



CONFLICTS MEDIATION THE YOUTH

Edited by:
Michał Głażewski
Lech Sałaciński



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EDITORIAL

LECH SAŁACIŃSKI
Poland

ON BENEFITS OF PRACTICAL ACTIONS
OR THE INTRODUCTION TO AN INTERNATIONAL
PROJECT

At present in Poland as well as in many other European countries numerous projects financed from the means of the European Union are carried out. All these projects, despite their diversity in terms of contents and structure, have one idea in common: supporting all initiatives leading to social development and international cooperation within the framework of the uniting Europe. Each of the projects should result in measurable and practical benefits. Yet in the opinion of many people this is not always the case. It may happen that particular projects result in bulky volumes of studies in which it is difficult to identify any practical benefits.

This book, and I hope that most readers will share my opinion in this respect, proves that the international projects carried out are not a mere waste of time and money, but in fact can practically contribute to the development of particular countries and regions. The authors of particular chapters of the book are directly involved in the project carried out within the framework of three European programmes: *Socrates*, *Leonardo da Vinci* and *The Youth*. Their ideas, concepts, conclusions or reports on actual actions undertaken constitute the true value of this study and confirm the practical benefits of this kind of activity.

The main topic of the project focused on the issue of social conflicts and shaping social, democratic and civic attitudes in various circles. One of the major forms of the project consisted in organising workshops for pedagogues from selected European countries which would provide them with an opportunity to learn more about the specific character and conditioning of social conflicts occurring in particular areas and their consequences for education. Apart from that the workshops were meant to offer an opportunity to practice concrete abilities vital for coping with conflict situations arising in schools and other educational institutions. The following title summarizes the primary aim and the major task underlying the project: "Shaping Demo-

cratic and Civic Attitudes Through a Systematic Training in Resolving Conflicts – an International Comparative Study”.

The project was initiated by the employees of the Brandenburg Regional Office for Foreigners, Youth Work and School (Regionale Arbeitsstellen für Ausländerfragen, Jugendarbeit und Schule e. V. – RAA Brandenburg). RAA Brandenburg is a German non-governmental organization whose scope of activity covers the land of Brandenburg. The main statutory aims of the organisation include prevention of racism and hostility towards foreigners as well violence in educational institutions (both in schools and out of school). The organization employs, on various time and contractual principles, more than 40 pedagogues and social workers, which certainly should constitute a pattern to be followed in the Polish context.

The employees implement and supervise various projects targeted at children, teenagers and adults. Many of these projects are specifically aimed at teachers. Work with immigrants, migrants and other ‘minority’ groups also constitute some of the priorities of the programme. Workers’ salaries as well as the projects undertaken by RAA Brandenburg are fully financed from the European means, the budget of Brandenburg or other means acquired from various foundations.

The project described involved not only RAA Brandenburg but also twin organizations in France: Academie Francaise, Délégation Académique aux Relations Internationales et à la coopération in Rennes, Northern Ireland: North Eastern Education and Library Board from Antrim and Poland: Zielona Góra Educational Association “Civilitas” from Zielona Góra, Teacher Training Centre from Zielona Góra and “Bona Fides” “Kultura Dialogu”, “Horyzont”, “Meditor” from Silesia. All these organizations are actively involved in education and are experienced in terms of work with schools, children and teenagers in the area of conflict and violence prevention. A closer examination of the scope of activity of these organizations shows that in their routine, daily work many interesting instances of actions practically contributing to the democratization of school life as well as to the raise of the quality of social life in general can be found.

According to its assumptions the project was aimed directly at two groups:

- teachers, pedagogues and social workers employed in schools of various types, willing to start work with teenagers, parents and other teachers. The aim was to acquire interpersonal competences and the ability to resolve all conflict situations peacefully and encourage democratic attitudes in everyday life;

- young people in problem situations (e.g. teenagers from pathological backgrounds, handicapped people, juvenile immigrants or teenagers of the rightist political orientation).

The actual tasks underlying the project were scheduled for two years and covered the following scope of activity:

- five 10-day international workshops during which the participants had an opportunity to: familiarise themselves with the specific character of social conflicts in particular countries and resulting educational problems, learn about the methods of coping with such problems in normal conditions of routine work and life, exchange experience as far as mediation and negotiation in conflict situations are concerned and acquire new pedagogical skills during practical activities;
- publication of a book promoting the idea of the project, describing the achievements of the participants, their practical experience, conclusions from the tasks undertaken or theoretical reflections connected with the problems of teenagers, their aggressive behaviour and conflicts between young people;
- training sessions were organised in host countries and regions and as a result the participants were able to work out new methods of work with children, teenagers, parents, teachers as well as prepare materials which could be used while working with young people;
- direct work with young people in selected schools and educational institutions in particular regions.

The participants of the project found subsequent study trips particularly informative, especially from the cognitive point of view, since they were offered an opportunity to take a closer look at problems typical for particular countries or regions. It turns out that what poses a specific problem in one area or country is no longer a threat somewhere else. It was either dealt with successfully in the past, it is efficiently prevented or it becomes insignificant from the general point of view.

For instance while visiting Northern Ireland, project participants had an opportunity to gain an in-depth knowledge of the essence and origins of the existing religious conflicts. These conflicts, so typical of this region, do occur, yet are not so significant in other countries. Nevertheless, getting a better insight into the essence of the problems as well their significance for educational practice was of particular interest. Project participants may have been misled by a deceptive impression that nobody remembers what it is that the people in Northern Ireland fight for and where all the hatred and

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