Educational Initiatives a Source to Promote Democracies: Human Rights Education and Education for Democratic Citizenship programs to foster Democracies

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Background:
The background of this paper is my current research project “Teaching Human Rights in Europe: Consequences, Purposes and Realization,” which is a survey of human rights education programs and their impact on the lives of national minorities in six European countries. The countries are Armenia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Slovakia, and Spain. By finding the process of regaining the right indicators to answer our research question, we analyzed how human rights instruments and institutions contribute to and affect the lives of members of national minorities. We aspire to identify governmental, non-governmental and individual actors who have contributed to human rights education in the focus countries. Another aspect of the project is to analyze the existing local, national and international legal frameworks of human rights education that lend themselves to protection of human rights in general and to also examine those frameworks that protect and foster minority rights specifically. A further goal is to investigate whether there is a way to combat discrimination against minority groups through human rights education in particular.

The consequences and impact of human rights education for national minorities constitute the focal point of this research project. Another dimension of the research is the set of new theoretical insights produced by working in an interdisciplinary team. The overall idea of the clearly problem-oriented research setting is to find out how legal analysis, the methodology of comparative political science, and ethnographic microanalysis can be combined in order to learn more about the purposes, realization, and consequences of human rights education.

Introduction:
First of all, I will describe two educational initiatives which I came across in our research countries as parts of the promotion of democracies: the UN Decade on Human Rights Education (1995-2004) and the Council of Europe Project, Education for Democratic Citizenship (all phases), which exist in many European Countries.

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1 This research project “Teaching Human Rights in Europe: Purposes, Realization and Consequences” is conducted at the Humboldt University of Berlin and the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Potsdam by Dr. Iur. Claudia Mahler, legal scholar (University of Potsdam), Dr. Pol. Anja Mihr, political scientist, and Dr. Phil. Reetta Toivanen, social anthropologist (both Humboldt University of Berlin). The research assignment is financed by Volkswagen Foundation, Germany and will run from 2003-2006. The Symposium Teaching Human rights in Europe will be held October 26-28, 2006 in Berlin for further information see www.humanrightsresearch.de.

Secondly, I will illustrate a few situations that revealed themselves during our field work in the research countries, which can be seen as examples for using a certain influence to improve the status of democracies in post communist countries.

The common aim among all the member states of declarations like the Decade on Human Rights Education and the Project Education for Democratic Citizenship was to foster democratization and civil liberties.

The proposals of human rights education (HRE) and education for democracy started in the same time period. Since after World War II, learning for democratic citizenship and the idea of human rights have been seen as integrated parts of fostering democratic stability. In the beginning of the last decade of the 20th Century, fundamental changes have taken place in Europe. These changes have taken place in Western established democracies as well as in the new ones. While countries in old democracies faced economic, social, technological and political changes, countries in Central and Eastern Europe seek to overcome their heritage of the communist era and instil in their citizens the ideas of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.


The idea of the universal Decade for Human Rights Education was first institutionalized in 1993 during the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. One further outcome of the World Conference in Vienna was the decision of the General Assembly to create the position of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The UN-Secretary General proclaimed the UN-Decade for Human Rights Education in 1994. The UN-Decade on Human Rights Education is based on Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The principle that education strengthens respect for human rights is the starting point for the new initiative on human rights education. The aim is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of human rights and to allow everybody to stick to human rights standards as outlined by the UDHR. These educational efforts call upon every individual and every institution in the society to promote respect for human rights and to

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strive for their universal and effective recognition. On the basis of several other human rights conventions, human rights education can be seen as a fundamental human right itself. However, the UN-Decade had purely a proclamation status. The International Plan of Action for Human Rights Education was the guiding instrument to support state parties in fulfilling their obligations. The introduction, for example, mentions that it was outlined during the World Conference on Human Rights the responsibility “[…] on all States and institutions to include human rights, humanitarian law, democracy and the rule of law as subjects in the curricula of all learning institutions in formal and non-formal settings.” 

In addition, the general guiding principle No. 7 says: “In recognition of the interdependence and mutually reinforcing nature of democracy, development and human rights, human rights education under the decade shall seek to further effective democratic participation in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres, and shall be utilized as a means of economic social progress and people centred sustainable development.”

The most important aim throughout the decade was to encourage state authorities that it is for the benefit of the entire society to implement human rights education in the education sector. This aim brings to mind that the overall goal of human rights education is to educate members of the whole population to respect one another. One of the crucial elements of human rights education is to refer particularly to the human rights standards. This is because if people are not able to precisely state their own human rights as well as those of others, they will not be able to claim human rights, nor will they be able to fight for them.

Some scientific works have divided HRE into three different mutually dependent levels to give a better definition of the concept behind HRE. The first level consists of knowledge transfer concerning legal and universal human rights standards, the second level deals with awareness-raising, where one can find human rights and take advantage from it. The third level will encourage people to actually engage in activities to foster human rights. Such
models as this three-tiered model of human rights education are aimed toward establishing a “culture” where human rights can be understood, respected, and defended.\(^\text{11}\)

The International Plan of Action for the UN- Decade for HRE outlined objectives for the international community. The objectives include the assessment of needs and formulation of effective strategies; the building and strengthening of programs and capacities for human rights education at the international, regional, national and local levels. Furthermore, the development of effective materials has to be coordinated. Another element in stimulating the global dissemination of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights is the strengthening of the role of mass media.

Human rights education can be furthered in very different educational settings for various target groups. This includes instructional seminars for teaching programs and the distribution of training material in the formal, informal and non-formal educational sector for teachers, university professors, social workers, law enforcement officers, lawyers, company managers, and others.\(^\text{12}\)

There was little political will to carry forth these initiatives, and alongside that, people were unsure as to what human rights education really meant and were reluctant to either engage HRE as a concept or decide how one should implement it.\(^\text{13}\) The midterm evaluation was a monitoring procedure of the decade where only some of the state parties reported on their realization of the aims of the decade. In 2004, only 24 countries had established some kind of National Action Plan for Human Rights Education, which was one of the shortcomings identified by the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights.\(^\text{14}\) Similarly, very few governments had implemented human rights education into their national school curricula at the end of the decade.\(^\text{15}\)

The Commission on Human Rights took note of the reports that recounted achievements and weaknesses of the decade as well as proposals for its follow up. To further the successes of the decade, a Resolution by the Commission on Human Rights called “Follow-up to the


\(^{14}\) For the report see UN-Doc E/CN.4/2003/100. For the Follow-up study by the High Commissioner see UN-Doc E/CN.4/2003/1001.

United Nations Decade on Human Rights Education” was adopted on the 21st April 2004.\textsuperscript{16} Therefore, it admits the need to continue a global structure to promote human rights education.

In April 2004, the Human Rights Commission of the UN-Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) proclaimed a World Programme for Human Rights Education. The UN General Assembly had adopted the revised Draft Plan of Action\textsuperscript{17} in its resolution on the World Programme for Human Rights Education (53/312) on July 14, 2005.

The first phase of the World Programme (2005-2007) will focus on the primary and secondary school systems and the implementation of human rights education. It will broadcast inaccurate knowledge-based content on human rights combined with the promotion and respect for human rights in the teaching environment itself, thereby developing diverse methodologies. There are small differences in the new definition of Human Rights Education from the one of the Decade; Paragraph 3(d) of part A which states: The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law; e) The building of maintenance of peace; f) the promotion of people-centred sustainable development and social justice.\textsuperscript{18}

**Education for Democratic Citizenship in Europe**

Even though the Decade on HRE was a UN initiative, the Council of Europe was a partner. The Council of Europe gave a definition on HRE which reads: “educational programmes and activities which focus on promoting equality in human dignity, in conjunction with other programmes such as those promoting intercultural learning, participation and empowerment of minorities”.\textsuperscript{19}

Nevertheless the forthcoming Council of Europe programs focused more on the concept of education for democratic citizenship than human rights education, which will be described in the next paragraph.

\textsuperscript{16} UN-Resolution, Commission on Human Rights, 204/71, 21 April, 2004.
\textsuperscript{17} General Assembly, UN-Doc A/59/525.Rev.1, 2 March, 2005.
\textsuperscript{18} General Assembly, UN-Doc A/59/525/Rev.1, 2 March, 2005, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{19} Official definition of Human Rights Education for the Council of Europe Youth Programme, cited in Council of Europe 2003: 17.
In 1997 the Project on “Education for Democratic Citizenship” (EDC) was established.\textsuperscript{20} The overall idea of the Final Plan of Action of the Second European Summit in 1997 was to strengthen democratic values among the youth through education in preparation for democratic citizenship.\textsuperscript{21} In May 1999, the Committee of Ministers adopted the Declaration and Programme on Education for Democratic Citizenship based on the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens. This Declaration was the result of having recognized the importance of education in promoting human rights, democracy and social cohesion for Europe as a whole.

What is meant by “Education for Democratic Citizenship”:

“EDC is a set of multifaceted practices and activities developed as a bottom-up approach to help pupils, young people and adults participate actively and responsibly in the decision making processes in their communities for the purpose of promoting and strengthening democratic culture based on awareness and commitment to shared fundamental values, such as human rights and freedoms, equality of difference and the rule of law, for their own benefit and for the benefit of society as a whole. It focuses on providing life-long opportunities for acquiring, applying and disseminating information, values and skills linked to democratic principles and procedures in a broad range of formal and non-formal teaching and learning environments.”\textsuperscript{22}

This first segment ended in 2002, and in this phase the necessary skills and competencies for practicing effective democratic citizenship were identified. This was the starting point for a discussion on how to teach these skills. A wide range of supportive activities in the member states were started. One tool to promote the program was the initiative of networks of experts.

EDC has emerged from more traditional programs, such as civic education or civic instruction. One fundamental goal of EDC is the promotion of a culture of democracy and human rights. This culture should enable individuals to develop the collective project of building communities. Participation is the solution for promoting and strengthening a culture of democracy. This democratic culture is based on awareness and commitment to shared fundamental values, such as human rights and freedoms, equality of difference and the rule of law. Participation is one of the basic rights of each person in a stable democracy.

\textsuperscript{21} The Final Declaration of the Second Summit of the Council of Europe of 11 October, 1997. Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 14
The member countries should make EDC and essential component of their educational, training, culture and youth policies and practices. As an educational initiative, EDC tries to reach all individuals, regardless of age or social status. It therefore goes far beyond the school environment and must be seen as having an inclusive curriculum that must incorporate a wide range of formal and non formal educational settings. EDC is a process of lifelong learning.\(^{23}\) Lifelong learning demands a holistic means to education such as EDC. The main task for the second phase of the EDC project (2001-2004) was to bridge the gap between policy and practice.\(^{24}\)

The next step in the development was the announcement of the European Year of Citizenship among all the member states in 2005. The general objective of this Year was to “bridge policy and practice by empowering policy makers and practitioners at all levels to set up and develop sustainable programs for EDC/HRE,”\(^{25}\) which is a direct extension of phase two. The member states should act in the political framework of the Year and further the implementation of EDC while fostering sustainable practices. The Council of Europe provided a kit on how to teach civic education.

Phase three is called Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights. In 2006, a Programme for Activities under the title “learning and living democracy for all” was presented. The program is based on experiences of previous phases and the Year of EDC.

EDC seeks to promote an integrated understanding of human rights, placing equal emphasis on all categories, including civil, political, social, economic and cultural or development rights. The outcomes of EDC are related to the understanding attitudes and behaviors that it aims to achieve among individual learners. It is also concerned with what it aims to achieve at a broader societal level.

**Issues, Goals and Objectives**

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Both initiatives aim to strengthen policy development and implementation of EDC/HRE. Another goal is to intensify the capacity for teacher training and development in partnership with civil society and boards of education.

All people from different social backgrounds are target groups of these very similar programs. Hence, the values which the initiatives promote through education are comparable. The main goals of the two programs distinguish the programs from one another—they focus on the idea of human rights and democratic citizenship, respectively. However, the objectives and content description of EDC and HRE have many overlapping goals. This can be observed when one tries to determine whether one of the theories is an umbrella concept that encompasses the other. Both theories can be viewed as umbrella concepts. On the one hand, one can read that EDC is the overall concept, which includes HRE. Many official documents of the Council of Europe configure the two theories. On the other hand HRE might be viewed as the umbrella term because it is much broader and includes all people of the world and arguably stands for more values than EDC.

However, I would argue that there is no need for this conflict. Human rights education and EDC programs see one goal in informing people about their human, fundamental and democratic rights and duties to live in a democratic environment. Both initiatives try to foster the implementation of human and democratic rights education in the formal education sector. Hence, to further the integration of these themes, they have a special focus on teacher education. Furthermore, both programs refer to informal and non-formal education and want to bridge the formal education sector with civil society.

Both programs further the promotion for living together in democratic countries and try to give people in different regions a better environment in which to reside, ultimately influencing initiation of programs on the national level.

**Observations in the member states**

On my field trips, I had the chance to talk to several actors that engage in HRE. During the interviews, many of them told me that they are part of EDC projects and this is why they are involved in HRE. Others asked me what I meant by HRE, because their special focus was in the field of citizenship education and they are aware that human rights are one part of it. Whether the two are essentially the same, they can not say for sure. This is when I observed that people working in the field generally use EDC and HRE sometimes as synonyms, but they are not quite sure if there is a real difference between the concepts. In practice there is sometimes no distinction in the content of EDC and HRE. But if people try to give definitions
as to what EDC is, many state: EDC is the concept to educate their students to become “good citizens”. We encountered this answer in all our research countries from actors with extremely dissimilar backgrounds.

In my current project “Teaching Human Rights in Europe,” we also had a workshop in Yerevan, Armenia. During the discussions, we were informed from different sources that new school books with sections devoted to HRE were financed by the UN or the Council of Europe. However, teacher education and the pedagogical system have not changed since the Soviet era. People informed us that in their opinions the new books are useless to some extent, because the children do not have the chance to feel the culture of human rights or learn how to participate in a democratic system. One of my colleagues visited a school and informed us that the pupils had to learn the articles of the UDHR by heart and recite them from memory without further explanation about the background or the use of the rights. At that point, we realized and witnessed what people tried to tell us before. Armenia is one of the examples where people do not believe in law or the juridical and democratic system. In this case, it would be good to support small Armenian NGO or initiatives to find influential partners in civil society to make sure the projects have a chance to find fruitful grounds for their seed. I got the impression that good practices from other democratic countries to include chapters on HRE or civic education in school books came too early. The whole system had not changed by then, and without these new bases, the promotion of human rights or democratic values failed, because teaching about it in the classroom was not effective. Before people start to distrust the system, it seems that there is no need to implement further initiatives from the outside. It could be a good starting point to further some small democratic groups to foster the development of democratic structures.

The Council of Europe and other initiatives gave financial support in countries like Armenia, Estonia and Slovakia to NGOs, the government, or cooperative efforts. In many cases governmental authorities had to manage the financial support. One particular problem was that some NGOs which had critical attitudes toward governmental actions were not included in cooperation and had no chance of getting financial support to foster their grassroots projects.

In Estonia and Slovakia other donors, like the Open Society Foundation and the European Union, also gave support to programs and projects. The British Council as well as political German foundations provided financial help to grassroots NGOs, and these initiatives had sometimes more sustainability because they were in contact with old networks where people had more trust in each other. Some initiatives, for example some Slovak NGOs had big problems garnering further financial support because the new national institute on human rights was initiated and got the budget for the work. The national institute facilitates the trainings nowadays and, therefore, receives financial support from the official side.

Another fact which we came across in Post-soviet countries like Estonia and Slovakia is that persons changed their working positions very fast. The young elites who were often working for some NGO, were involved in the launching of HRE or EDC. After a short period, people left the country and worked for international organizations or took a position on the governmental side. Because of this phenomenon, it was occasionally hard to find NGOs mentioned in documents or a special individual who was responsible for a program. They sometimes disappeared and left a big gap in the national networks. When actors vanished from the scene, it could have also been that the NGOs had dealt first with HRE but that the organizations subsequently had to change their subjects to get further financial support. In both cases it would be very effective if an initiative from the outside would provide long lasting financial support and these very effective NGO can be partners by implementing sustainable programs.

For instance, the programs in the formal education sector in Slovakia failed to realize changes in the curricula or a long-lasting action plan on human rights education till 2004. But after some unsuccessful proposals they started again with a mixed working group from the governmental side e.g. Ministries of education, pedagogical institutes and many different partners of civil society e.g. NGOs, labor unions etc. began to draft action plans for the sustainable implementation of HRE and EDC. This process would not have started again without some pressure from the outside.

For example, in the formal education sector when initiatives from the outside started at the right time, this had the perfect effect by drafting new setting. But if the programs with the power and money from the outside started too early, the project often failed because civil society did not believe in the values (Armenia) by then or the know-how of teachers or the
content of the programs did not meet the needs of the target groups (Armenia, Estonia and Slovakia).

This seems to me to be scenario to further small grassroots initiatives to prepare regions to have fruitful project implementations.

Some schemes, especially when they focus on special groups like police enforcement often had better chances when grassroots NGOs and official partners worked together and the target groups were involved in the drafting process of a program. I learned this, as matter of fact, in Slovakia.

One very interesting observation was that often a single person or a small group worked as purveyors on promoting democratic values in HRE or EDC programs. They started to lobby the programs from intergovernmental institutions at the governmental level and were all engaged with NGO networks and other actors. These people were very often the link between an international program and some smaller initiatives in the country. Hence, they started round tables to bring people together and these personal schemes were very often the starting point on the national level. Without private initiatives or personal dedication not much would have happened.

**Conclusion:**

As some examples have shown, external intervention or external financial support are needed tools for starting new initiatives in the different countries, especially if the government involvement is essential. But sometimes, as we have seen with the example of the Armenian school books, it is not enough to promote only one tool for change, namely the teaching environment. The whole environment has to be ready to convey the values behind the written words.

In some countries, external intervention seems to be one big criterion for starting some programs. However, as we have seen in the case of Slovakia, if the government is the administrative power that regulates the budget, some critical NGOs, even though they would be very effective in their field, get excluded from the initiatives. A solution for this scenario would be the direct support of the NGOs. But one has to keep in mind if the program should have an impact on a sustainable development in the formal education sector, for example, or on trainings for officials like law enforcement officers, the
governments have to be involved and would need to work together with civil society’s initiatives.

Another aspect I really have to stress is that I very often found that if anything happened in the field of implementing and enhancing human rights education or education for democratic citizenship in a country—particularly in the formal education sector—it was done because individuals, activists or dedicated state officials felt they had to do something and bring it up on the political agenda. So, from my point of view, the purveyors for democracy promotion were more often individuals than established democracies.

The overall conclusion would be that we need support for the grassroots and a small proportion of pressure and sufficient financial support from the outside to find the perfect way for implementation of long-lasting sustainable programs to foster democracy through learning democratic and human rights values.