



Sociocracy in IBC - Instituto Bioregional do Cerrado. A case study.

Context: Bioregional Institute of the Cerrado

IBC (Instituto Bioregional do Cerrado) is a non-profit organization in the centre of Brazil, whose purpose is to create and implement innovative projects and programs to raise awareness and increase sustainability in bioregional communities. They have two axis of action:

- A social-educational-environmental axis - focused on the development of social-environmental projects and the offering of educational programs
- And the creation of a human settlement - an ecovillage, a living laboratory to experiment with development of a sustainable community in 120ha of land with high altitude, located at 4,5 km from the Alto Paraíso city.

IBC was first founded in 2012, already with a vision to become a community and an institution. It gained strength in 2013, when people started to settle. They have held some big events since then, but at this time there was almost no infrastructure, no electricity, water coming straight from the waterfall. In 2014, there was a call for the most active people involved to join a process of immersion using Dragon Dreaming. They spent several days together, reviewing the original dream, adding new dreams, creating their principles, values. It was like a re-foundation of IBC. Still in 2014, a member of the community (Rafael) took a sociocracy course and brought this back to the group. He proposed a modification in their constitution to change their governance to become a Sociocratic organization. At that time, there wasn't a big core yet, just a few people living around and just two families settled. This was the first step.

Currently, there are 13 families living there, which means 15-20 people permanently settled and some more living outside but connected to the project. Nowadays, there's electricity, internet, water. Up to now, 20 parcels have been given the right to use, most are for families and a few for singles. Associates can build their homes, but do not own the land. The land belongs to the institution and they are the stewards. Each Associate, who has invested in an Associative Title, has the right to use the communal area and to occupy a private area that has a hexagonal design and is called Crystal. Crystals represent about a quarter of the land. A part of the Permanent Preservation Area, the Permacultural Design provide planting areas and

other community activities, as a community center and kitchen, children and elder spaces, and more.

To write this case study we have interviewed Cintia Godoy, who was one of the co-founders and currently holds the role of institution coordinator and Rafael Pereira, who has been an associate since 2014 and was the one who first brought Sociocracy to IBC.

Sociocracy Implementation

Rafael took a Sociocracy course with Diane Leafe Christiansen and Gina Price at Terra Luminous. He returned to IBC feeling like he had found a practical tool for implementing the values of horizontality and cellular development that IBC was seeking. At this time, there were just four people in the general assembly. Rafael introduced his fellow-members to the principles of sociocracy to an IBC general assembly, and they agreed to adopt the circle structure and the principles of effectiveness, equivalence and transparency. Rafael drafted a new constitution for the community and it was approved by the general assembly. Rafael was elected institutional coordinator, the operational leader of the general circle.

Implementing what had just been approved was challenging, since he was the only person familiar with sociocracy and he had only been to a workshop. The four original members had many challenges, but they learned the process together. Rafael was the only facilitator for most of the first year.

Structure

IBC is composed of five circles:

- The General Assembly makes strategies and policies for the year
- The Manager Circle (aka general circle) is in charge of implementing these decisions
- Agriculture
- Projects

Challenges

According to Rafael, the first challenge was getting people on board for a lot of meetings. The people involved value fluidity and horizontality. People had assumed that because it was a decentralized structure, it would require less involvement. So there was sometimes a lack of buy-in to the process and motivation to learn. In the language of sociocracy, they were more oriented to equivalence rather than effectiveness. With sociocracy, they were challenged to find an equilibrium between the two.

Another challenge was learning the distinction between clarifying questions and reactions. Rafael wonders if this is cultural issue -- it makes sense for the Northern Europeans who designed it, but represents a rigidity that doesn't work well for Latinos. Sometimes, Rafael would collapse the two rounds into one, allowing people to ask questions and give reactions at the same time. For more difficult decisions, he would do a round for each.

There were also a lot of decisions that were made that weren't followed through on. In these cases, people would often abuse the "good enough for now, safe enough to try" idea. After consenting to a proposal in a circle meeting, they would say later that the proposal wasn't good enough -- when in reality it hadn't worked because it hadn't been tried. Rafael thinks this ambiguity is a shortcoming of Sociocracy.

Cintia made a more philosophical point: sociocracy doesn't automatically create empowered, responsible people. In fact, it depends on people doing the work of developing their own power and responsibility.

Evolution

In 2016, Rafael made another course on Sociocracy, but this time it was Sociocracy 3.0 with James Priest and Lily David. He was very impacted by some new things he had learned, so when he returned to Alto Paraíso, he set up a two-day workshop for the associates to transfer that knowledge to the group.

After that, in the next general assembly meeting, they started to introduce some of the aspects of sociocracy to create a new circle of Agroecology. The current challenge is to fully implement sociocracy: backlog, tensions, separate operational and governance meetings; but he knows people are already adopting the term driver.

The greatest benefit he learned from sociocracy was the value of objections. He says this only became clearer to him when he met S3. It was a quantum leap in the matter of his understanding of consent. After taking the course on S3, it felt like objection was a gift. Now, he looks forward to having objections because he knows it will improve the proposal. He felt he became more mature in terms of consent decision making and his maturity reflected on the group.

Soon after that, he left IBC for a while so he could not follow the implementation of sociocracy. He has been informed only by reading the meetings minutes, and he was able to attend one meeting via Skype. But he knows some people took it on them to continue the implementation of Sociocracy there. Two other associates took courses in Sociocracy and several people play the role of facilitator. Today, he is assured that it is embodied in the group, he is not the only guardian of Sociocracy anymore. They continue to use Sociocracy as part of their daily life, with only a few adaptations.

This case study was written by Jesse Marshall and Nara Pais as part of his contribution to [the Sociocracy Leadership Training](#) in 2017. Thank you, Jesse and Nara!!