

# The Commune

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An educational game about democratic decision making.

## About the game

Pedagogical and Didactical Centre created this game by commission from the International Programme Office for Education and Training and the EU Information Centre. The first version of the game was written 2006, translated for the first time to English in 2009, reworked 2010, 2012 and translated again 2014 – version 5.0 Eng.

The game is about a commune where different people live together, and have to make decisions about things like smoking, warming, economy, privacy and shared resources. The commune setting is an analogue for the EU union. After playing the game, the events of the game can be used to discuss the EU union from different perspectives. The teacher can decide what issues are to be solved within the commune during the course of the game.

## About the authors

Pedagogical and Didactical Centre is a part of the municipal union of the Gothenburg Region Association of Local Authorities (GR), a co-operative organization uniting 13 municipalities in western Sweden.

The organization meets over 5000 teachers and 15000 students every year through different projects and activities. Pedagogical and Didactical Centre works with individual schools, whole municipalities and other organizations both nationally and internationally.

Read more at [www.pedagogisktcentrum.se](http://www.pedagogisktcentrum.se)

## Target audience

13 years and older. The game might work for a younger audience, depending on the participants' previous experience with similar games and role play.

## Purpose and goal

The goal of the game is to create an easily accessible common ground for a group to talk about the EU union and the challenges as well as benefits of cooperating within different fields. Such fields, in the case of EU, include climate change, environment preservation, trade rules and security. Central questions are:

- What is a good way of making decisions when everyone has different opinions?
- What benefits and drawbacks are there in cooperation with other countries?

## About the translation

This is a reworked and translated game. The original in Swedish version is called *Kollektivet*. Translation by Carolina Dahlberg, GR Education. The original version is available at the game database at [www.pedagogisktcentrum.se/speldatabas](http://www.pedagogisktcentrum.se/speldatabas).

## How the game works

The game is an analogue for real-world challenges about cooperation and decision making in the EU union. By setting the game in a commune; countries being represented by different people with different opinions, the game translates complex global issues from *international* to *interpersonal*. The core difficulty – different needs and opinions – remains.

### The passive game master

In the game, the game master is fairly passive, only interfering to help the players move forward if the game and up in look argument. The game master or teacher also introduces new issues for the players to discuss. Other than that, the game master (or teacher) lets the players (students) make their own decisions and come up with models for decision making that they believe will work well for the commune.

### The issues

The game has 12 different issues that the players can discuss. As a game master or teacher, it is recommended that you prepare 2 or 3 for the game. But the players really only need one to be able to play the game. Have a few more ready if they solve the issues too quickly, and hand them out to the players when they have resolved the current issue.

### Simple characters

The characters are simple and not very fleshed out in their description. Depending on the level of experience of the players and the goal of the game, you are free to do further exercises to build more relationships, background and other aspects to the characters.

One example of this is asking the players to group up with other characters they believe they would get along with, before the beginning of the game. That way, they will bunch up into different “alliances” through the game.

Another method for giving the players more information about their own and other people’s characters is making several “scale”-exercises where, depending on their characters opinion on a chosen matter (for example: climate change) can position themselves in different ends of the room.

You might want to run one or several of these exercises before the beginning of the game.

## Tips for game mastering

### The theme introduction

The purpose of this phase is to introduce the participants to the theme of the game, and prepare the participants for the generalization process. You can choose not to introduce the theme, but that might impair the participants' chances to make good observations during the game and focus on the goal.

### The game

When running the game, make sure you've read the instructions and keep a copy of the schedule close at hand for support, in case you forget the next step.

Move around the game area and listen in to what is happening. Through close observation during the game, you will be able to help the participants remember the events of the game during the post-game discussion.

Do not worry if not all of the participants are 'active' during the run of the game. Even some participants don't speak or interact with others, they may still observe and reflect on the events of the game.

### When to end the game

The game has no clear end point and it is very much up to you as the game master to decide when the game ends. Be clear – to yourself – about your goals with the game and when you feel like the students have experienced that which was important – break the game.

Don't wait until the players are bored before breaking the game. It is generally better to break the game a little bit too early, than too late.

### Debrief and post-game discussion

When learning through experiences, the process of transforming the experience into general knowledge is called generalization. After an educational game, the purpose of the post-game discussion is to facilitate this process for the participants.

Although you probably have plenty of input for the participants on how their game went, and what kind of knowledge can be drawn from the events of the game, it is important that you *ask questions* during the discussion and allow the participants to make their own conclusions.

# Instructions

## Introduction

Introduce the players to the setting and the theme of the game. Make a conscious choice if you want to tell them that this is a EU simulation or not (Tips for game mastering). An introduction might be something like:

*We are going to play a simple role play about a group of people in a commune. Although these people are all different, they all agree that living together has its benefits. Some are very involved in the commune, others mostly stay by themselves.*

*Some of the living costs are shared among the members of the commune, and these are covered for by a fee that each member pays every month. Although they don't always agree, the members of the commune are convinced that a life together has more to offer, than living by oneself.*

After the introduction, you can ask the players a few question on how the picture the commune. What kind of house is it? What about the garden? City, village or perhaps suburb? Don't spend too much time on this – only enough to help the players visualize the setting. (It is not important how the commune looks, only that the players feel ownership for the setting.)

The easiest way to distribute the characters is by just mixing them and let each player pick one randomly from a pile. Let the players choose a name and make name tags with name, occupation and (if needed, depending on theme of the issues) level of income.

As the players to, one at a time, present their characters. Good questions to answer are: name, occupation, appearance (the character might look very different from the player), and what other's think of the character.

You might choose to add other exercises to the character creation part as well. (Tips for game mastering)

After this, brief the players about the rules for the commune for decision making on common issues:

*The commune once in a while gathers all members for a commune council. The rules are simple. All common issues are resolved by voting, each member have one vote.*

*All money decisions require 2/3 majority*

*All decisions concerning new members require full consensus*

*All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority*

*All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority*

Also remind the players that the are meant to vote as their character, and not as themselves. Tell them that if anything is not covered in the rules, the will have to make new or additional rules for those situations. Also, select a person/character to lead the council as the game begins.

Present the players with an issue of your choice and let them discuss it (as their characters) until they have a solution. If the discussion doesn't start, you can help the players by asking questions and giving hints and suggestions. It is not important that they find solutions for all the issues.

If you feel that the discussion has ended up in a loop or the players seem confused, you can break the game temporarily and ask them to discuss as themselves (and not as characters) what a good strategy might look like to solve the issue. When they have a strategy, as them to return to the game as

characters.

Depending on how much time you have for the game – and the energy level on the players – you can introduce more issues.

Break the game and ask the players to gather in a ring (standing or sitting) for post-game discussion

## **Debrief and post-game discussion**

Ask the participants to gather in a circle. Either standing, sitting on chairs or on the floor. Try as best you can to have everyone on the same level so that no one stands out. You should sit in the ring as well.

Begin with doing a round where you ask each player to say something about the game that they think about right now. It doesn't have to be very elaborate and they can be honest. (If someone, for example, say the game was "fun" it's equally OK to say "boring") Don't reply or explain to the participants what they felt or experienced, just let them say what they think without analysing or judging their opinions.

Talk about what happened and who did what when they were going to make decisions about the different issues.

Discuss the game design with the students – did it matter that they didn't get any clear guidelines for the decision making-process? What procedure did they end up using? Why? Was it a majority decision or were there alternatives that they never used?

When generalizing the game experience, you can either use the game as analogue to the cooperation between EU countries, democratic decision making in general or some other theme or issue that you want to discuss with the students in particular.

Lastly, if there is additional time, ask if the participants have any other thoughts about the game and help them elaborate these thoughts.

*Often, participants – especially students – give feedback as how to make the game/role play more 'fun'. This is valuable feedback, and as the facilitator you should listen and consider their input. However, the main objective of the game is to help participants get a further understanding of how history and nationalism plays a role in conflicts, and not to play a 'fun game'. Fun is good – but it is not the main purpose.*

## Characters

<p>Librarian</p> <p>You often agree with other people</p> <p>You like cooking, art and music</p> <p>You like browsing the other members' record collections</p>	<p>Law student</p> <p>You often mediate to avoid conflict</p> <p>You like flowers</p> <p>You are devoted to growing vegetables for the commune</p>	<p>Yoga and meditation teacher</p> <p>You are a Buddhist and vegetarian</p> <p>You own a large inheritance</p> <p>You like buying organic food</p>
<p>Preschool teacher</p> <p>You are vegetarian</p> <p>You like parties but not to clean up afterwards</p> <p>You dislike people entering your room uninvited</p>	<p>Carpenter</p> <p>You enjoy building furniture</p> <p>You like listening to loud music</p> <p>You care a lot for animals</p>	<p>Housewife/Househusband</p> <p>You are often happy</p> <p>You are married to the mailman and have two children</p> <p>You live in the commune for economic reasons</p>
<p>Mailman</p> <p>You are indecisive</p> <p>You are married to the housewife/househusband and have three children</p> <p>You like sports and cars</p>	<p>Cobbler</p> <p>You regularly smoke a pipe</p> <p>You like when things are the way they've always been</p> <p>You have no idea what this "internet" thing is</p>	<p>Fire Fighter</p> <p>You often have mood swings</p> <p>You like spending time with people outside the commune</p> <p>You are concerned about climate change</p>
<p>Writer for a local newspaper</p> <p>You are a single parent with two children</p> <p>You own a powerful computer</p> <p>You think there's too much running around in the house</p>	<p>Job seeker</p> <p>You are critical towards most things</p> <p>You are a right-wing city council member</p> <p>You moved in recently and like living in the commune</p>	<p>Flight attendant</p> <p>You like cooking and often make a mess in the kitchen</p> <p>You are often away from home</p> <p>You like eating vegetables from the garden</p>
<p>Primary school teacher</p> <p>You are interested in gardening</p> <p>You have an alcohol problem</p> <p>You like to spend time with other people and dislike being alone</p>	<p>Engineer</p> <p>In your youth, you were a member of a motorcycle gang</p> <p>You are very accurate and precise</p> <p>You are suspicious of neighbours and outsiders</p>	<p>CEO of an IT company</p> <p>You separate your private and work life carefully</p> <p>You are a frequent smoker</p> <p>You like to buy the cheapest product in the store</p>

<p><b>Car mechanic</b> You are a vegetarian and a smoker You like listening to classical music You have two cats and would like to have a third</p>	<p><b>Gardener</b> You owe money to tax authorities You don't drink alcohol You are allergic to furry animals</p>	<p><b>Priest</b> You like cooking for others You like chatting online You like swimming outdoors</p>
<p><b>Accounting clerk</b> You are doubtful about many of the rules in the commune You only smoke at parties You don't like being outdoors much</p>	<p><b>Taxi driver</b> You like to go hunting and spend time outdoors You like whiskey You would like to have a dog</p>	<p><b>Psychologist</b> You smoke a lot You like to hang out with people in the commune and your door is always open You like to read</p>

## Extra characters

<p><b>Musician</b> You smoke almost all the time You think online communities are harmful to people Spending time together with people is great</p>	<p><b>Retiree</b> You think you're 30 years younger than you really are You always try to find the cheapest products in the store You always gossip</p>	<p><b>Restaurant worker</b> You enjoy spicy food, expensive wine and cigars You like the vegetables from the garden You often feel misunderstood and lonely</p>
<p><b>Police officer</b> Money is not that important You dislike lazy people You dislike when people walk into your room uninvited</p>	<p><b>Sex educator</b> You smoke regularly You think the house is often too cold You only hang out with a few close friends at the commune</p>	<p><b>EU coordinator</b> You often go hiking in foreign places You've tried and failed to quite smoking about 1000 times You like to eat out</p>
<p><b>Archaeologist</b> You have a large stamp collection You have an illness that forces you to stay home most of the time You like to visit other people's rooms in the commune</p>	<p><b>Receptionist</b> You haven't missed a soccer game in 10 years You like American cigars You love being outdoors</p>	<p><b>Programmer</b> You do a lot of overtime at work You have a powerful laptop computer You are often annoyed by other people's behaviour</p>

## Issue 1 - Smoking

Some of you have been coughing a lot lately, and you suspect the reason to be members of the commune smoking indoors. There are no rules on smoking currently, but everyone is aware of the situation. Should there be limits on smoking?

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority



## Issue 2 - New members

Several new people have announced that they would like to move in with the commune. There are available rooms in the house. The commune needs to decide if you want more members, and if so, what the requirements should be for the people moving in.

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority

## Issue 3 - Broadband

One member has posted a list to get support for installing a broadband for all members of the commune to use. Many feel that broadband is an unnecessary luxury and are worried about how it might be used. Will commune members download illegal content? Will there be consequences for the other members? Who will pay? Will everyone have to pay? What about those who do not wish to use the broadband, do they have to pay as well?

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority

## Issue 4 - Finance

The fee for being a member of the commune is currently based on a complicated mathematical formula, where different people pay different amounts depending on their income and a few other factors. Lately, commune finances have become unsustainable, and a new system is needed. What should it look like?

1. All members pay the same amount
2. Members pay in proportion to their income
3. Members pay in proportion to their assets
4. Members pay in proportion to both income and assets
5. Members put ALL their money into a large, common pot
6. Members pay in proportion to the work they perform for the commune
7. Members pay in proportion to how much food they eat
8. Members pay in proportion to the size of their rooms
9. A compromise between the alternatives above (what should this look like?)

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority

## **Issue 5 - New rules on comfort issues?**

Some members feel that 2/3 majority is too much for comfort issues such as smoking, garbage and so on. They want to change the rules so that only ½ majority is needed for those issues. The commune does not have a procedure for changing the rules, so what should be done?

Some think complete consensus should be required for changing the rules on decision making. Some want new members to only have half a vote.

The commune needs to find a system for updating and changing the rules for decision making, but what should it look like?

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority

## **Issue 6 - Emergency aid to people in need**

A commune close to yours has been destroyed in a fire and five people are in urgent need of somewhere to live. They have now contacted your commune to ask if you can shelter them until they find a new place to live.

Who should share their room with the five people who need shelter? Last year you had a similar situation and then three of the commune's members shared their rooms with people in need. Will the same do this again, or should other commune members pitch in? Or perhaps you shouldn't shelter people at all?

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority

## **Issue 7 - Village council elections**

There are many more houses on the same street as your commune. The neighbourhood has some common facilities and green areas, and it has been suggested to form a forum – a village council of sorts – where the residents in the same area can discuss common issues.

Each building will be assigned a number of seats in the council, depending on the number of inhabitants in the building.

While two other communes on the same street will be given seven seats each, yours have only been granted two seats.

You need to decide if you think this council-idea is a good one, and if so – which to members should represent your commune?

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority

## Issue 8 - Open or locked doors?

In the commune, all people can choose if they want to have their door open, closed or locked. Some members want to socialize and spend a lot of time with each other; others mostly stay by themselves or have most of their friends outside of the commune.

Now, one of the commune members suspects that another commune member or perhaps a guest in the house has stolen her smartphone. He or she now wants to search all the other rooms.

You need to decide what rules should apply in a situation like this – and how to avoid it in the future. Should you keep the front door locked at all times? Should there be list on what people are approved as guests in the house?

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority





## **Issue 9 - Selling vegetables**

Every month, each member of the commune contributes an amount of money to the common funds. Besides using these funds to pay bills, you also distribute some money to activities you want to encourage. For example, one person is paid to clean common areas and three people have joined together to grow vegetables in the garden, for which they receive a small amount of money. This is what your next issue is about. Several people outside the commune have contacted you, offering to sell you vegetables for a much cheaper price than what you pay people to grow them for. How will you deal with this? Should you continue subsidizing these three commune members to grow vegetables for the commune, even though you could buy vegetables much cheaper from outside the commune?

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority



## **Issue 10 - Investing in the commune's common finances**

A member of the commune suddenly loses his or her job. Since this person has contributed a lot to the common finances and is very creative, someone suggests that you could invest in a loan for him or her. Some think this is a good idea – in the future, he or she might earn a lot of money if he or she doesn't have to move out from the commune. On the other hand, others feel it is unfair to spend so much money on a single person. What if someone else also loses his or her job? Will there be money to offer them the same deal as well?

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority

## **Issue 11 - The market**

At one point, it was decided that the commune should organize a market to sell of old things and good – giving all the money earned to the commune funds. All members participated and while some managed to sell of most of their things others didn't sell anything.

It was decided beforehand that all the money earned should be given to the commune funds, but now the two people who earned the most feels that it is unfair, since three people sold nothing at all.

What should be done about this? What rules should apply?

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority

## **Issue 12 - Heating the house**

Today, the commune is heated via coal and oil. That is not particularly good for the environment, and several members are concerned and want a change of energy source. A possible alternative is installing geothermal heating.

But not everyone is so positive. The installation would be extremely costly and it would take more than ten years before the cost of the change repaid itself, compared to using coal and oil. The commune would also have to use almost all the common saved money, plus taking a big loan from the bank that would also have to be repaid.

What should be done, and how should it be paid for?

The rules:

All money decisions require 2/3 majority

All decisions concerning new members require full consensus

All purchase decisions require 2/3 majority

All comfort decisions (for example smoking, noise, garbage) require 2/3 majority