

European Conference 2014
**"1914-2014: Lessons from History?
Citizenship Education and Conflict Management"**

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Workshop 10
**"Citizenship education in conflict regions:
Challenges, options and dilemmas"**

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I found my topic of citizen education in conflict zones very appealing, as we had continued discussing this topic both informally after the panel – and then – more formally, during the World Cafe exercise, involving more participants from different countries.

This was due to two important components:

1. Citizen education in conflict zones is such a traumatic topic: Everybody wants to do something to help in such conflict zones, like Crimea or East Ukraine, but "traditional tools" in such environments do not work.
2. One of the particular solutions that I suggested in my talk - is the necessity to create certain "secure learning spaces" - because in conflict zones and generally in troubled circumstances of authoritarian pressure or deeply divided communities torn by violence or threat of violence, people feel very insecure even to share what they really think, - and in such an environment no "citizen education" can happen.

So, before planning certain education programme, the organisers of citizen education should think about creating a secure environment – both physically and psychologically – where no one can be attacked and everyone will be welcomed to talk her or his mind.

Second important thing is that issues to be discussed in such situations, should be less" theoretical or "conceptual", but rather simple and particular issues or regular needs, like food and water supplies, child security, housing issues, cleaning of common spaces, etc. that can provide citizens both neutral and secure spaces at least to share their current problems and discuss their troubles - which in troubled environments are too many.

Only after developing a certain level of trust among the participants, that are invited to those secure learning spaces with possible regularity, the discussions may touch upon focusing on common needs that people can work together, like providing and distributing food and the supplies to the community members or re-building the school-house, which had been shelled.

A very important issue in conflict zones is getting information on the events currently happening, particularly when people are deprived from normal information sources they usually use - variety of radio and TV programmes, newspapers and news networks, internet and social media they trust.

In my presentation at the workshop, I shared data on how current TV channels in the Russian Federation present the events in Ukraine, blaming the violence on "Kievan Fascists" and participants of the pro-European and anti-corruption citizen uprising Maidan. In our sincere discussions there were many examples, and quite painful discoveries, including how much national TV propaganda still matters, and how quickly the propaganda can completely re-frame human mind, even in cases when it is made of brutal lies and how difficult it is for citizens to find true information and create "real picture of events", before they can even make up their mind about them.

We had many well-informed participants, including those doing media-analysis of Russian coverage of the events in the Ukraine, so there was enough data to illustrate how propaganda have created completely intolerable images of Maidan events and Ukraine "honour revolution", that led to belief that Ukraine is led by "Kiev violent junta" and any actions against it are justified. Including waging a "just war" in order to save Ukrainians by making them closer to "Russian brotherhood" or mysterious "Novorossya dream", that is "worth dying and killing for". In such situation the role of civic education, first of all is "truth telling", which itself is not at all easy, because such efforts have to be systemic and find channels to spread this truth among those, who may act as multipliers – through existing educational networks – both formal and non-formal – and use of social media.

What is also important is the form in which the information is spread: just re-posting or sending e-mails to the big lists is not effective. What is needed, is an "art of story telling" and for this civil educators have to put facts together, focusing on a special person, event or a message, that allows to make a comprehensive story, which is based on true facts, catches attention, is convincing and allows it to be discussed in public.

Another point I was elaborating on, is a challenge of division between what is known as formal and non-formal civic education, that both have advantages and shortcomings. While formal education is more structured and more systemic, it takes much longer time and usually requires formal organisational structures – schools and universities – with formal authority to "recognize the knowledge" that was gained through such education and deliver certain diplomas or certificates. Informal or non-formal education – mostly provided by various kinds of NGOs through learning seminars, short-term schools and trainings – is usually more focused and flexible, but often over-simplified and lacking systemic picture of the subject and holistic vision, that allows participants to learn further by themselves.

What needs to be recognised by civic educators is that in times of crisis – and even worse in violent conflicts – the limitations of both forms of civil education can destroy their positive features.

In order to overcome this challenge and to use the best features of both systems, I proposed to create "complimentary chains" of formal and informal education, where the flexibility of workshops and skills trainings may be combined with systemic degree programmes by awarding ECTS credits for skills acquisition for example, for fact-finding, process monitoring or negotiation skills.

In current conflict situations, where there is a great need for observation and monitoring in conflict zones, universities with degree programmes in human rights, democratic citizenship, global conflict resolution and the like, could partner with many citizen training NGOs in the mission of preparing qualified observers and peace-builders. Such trainings in peace building and conflict resolution could give their participants the chance to both grasp the practical knowledge through trainings and to accumulate ECTS credits, which they can later present to regular university programmes and account them as credits for their future regular diplomas.

Such type of cooperation between formal and informal educational institutions, though, seemingly obvious, still does not exist; partly because of the rigidity of the formal education system, partly because NGO training programmes are often short-lived and strongly dependent on NGO donors. So in order to start the work in possible "matching" formal and informal citizen education, there needs to be at least three different components:

- One or several innovative universities that are teaching bits and pieces of citizenship education, like public policy, human rights, democratic governance, conflict resolution, and other subjects helpful in citizen education, and that are willing and interested to partner with NGO training-based citizen education.
- Several long-lasting and experienced NGOs and NGO networks that work in the field of citizen education and are willing to cooperate with universities to involve a systemic academic approach in their trainings and allowing their participants to earn ECTS credits through didactical supervision of their training programmes by universities and inviting some teaching experience from those universities.
- One or several donors or donor consortiums that are interested in funding this particular type of cooperation for a 2-3 year project, so that the results of it might be visible and further judgment about this experiment could be made.

All those ideas were discussed with NECE participants, many of who are either NGO activists, academics or experts in the education field. The general attitude to this idea was very positive, as the "two worlds" of citizen education – universities and NGOs – would very much benefit from such type of cooperation. But the citizens would benefit the most by getting an opportunity to acquire skills training during NGO training while receiving "formal ECTS educational credits" which are recognizable by universities. In this way, we would be able to educate a bigger number of "qualified citizens" – with both practical skills and opportunity to "convert" these into a full degree at a university.

Being motivated by NECE discussions, I took these proposals to my academic colleagues and partners from the National Research University "Higher School of Economics" who agreed, that it is a very prospective theme to be explored further.

So, first I included the theme of citizen education in my presentation to the participants of the Warsaw Dialogue on Democracy, co-organised by Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Community of Democracies, where I was focusing on creating international learning spaces that can be supported by various global actors for democracy promotion. More information on this event can be found [here](#).

Also, we approached our international academic partners from the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) and found out that there is a special Research Committee on Citizenship Studies that plans to have a special session on citizenship education. More information on the ECPR can be found [here](#).

We also approached the Research Committee with a proposal of several panels. Please see them below. If these panels will be approved by the Organizing Committee of ECPR General Conference in Montreal, we will be advocating for prospective participants to submit their papers. In this way, our topic on citizenship education in unfavourable environments, including authoritarian regimes and conflict zones, started at NECE Conference, will be developed further.

Here are the panel proposals on citizenship education that the Public Policy Department of the National Research University “Higher School of Economics” submitted to the ECPR General Conference:

Panel Proposal №1: Creating Civic Learning Spaces: Citizenship Education in unfavourable social environments

Chaired by Nina Belyaeva, Professor at the National Research University “Higher School of Economics”

It is conventional knowledge that citizenship education is best achieved "by living it", where the students are learning citizenship skills through participation in democratic practices like community work or elections. But there is growing number of cases, where such practices are not available, particular in authoritarian and corrupt regimes and in conflict-torn regions, where citizenship identities are deeply troubled. Our panel seeks to explore the limits and opportunities of citizenship education in troubled social environments and how citizenship education can be organised, and what role can it play in such unfavourable conditions.

Panel Proposal №2: The role of social and moral conflicts in citizenship education

Chaired by Dmitry Zaytsev, Associate Professor at the National Research University “Higher School of Economics”

This panel elaborates on the role of social and moral conflicts in citizenship education: studying of such concepts as democracy, political participation, human rights, civil society, the public, public interests. This panel will critically reflect on societal contexts of citizenship education. We will focus on critical examination of established concepts of learning democracy in educational institutions and the dominant discourse on democracy and political participation, and how it influences citizenship socialisation.

Panel Proposal №3: Citizenship manifestation and creating common identity of protest publics

Chaired by Irina Semenenko, Professor at the National Research University “Higher School of Economics”

Recent mass protest movements in Russia, Ukraine and countries of MENA regions raise the question about the common identity of protesting publics. We welcome insights on seeking the common foundations of such identity in citizenship manifestations practices of protesting publics, and testing the hypothesis that these citizenship manifestations practices create unique identity for such collective actors as protesting publics. Identity plays a crucial role in the consolidation of protesting publics and permanent repetitions of protests, and, finally, in the political changes.