

World Forum for Democracy 2016
Lab 9
**“Training Tomorrow’s Democratic Leaders:
How to Make a Difference”**

Report¹

This lab, sponsored by the Network of the Council of Europe Schools of Political Studies, considered the nature, context and scope of Non-Formal Education for active citizenship and democratic leadership, underpinned by the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law and mindful of creating inclusive learning opportunities for young people from all groups of society. The main presenters were Ms Yael OHANA (Director of educational consultancy “Frankly Speaking”, Berlin), and Ms Veneta ILIEVA (Alumna of the Bulgarian School of Politics, Chief Financial Officer for the Trust for Social Achievement, Sofia). Discussants were Ms Bryony HOSKINS (Professor of Comparative Social Science, University of Roehampton, UK) and Mr Jakov ŽIŽIĆ (Executive Director, Academy for political Development, Croatia). The meeting was chaired by Ms Catherine LALUMIERE (President of the Association of Schools of Political Studies and former Secretary General of the Council of Europe), and moderated by Mr Hakan ALTINAY (Director of the European School of Politics, Istanbul).

Executive Summary

The Schools of Political Studies (SPS) need little introduction. Created with the support of the Council of Europe and supported by this Organisation and the Association of the Schools of Political Studies (established in 2008) over almost 25 years, the Schools have become a beacon for ‘democracy by education’ in 24 countries in Europe and, more recently, in Northern Africa. The Schools achieve this by training young people from different backgrounds and sectors of civil society - informally and outside of the country’s formal educational system - into promising democratic leaders who will promote the values of the Council of Europe.

As for the ability of Non-Formal Education and the Schools in particular to reach heterogeneous groups of people from different backgrounds, there may still be some room for improvement, and indeed the question of broadening access to NFE in general was a recurring theme of the lab.

The added value of NFE is the fact that it educates in attitudes and behaviours, rather than skills. This is hugely important for the question of democratic leadership because, as recalled in the words of Pierre Mendès France, ‘democracy is above all an *état d’esprit*’.

What is Non-Formal Education (NFE)?

Non-Formal Education (NFE) can be described as a learning method that takes place outside the structures of traditional learning, with different methods of teaching and (often) little assessment. It is voluntary, yet intentional and organised, and is value-driven rather than subject-driven. In the context of forming democratic leaders, Non-Formal Education can be a useful tool for complementing Formal Education, which may be lacking. NFE should seek to develop attitudes and behaviours, not just skills; it should additionally seek to ensure change and multiplication.

Summary of the panel discussion

Ms Yael OHANA outlined the key benefits and potential pitfalls of the NFE approach, explaining that NFE was a value-driven, self-reflective, critical, relational, developmental and non-indoctrinating approach that could be a very effective model for change if carried out well. She provided two examples of initiatives where NFE had made a difference: the RAY network of the European Commission’s Youth in Action programme (2007-2013) and the Amnesty International Human Rights Friendly Schools project. In terms of the political dimension, Ms Ohana recognised four important areas that can be developed through NFE: critical thinking, political literacy, psychological confidence and participatory leadership. However, NFE is not without pitfalls and these are primarily that the number of people reached by NFE remained limited, trainers are often not trained in pedagogy and that

¹ Rapporteur: Günter de Schepper, Directorate of Policy Planning, Council of Europe.

NFE is often not recognised as a valuable part of the education system. Indeed, whilst the theory has been much expounded, little is known about the effectiveness of NFE and little evaluative research is available. In response to questions from the audience, Ms Ohana said that if schools truly wished to practice democracy, then they needed to let pupils/students make decisions that matter, and not just encourage them to get involved in mock debates or model conferences. In terms of recognition of NFE, the problem lies more on the side of universities and employers not recognising the achievements than in non-accreditation by the organisers of NFE. Ms Ohana cited in this case the Youthpass of the European Union, which allows for the formal recognition of NFE activities.

Following the first presentation, Ms Veneta ILIEVA brought in a concrete example of NFE in practice. She presented the Summer Academy of Strengthening Democracy in the Euro-Med Region, which took place in Bulgaria in May 2016 and which she attended as an Alumna of the Bulgarian School of Politics. It was attended by 21 participants from three of the Schools of Political Studies (those of Bulgaria, Tunisia and Morocco). The participants came from different professional and personal backgrounds. This summer activity was based on interaction, inspiration, and energy, and in small groups they were tasked with proposing measures and policies to solve democratic deficits in the Euro-Med region. Ms Ilieva noted that the academy could be seen as a microcosm of the greater question of getting people from different backgrounds to work together. In asking questions about democracy, she found that a number of key points raised by the participants were about values, such as kindness, friendliness, respect, and trust – both in oneself and in the system. The combination of these values plus a dose of critical thinking would be what was needed for democratic institutions, and to help people to counter political manipulation. Ms Ilieva stressed that NFE has to remain optional as any attempts to make it compulsory would defeat the very point of it.

Responding to the presentations of Ms Ohana and Ms Ilieva, Ms Bryony HOSKINS pointed to the difficulties faced by NFE in terms of reaching all social and economic groups, and in terms of securing a valued space in the education system. She noted that democratic values and political engagement were often already learned in a community, and that this social process leads to a sense of belonging to a group. She stressed that parents and family played a crucial role in informal education. According to Ms Hoskins, one of the key roles of NFE should be to provide democratic instruction to those who did not receive such values from the home environment, and for this targeted activities were needed. Extending this thought to formal education structures, Ms Hoskins highlighted the fact that schools often exhibit precisely the opposite of democratic behaviours and are known as institutions of rules, restrictions, authority and punishment. As decisions about education fall to governments, some innovative approaches to education found themselves quashed before they have a chance to flourish. Concerning the content of NFE, Ms Hoskins lamented the fact that activities since the financial crisis had tended to focus on developing skills for employment rather than promoting key values and citizenship, which are needed for democratic leadership.

Referring to his experiences as Director of the Academy of Political Development in Croatia, Mr ŽIŽIĆ explained that democratic values were not just missing in the way schools were run, but sometimes also from their curriculum. He felt this to be the case in Croatia, and saw that NFE was the only way to teach democratic leadership at all, as the option to teach it through formal education did hardly exist, if at all. In response to the risk of only reaching a small number of people with NFE initiatives, Mr Žižić explained that the Academy of Political Development had recently started offering a training cycle for students, in addition to the usual programme for young professionals. He acknowledged the concern raised by the audience that securing funding for NFE often posed difficulties if the public authorities were not willing to sponsor it.

Finally, recalling Pierre Mendez-France's statement that "democracy is an *état d'esprit*", Ms Catherine LALUMIERE, Chair of this lab, stressed the importance of 'respect', 'trust', 'kindness', 'values' and 'democratic principles' as the main principles for education. She also noted that the basis of such democratic values should be the instruments we already have before us such as the European Convention of Human Rights and the UN Declaration on Human Rights, and that these should be the cornerstone of Formal and Non-Formal Education. Both formal and non-formal education are necessary and complementary, starting from childhood.

Conclusions

1. The training of tomorrow's democratic leaders by education - be it formal or non-formal - must focus on developing an *'état d'esprit'* of democracy which includes several important elements, such as 'values' and 'democratic principles'. Already existing instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention of Human Rights, should be the main basis of this education.

2. Non-formal education tends to attract people who already have fairly well developed notions of society and democracy; however it should be more accessible to all groups in society and not limited to those who are already engaged in civic society and democracy.

3. Formal and non-formal educational systems can complement each other; therefore non-formal education should be encouraged to function independently and should be recognised as a valuable contribution to democratic education and leadership.