

Epistemic Asymmetry in Adolescent Democratic Deliberation: Teacher Facilitation, Participatory System Design, and Initial Role Reconfiguration Insights from the SAUFEX Interdemocracy Pilot



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Frame: Project SAUFEX

SAUFEX is a HORIZON-funded EU project.

Core objective: Democratize and decentralize decision-making processes and quality assurance related to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).

First institutional outcome: Establishment of a Resilience Council (RC) of approximately 100 NGO and academic representatives advising the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Upcoming: Establishment of an RC advising the future Polish DSC.

Limitations of Resilience Councils

Major limitation: Resilience Councils broaden expert participation, but not public participation.

Risks:

- **Reinforcing technocratic and meritocratic bias;**
- **Weak responsiveness to citizens;**
- **Framing citizens primarily as objects of protection and education rather than as participants whose well-being matters intrinsically.**

Potential outcome:

- **Increased paternalism;**
- **Democracy reduced to a mechanism for allocating influence.**

Citizen well-being - a central normative SAUFEX frame

Conceptualization: the experienced level of fulfillment of basic human needs (autonomy, belonging, achievement).

Underlying mechanism: Autopoiesis. Citizens continuously maintain, realize, and correct themselves within a dynamic context.

Risk:

- **Dislocation undermining resilience and increases susceptibility to destructive movements and narratives.**

Implication:

- **Harmful contexts stimulate harmful self-correction;**
- **Supportive contexts stimulate constructive self-correction.**

Involving the general public

Democratic participation requires more than “fact-speaking.” It must also incorporate “belief-speaking” - citizens’ lived perspectives, values, and experiences.

Both are elements of personal ontologies.

Incorporating full personal ontologies:

- **Strengthens democratic responsiveness;**
- **Enhances legitimacy;**
- **Improves policy implementability.**

Preconditions

According to James Surowiecki, crowds generate wisdom rather than herd behavior when four conditions are met:

- **Participants possess at least minimal relevant knowledge;**
- **Cognitive diversity is present;**
- **Judgments are formed independently;**
- **Participants draw on decentralized/local (tacit) knowledge.**

Why education

Independent judgment requires:

- **Simultaneous exposure to the same question;**
- **Individual reflection without consultation;**
- **Delayed exposure to others' perspectives.**

Educational settings uniquely enable this at scale.

Core challenge:

- **Epistemic asymmetry between teachers and students.**

Interdemocracy

Interdemocracy is an educational method and format:

- **Good practice in the European Commission 2022 publication *Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training*;**
- **Endorsed by European policy-makers, academics, and practitioners;**
- **Positively reviewed by teacher trainers (PCEN) and the Polish MFA.**

Interdemocracy multiple classroom participation process

- Evidence-informed teacher introduction
- Central question
- Independent individual responses
- Submission to central server
- AI-assisted clustering under human supervision
- Preliminary recommendations by older students (Youth RC)
- Presentation of recommendations to participants
- Individual participant recommendations assessment
- AI-assisted clustering of assessments
- Final recommendation formulation by the Youth RC
- Submission to relevant institutions
- Institutional responses returned to participants

Interdemocracy and autopoiesis

Aim: Create equal conditions for all participants' independent perspective formation, attentive listening and exposure to plural viewpoints as a safe and challenging launchpad for self-expression.

- **First-person expression;**
- **“Thank you” as communicative closure;**
- **No interaction during formulation;**
- **Three-stage articulation: handwritten → digital → spoken aloud;**
- **Randomized speaking order;**
- **No reactions;**
- **Teacher as procedural facilitator.**

Teacher as facilitator

Teacher

Epistemic lead

Evidence-informed

Naive realism-based

Curriculum-bound

Benevolent interventions

Mission-based guardianship

Facilitator

**Epistemic-neutral procedural
responsibility**

Servicing personal ontologies

Utilitarianism-based

**Content agnostic; legal system as
sole boundary**

Neutral observations

Responsibility for the Other

Pilot

- **Organized by PCEN and FCP; supported by the Polish MFA**
- **November 2025 - March 2026**
- **Pomeranian Voivodship (Poland)**
- **Fourteen teachers, sixteen PE classes**
- **Four ninety-minute sessions**
- **Three topics: Participation, AI, discussing „difficult” subjects in the classroom**

Pilot – teacher outcomes

Quantitative (Likert-5)

- ***Compared to the previous session, I felt more comfortable in the role of facilitator: After session 2: 4.17; After session 3: 3.8; After session 4: 3.56.***

Qualitative

- **Feeling unburdened, more at ease, reduced performance anxiety, better awareness of underlying classroom dynamics (peer influence, social pressures, individual strength of those normally quiet), soft competences development.**
- **Challenging: Guarding the frame, not intervening.**

Interdemocracy in the educational system

Interdemocracy lays the groundwork for student democratic basic skills and democratic engagement.

Building on that:

- **Training citizen skills (Bauman): Dialogue, negotiation, gaining mutual understanding, resolving conflicts; Media literacy; Citizen education; Media creation.**

Vision:

- **Educational settings as chargers of students' democratic societal resilience.**

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