

UNIT 7
EQUALITY
Upper secondary level

**Majority rule – a fair rule?
How can we settle
the majority/minority issue
in democracy?**

7.1 The majority always rules – ok?

A model case story

7.2 How can we balance majority and minority interests?

Drafting a statute for a micro-community

7.3 Draft statutes

Comparing ideas in institutional design to solve the majority/minority issue

7.4 What is a good way to govern a democratic community?

What is fair, and what works?

Extension: research task

In what way does the majority/minority issue occur in our country, and how is it settled?

Unit 7

Equality

Majority rule – a fair rule?

Introduction for teachers

In democracy, the majority decides, and the minority must accept this decision. Because decisions in democratic systems are temporary and open for revision, the minority can accept being outvoted. But what happens if the minority becomes a “persistent minority” – if it is permanently outvoted? Critics call this situation the “tyranny by the majority”.

The unit focuses on this problem, which is a key issue in democracies. It demands a solution, as social cohesion is endangered if groups in society have the impression that their interests are consistently being ignored.

The students analyse a model case story about a sports club in which two groups, a large one and a small one, argue about how the club budget is to be spent. The problem is less complex than in real society, but the core issue is the same. The students try to solve the problem by designing a statute. Different approaches are possible, and these are also used in designing constitutions – giving minorities rights of autonomy (a federal or cantonal model), and by establishing standards of human dignity and mutual recognition, human rights limit the scope of majority decisions. However, no set of rules will ensure that minorities are treated fairly and that the will of the majority is respected. Democracies depend on a culture of responsibility and mutual respect, that is, on how citizens treat one another of their own free will.

Therefore the tools that the students have developed give them the competence to better understand how the majority/minority issue is addressed in their country. A research task is suggested as an extension and application.

Competence development: links to other units in this volume

What this table shows

The title of this manual, *Taking part in democracy*, focuses on the competences of the active citizen in democracy. This matrix shows the potential for synergy effects between the units in this manual. The matrix shows what competences are developed in unit 7 (the shaded row in the table). The strongly framed column shows the competences of political decision making and action – strongly framed because of their close links to taking part in democracy. The rows below indicate links to other units in this manual: what competences are developed in these units that support the students in unit 7?

How this matrix can be used

Teachers can use this matrix as a tool for planning their EDC/HRE classes in different ways.

- This matrix helps teachers who have only a few lessons to devote to EDC/HRE: a teacher can select only this unit and omit the others, as he/she knows that some key competences are also developed, to a certain extent, in this unit – for example, taking responsibility, problem analysis, negotiation skills.
- The matrix helps teachers make use of the synergy effects that help the students to be trained in important competences repeatedly, in different contexts that are linked in many ways. In this case the teacher selects and combines several units.

Units	Dimensions of competence development			Attitudes and values
	Political analysis and judgment	Methods and skills	Taking part in democracy Political decision making and action	
7 Equality	The key issue of how to balance the rights of majority and minority groups in democracy Human rights protect minorities and individuals Federal and cantonal institutional designs protect minority rights	Analysing and solving a political problem	Presenting and arguing for ideas and solutions Making a decision	Mutual recognition
2 Responsibility				Mutual recognition
1 Identity			Making choices and defining priorities	
4 Conflict	Conflict of interests			

5 Rules and law	Institutional frameworks in democracy support non-violent conflict resolution.		Designing an institutional framework to resolve conflict in society.	Appreciation of peaceful means to resolve conflict.
3 Diversity and pluralism	Pluralist society consists of minority groups with different interests.		Negotiating.	

UNIT 7: Equality – Majority rule – a fair rule? How can we settle the majority/minority issue in democracy?

Lesson topic	Competence training/learning objectives	Student tasks	Materials and resources	Method
Lesson 1 The majority always rules – ok?	Analysing a problem. The problem of the “persistent majority”.	The students identify the problem of the “persistent majority” and suggest solutions.	≈ Student handout 7.1 (model case story), markers, flipchart.	Individual work, group work, plenary discussion.
Lesson 2 How can we balance majority and minority interests?	Working in a team, time management; solving a problem. Rules, laws and constitutions are tools to solve problems and deal with sources of conflict in society. This is the justification for government and authority. However, they may also serve certain interests.	The students draft a statute to deal with the majority/minority issue in a micro-community.	≈ Student handouts 7.1-7.3. Flipcharts and markers.	Group work.
Lesson 3 Draft statutes	Giving brief presentations, comparing and judging ideas and reasoning. Institutional design involves criteria such as feasibility, fairness and stability.	The students explore criteria of institutional design. They give presentations and compare their ideas.	≈ Student handout 7.4 Matrix for the students' presentations (blackboard or flipcharts). Flipcharts. A4 sheets. Markers. Glue stick or tape.	Group presentations, plenary discussion.
Lesson 4 What is a good way to govern a democratic community?	Judgment: balancing criteria. Dialectics between democracy, fairness and efficiency.	The students judge the draft statutes and explain their reasoning.	Blackboard or flipchart.	Presentations, discussion.
Extension: Research task The majority/minority issue in our country	Working.	Research task: 1. Examples of minorities being overruled. 2. Minority protection in our constitution.	Constitution; additional materials (print media, statistics, Internet).	Individual work, group work. Project presentations.

Lesson 1

The majority always rules?

A model case story

This matrix sums up the information a teacher needs to plan and deliver the lesson.

Competence training refers directly to EDC/HRE.

The learning objective indicates what students know and understand.

The student task(s), together with the method, form the core element of the learning process.

The materials checklist supports lesson preparation.

The time budget gives a rough guideline for the teacher's time management.

Competence training	Analysing a problem.	
Learning objective	The problem of the “persistent majority”: the majority decides in a democratic system. The minority is expected to accept both this principle and the decisions produced by majority vote. But what happens when a minority is permanently outvoted?	
Student tasks	The students identify the problem of the “persistent majority” and suggest solutions.	
Materials and resources	✍ Student handout 7.1: model case story (one copy per student), markers, flipchart.	
Method	Individual work, group work, plenary discussion.	
Time budget	1. Introduction: stating the problem.	15 min
	2. Setting the task.	20 min
	3. Group work.	10 min

Information box

This lesson introduces the students to the majority/minority issue. In a fictional case story, the problem is stated in the simplest possible way. A sports club is conceived as a micro-community, consisting of just two groups – one large, one small. The problem to be solved – how to balance the rights of the majority and the minority – is the same as that in society and in the political community.

Lesson description

1. Introduction: stating the problem

The teacher explains that the lesson will begin with a case story. He/she distributes a student hand-out 7.1, and a student reads the story aloud. At the beginning of a lesson, this mode of presentation brings the class together more than letting the students read in silence.

The teacher asks one question:

“What is the problem?”

He/she asks the students to think about this question for a few moments and write down the answer. This task gives the “slow thinkers” (who are often careful thinkers) or more introvert students a chance to contribute to the discussion.

In the plenary round, the students give their inputs, drawing on their notes. The teacher listens, and encourages the students to explain their ideas accurately (“active listening”). After about 10 students have spoken, the teacher records the key statements that have emerged on the board. It is to be expected that the students refer to the key principle of democracy, which seems to work to the advantage of the larger group, while the smaller group can refer to the principle of non-discrimination (equality). The teacher links the students’ ideas to these categories, which then give structure and clarity to the discussion:

A small community: the sports club	
The problem	Suggested solutions
Violation of equal rights Feeling of discrimination (violation of equal rights)	Minority interests must also be respected (compromise)
Permanent winners and losers (“persistent majority”)	Chess players leave the club (scenario of failure)
Democracy questioned Majority decides – losers disagree	Change definition of majority

The students should be aware that this kind of conflict requires some kind of settlement. The exodus of the chess players would harm the interests of everyone. For example, each club would have to cope with additional expenses. So it is worth the effort to find a solution that meets both the principles of democracy and equality.

2. Setting the task

a. The problem

The students will probably have realised that the case story is a model that shows the problems of society, and the majority/minority issue therefore has a political dimension. By studying a model instead of reality, the problem becomes clearer and the task somewhat easier. The results of this model case study can then be applied – compared – to reality. The teacher points out this link between the case story and reality, as this explains the purpose of the task.

Two principles must be observed: **fairness and democracy**.

On the one hand, the majority/minority issue needs to be solved fairly – the minority will not accept being permanently outvoted and seeing its interests and needs ignored. On the other hand, democracy means that the majority rightly insists on taking the decision into its hands. So the students must draft a statute that brings these two principles together.

The teacher distributes ↯ student handouts 7.2 and 7.3 to the students and gives them time to read handout 7.2 in silence. In a brief plenary round the students link the basic approaches outlined in ↯ student handout 7.2 to their ideas on the blackboard.

b. The expected solution

The students need to know what they are to deliver. In small groups, the students will work out a draft statute that provides rules to overcome the scenario of a “persistent minority” that is permanently being outvoted. They can include rules on decision making and perhaps also rules on distributing funds. The students should be aware of the fact that the sports club is a micro-community and their statute resembles the constitution of the state. Teacher and students refer to ↯ student handout 7.3 to clarify further questions on the task if necessary.

c. The procedure

Finally the teacher explains the technical aspects of the task. The students form groups. Their resource managers are called to collect the markers and flipcharts, and the teacher briefs the time managers to take care that the groups are ready by the end of the second lesson.

The teacher has copied the list of key questions on ↯ student handout 7.3 onto a flipchart (see lesson 3 below). He/she explains to the students that these key questions will be the checklist against which to judge and compare the students’ ideas.

3. Group work

The students form groups of four to six. They use the remaining time in the first lesson and continue with the second lesson.

The teacher can ask the team managers to meet him/her at the end of the lesson for a briefing on the groups’ progress.

Lesson 2

How can we balance majority and minority interests?

Drafting a statute for a micro-community

This matrix sums up the information a teacher needs to plan and deliver the lesson.

Competence training refers directly to EDC/HRE.

The learning objective indicates what students know and understand.

The student task(s), together with the method, form the core element of the learning process.

The materials checklist supports lesson preparation.

The time budget gives a rough guideline for the teacher's time management.

Competence training	Working in a team, time management. Solving a problem.
Learning objective	Rules, laws and constitutions are tools to solve problems and deal with sources of conflict in society. This is the justification for government and authority. However, they may also serve certain interests.
Student tasks	The students draft a statute to deal with the majority/minority issue in a micro-community.
Materials and resources	Flipcharts and markers. ☞ Student handouts 7.1-7.3.
Method	Group work.
Time budget	40 min

Lesson description

The students continue their work in groups.

The teacher watches them at work, observing which methods and skills they perform well and where they need training and further help. The teacher can ask for, and give feedback on how the students co-operated in the debriefing session (lesson 4). The groups should work alone as much as possible, and the teacher should certainly not intervene if the students are “making mistakes”. They will learn more if given the liberty and responsibility to discover their mistakes themselves, and if necessary, the class will correct most of the mistakes in the plenary round.

The teacher should also refrain from intervening if a group finds “politically incorrect” solutions, such as handing over all powers of decision to one person (“dictatorial solution”). Here again, this gives interesting inputs for discussion. Quite often the students will challenge a piece of unsound or unacceptable reasoning. The teacher assesses the students’ achievements in competence development and draws conclusions on their learning needs.

Lesson 3

Draft statutes

Comparing ideas in institutional design to solve the majority/minority issue

This matrix sums up the information a teacher needs to plan and deliver the lesson.

Competence training refers directly to EDC/HRE.

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The student task(s), together with the method, form the core element of the learning process.

The materials checklist supports lesson preparation.

The time budget gives a rough guideline for the teacher's time management.

Competence training	Giving brief presentations, comparing and judging ideas and reasoning.	
Learning objective	Institutional design involves criteria such as feasibility, fairness and stability.	
Student tasks	The students explore criteria of institutional design. They give presentations and compare their ideas.	
Materials and resources	<p>✍ Student handout 7.4</p> <p>Matrix for the students' presentations (blackboard or flipcharts).</p> <p>Five A4 sheets with markers per group; glue stick or tape.</p>	
Method	Group presentations, plenary discussion.	
Time budget	1. Presentations: draft statutes for the sports club.	30 min
	2. Comparison of the draft statutes.	10 min

Information box

This lesson devotes most of the speaking time to the students. The groups are given the opportunity to express their views (participation), provided their presentations are ready, and the speakers must observe the time limit (efficiency). Participation depends on efficiency. Working efficiently is a prerequisite for taking part in democracy. For this reason, training methodical skills is important in EDC/HRE.

Lesson description

1. Student presentations

The teacher outlines the agenda: the group speakers give their presentations, referring to the key questions in *≈* student handout 7.3. These questions reappear in the matrix. They refer to criteria of institutional design – feasibility, fairness, stability.

The teacher draws the matrix on three flipcharts or the blackboard. To reduce writing time, the teacher attaches A4 size sheets of paper to the matrix showing the key questions. This is also a demonstration of the method of presentation that the students are to use.

Key questions	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Comparison
Distribution of funds: how?					
Who decides on distribution?					
Autonomy for groups?					
Non-discrimination?					
...					

Each group has up to six minutes for its presentation. The groups present their results in turn. The teacher chairs this presentation session. The students should not begin a discussion before having heard all presentations. However, the presenters should explain the reasons for their group's suggestions.

The teacher encourages the presenters to face the class, and not to establish eye contact with the teacher alone.

A second team member is responsible for recording the information. This student makes brief notes in the sections provided on the blackboard or, preferably, the flipchart (an overhead transparency can also be used). The students take notes in their *≈* student handouts. This record provides the material for the discussion in the following lesson.

The teacher encourages the presenters to explain the reasons for their group's suggestions.

2. Comparing the draft statutes

The students compare the models before judging them. While the group presentations were structured vertically in columns, answering the key questions in succession, the students now switch their perspective and read the matrix across the rows horizontally, comparing the groups' responses to one particular key question. In the last column, the teacher, who chairs this lesson phase, notes the students' findings.

The students keep their own record on *≈* student handout 7.4.

3. Homework – preparing inputs for the discussion

The teacher explains that the students are to begin the next lesson with their inputs. Which of the draft statutes is most convincing in their opinion – and for what reasons?

≈ Student handout 7.4 offers key questions for judging the statute, and also gives the students instructions on how to use these questions, and explains their purpose in EDC/HRE.

Lesson 4

What is a good way to govern a democratic community?

What is fair, and what works?

This matrix sums up the information a teacher needs to plan and deliver the lesson.

Competence training refers directly to EDC/HRE.

The learning objective indicates what students know and understand.

The student task(s), together with the method, form the core element of the learning process.

The materials checklist supports lesson preparation.

The time budget gives a rough guideline for the teacher's time management.

Competence training	Judgment: balancing criteria.
Learning objective	Dialectics between democracy, fairness and efficiency.
Student tasks	The students judge the draft statutes and explain their reasoning.
Materials and resources	Blackboard or flipchart.
Method	Presentations, discussion.
Time budget	1. The students share and present their results. 20 min
	2. Discussion. 10 min
	3. Conclusion. 10 min

Information box

The students share their results and work out a statement shared by all ("snowball system"). This approach involves all the students, rather than listening to a few individual students and ignoring the majority.

Lesson description

1. The students share and present their results

The teacher first asks the students to vote for a certain statute (or for none) by a show of hands. Then the students with the same opinions form groups of four or five. They share their results and work out a statement. Then the groups deliver a brief statement on the reasons for their choice (see ✎ student handout 7.4).

2. Discussion

Once the students have voted for different statutes, they hold different views on how the group's models are to be judged. In the discussion, they critically question each other's choices.

The teacher chairs the discussion. At the end of the discussion, the students vote once more. Has any group succeeded in convincing the other? Do the majority of students vote for one particular statute?

3. Conclusion

The teacher announces the purpose of the concluding phase: the students now look at their thinking process and its result from a different perspective in order to appreciate its relevance.

The teacher asks one question: in what way does this case study on a small sports club resemble politics?

The students share their thoughts with each other and with the teacher. The teacher listens, and points out which ideas support or contradict each other.

The teacher sums up the discussion, adding the following point.

In politics, discussions on such complex matters are not academic, but practical. A community must make a choice – it needs a statute as a constitutional framework. So after having considered different options and alternatives with their strengths and drawbacks, a decision must be made – ideally by unanimous vote, or as large a majority as possible. In politics, a discussion on such an issue corresponds to the process of legislation or even deciding on a constitution.

Extension: research task

In this unit, the students have acquired a model to analyse an important element of their constitution and legislative system, answering both the question on how it has been constructed and how it works in reality. They carry out research on the following questions:

1. What are examples of the majority/minority issue in our society?
2. Case study: in what way does our constitution and system of laws settle this particular issue?
3. What is our judgment on the solution?