

Sociocracy: All voices matter!

Name of the organisation

YUPI - Youth Union of People with Initiative

Website of the organisation

yupi.pt

Location of the organisation

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Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work

- Participation of young people in decision making
- Safe/secure youth work environment
- Inclusion

Good practice category

A practice of processes and methods

Good practice aim & purpose

Democracy is a very broad concept, hard to grasp and live in the everyday school life. Schools and organizations from Portugal, Poland and Romania have decided to implement a project named "Deepening Democracy!" and with funding from Erasmus +, tested a new method of decision-making, bringing a new understanding to the concept of Democracy into schools. Sociocracy is a form of democracy where the group makes a decision based on everyone's consent (opposed to the majority rule), having no objections to the final decision that benefits the whole group (or working on the objections to make it possible for everyone to "live" with such decision). This method ensures a more collaborative, participatory and inclusive democracy where "All Voices matter!" (the title of our publication).

Every national partnership in this project has implemented (and evaluated) the sociocratic method to improve the quality of democracy according to their own spaces and structures of participation: in Poland the context was the decision of the School Participatory Budget; in Romania it was the plan of activities for the Democracy Club and in Portugal it was the decision of the classroom representative in all secondary school.

Good practice description

Sociocracy is a method of decision-making where all voices are heard, where we practice non violent communication and conflict transformation and the attitude of a moderator of the “circles of decision” are an important moment for training, practicing and acting as a citizen, responsible, actively engaged for a common good. In Sociocracy, regular meetings named usually as “circles” (where everyone in the group is equally valued to share ideas and concerns), are the spaces of participation where the group meets to debate a certain topic of interest and come to a commitment where everyone “consents” on the final decision after some rounds of listening to all. An objection is recognized as a valuable input that needs to be considered for the safety and comfort of all, but also because it can represent a possible obstacle that only the person that objected could envision and offer that information to the group.

There are 4 main principles of sociocracy: the consent (a reasoned argument must be put forward to object to a proposal. All objections are integrated into the proposal to improve it until everyone can agree on the proposal’s progress); circles as autonomous groups (Each circle has an area of responsibility and members decide how the work is done by consent. In this way the people most affected by the decisions are involved in the decisions); selection for roles by consent (the process of selecting people for certain jobs by group consent, with everyone in a circle defining the desirable profile and participating in the process of sociocratic choice); and feedback through double-links (the principle of double-linkage to link the circles and reach out to more people in an organisation and where each circle has representatives, who take the information not only to the upper circles, but also to the lower circles).

Sociocracy can be practiced from small to bigger groups, for light or tough decisions, from early ages to adulthood and it is specially valued by children and teenagers because it really allows a space for each one’s ideas and it answers to any possible objection of someone with a concrete measure to make it accepted by all, using the expression “I can live with that decision” - which means there are no objections for a decision to be done.

In the publication designed by the “Deepening Democracy!” project partners and coordinated by YUPI Association (Portugal), we explain step by step how one can implement sociocracy (<https://shorturl.at/rsCFZ>).

For example in Portugal we have implemented this method of decision-making to 19 classes of 10th grade from a high school for the nomination of the class representatives (Selection of roles by consent), and the feedback from teachers and students was incredible in terms of open communication in the classroom, inclusion, awareness of the roles and the nomination (for the nominated and for all involved), which turned out that in the next school year, this method will be implemented in all 19th classes of 11th grade plus all the new classes of 10th grade.

Good practice result & concrete effects

Sociocracy operates from the assumption that people are able to make decisions for themselves. More than that, they will also be more committed and intrinsically motivated when they make their own decisions. They were also able to negotiate for the common good, to communicate and to defend the sense of possibility, believed in transformation, reflected, planned and executed the action strategically, then independently or with the help of others. They engaged and involved other people to make adjustments and use leadership role models to the development of their potential as a leader. Everyone ended up having an opinion, being able to explain and reply and adjust their thinking

about a decision. They have a voice and have initiative. They speak up, identify, understand, avoid and clarify misunderstandings and ambiguities. Using sociocracy, youth feels part of the decision, increasing their sense of belonging. This makes everyone feel part of the community and increases the urgency of contributing to change and transform their contexts and society in general. We must always bear in mind equality of value, respect for individuality and active listening.

In the given example of selection of roles by consent in Portugal, we consulted all 19 teachers involved in the implementation and the feedback was: 100% ready to implement after short training; the most significant aspects of this method for teachers were the deeper awareness of the role to be selected, the structured and inclusive approach it offers and the raise of responsibility and commitment of all students. Two months after the selection of roles, 6 out of 17 teachers have identified improvements in the consciousness and attitude of representative democracy from the nominated students and all teachers have agreed that the method should be implemented in coming years for consolidation of the practice and because it answers to the school's vision of deepening and strengthening young people's active participation.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work

Organisation and practice