

# Chapter 1 – Aim, background and methodology of the study

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## ***1. Context and purpose of the study***

For over a decade the Council of Europe has been working on policies in the field of education for democratic citizenship (EDC). One result has been that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe agreed on a recommendation stating that EDC is central to educational politics, and that it is a “factor for innovation in terms of organising and managing overall education systems, as well as curricula and teaching methods” (Recommendation Rec(2002)12). According to this recommendation, European governments acknowledged their responsibility for ensuring the cultural basis of democracy through education. However, politics is not so simple that supranational recommendations are immediately translated into policy in national states. This gap between agreed and realised policies has been termed a “compliance gap”. One of the most logical reasons for non-compliance comes from a lack of awareness or competences. Therefore the Council of Europe concentrated on producing materials that could help raise awareness and develop competences. Key products resulting from this effort have been collected as an “EDC/HRE Pack” since 2005. This collection covers the areas of policy making, democratic governance of educational institutions, teacher training and quality assurance. The “Tool for Quality Assurance of Education for Democratic Citizenship in Schools” (Birzea et al., 2005), which is one of these materials, forms the reference document for this study.

This study analyses relevant conditions and possible activities with regard to implementing the tool in 10 national educational systems. As relevant conditions, the study considers the existing attempts to deliver educational quality within countries, together with the teacher training programmes that accompany these attempts. As possible activities, national adaptations of the tool, and various ways of working with different target groups, are also taken into account.

The following sections provide background information concerning the project. This will help the reader understand why the tool needs to be adapted in different circumstances. Section 2 presents points of reference that open theoretical perspectives on the work presented. Section 3 provides a rationale for the selection of participating countries and gives and describes the methodology used when conducting this study. Finally, Section 4 provides an overview of the remaining contents of this book.

## **2. Points of reference for the research presented in this book**

Besides the tool itself, the study concept relies on some theoretical considerations deriving from comparative education, from school development research, from theories of evaluation, and from research on innovations. This section looks at each of these theoretical considerations in turn.

### **2.1. The “Tool for Quality Assurance of Education for Democratic Citizenship in Schools”**

The tool is designed to answer the needs of all those who are responsible for developing EDC measures at school. It provides a conceptual background as well as exemplary materials showing how the quality of schooling with respect to education for democratic citizenship can be ensured.

The tool was developed as a result of analysing EDC experience in South-East European countries and by adapting mostly western European materials to this context. Thereby the principles, methods and instruments have been described, all of which are intended as a generic resource for users in any country. In order to make the tool manageable for people without previous knowledge of it, the first chapters explain its basic concepts. Thus there are first of all introductions to EDC, quality assurance, evaluation and school development planning before these concepts are all related to each other. At its core, the tool offers an evaluative framework for EDC in schools, providing a set of broader indicators in the sense of questions an evaluation has to answer (for example, “Are the design and practices of assessment within the school consistent with EDC?”). Each indicator is accompanied by a set of sub-themes (for example, fairness, transparency and improvement) coupled with concrete statements that can be taken as evaluation checkpoints (for example, “Teachers do not use assessment of knowledge and skills in specific subjects for enforcing discipline”). Different ways of collecting data and working with results in school development planning are also illustrated.

The tool is a free online resource and can be downloaded from the Council of Europe’s website: [www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/Source/Pdf/Documents/2006\\_4\\_Tool4QA\\_EDC.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/Source/Pdf/Documents/2006_4_Tool4QA_EDC.pdf)

Further information about the Council of Europe’s work in the field of EDC is available at: [www.coe.int/edc](http://www.coe.int/edc).

### **2.2. Comparative education research**

As the study presented here deals with different educational systems, the research tradition of comparative education (Bray, 2007; Postlethwaite, 1995) can be used as a reference in order to reflect the given aims and alternatives in conducting the work. The objectives of comparative education can vary with respect to research

interests. Hörner et al. (2007) distinguishes four classical purposes of comparative studies:

- ideographic purpose: this purpose is fulfilled by various types of educational systems. A study may be interested in identifying common structures and developments in different systems, or in distinguishing the principles that guide the actors in different settings just because there is scientific interest in the phenomenon;
- meliorist purpose: for this purpose the units of analysis are determined by the goal of finding a feature in one educational system that may be useful to improve another system. This approach is popular but nevertheless problematic, because of the entelechy of each system, which may result in the same feature working differently in one system than in another;
- evolutionist purpose: here researchers try to discover emerging developments within at least two compared systems. The emerging trends are then taken as a point of reference when analysing countries that have not yet shown any signs of these trends. However, there is an inherent danger in this approach in the often undisputed normative understanding of the new discovered trends;
- experimental purpose: in this approach the compared systems are viewed as participants in an experiment. Researchers are interested in learning about the different systems by the way they deal with a common intervention. Unlike a scientific experiment, however, there is no random assignment of interventions to the experiment or to the control group. Preconditions and implementation procedures differ.

This study is primarily linked to two of these purposes: ideographic and experimental. First of all, to some degree the different country reports follow an ideographic purpose: information about specific features within the educational systems of 10 countries is presented in a systematic way, and compared. However, this alone is insufficient, given that broader up-to-date descriptions of the educational systems within nine of the 10 participating countries can be found elsewhere (Hörner et al., 2007; Döbert, 2007; Giedraitienė, Kiliuvienė and Brauckmann, 2007; Hellwig, Lipenkowa, 2007; Hörner and Nowosad, 2007; Průcha, 2007; Rajangu, 2007; Schmidt, 2007; Sroka, 2007; Žogla, Andersone, Černova, 2007), along with two recent international comparisons on general EDC within Europe (Bîrzea, 2004; Eurydice, 2005). In addition to specialising in the relationship between quality assurance and EDC, this study therefore has a second, experimental purpose. It presents all countries in the comparison with new material, the “Tool for Quality Assurance of Education for Democratic Citizenship in Schools”. Descriptions are not purely ideographic, but selected and given as preconditions for the implementation of the material, accompanied by the individual authors’ ideas on how to support implementation given their country-specific context.

However, departing from most experimental studies, this study actually precedes the real experiment, which is the practical implementation of the tool. Indeed, a feasibility study can be looked at as a mental experiment. In this sense, we can interpret the authors of the 10 country reports as making different forecasts and showing different opportunities according to their country-specific context. This emphasises the fact that it is not only the situation within a country that shapes the content of reports, but also the standpoint of the individual authors.

### **2.3. School development research**

The basic assumption in the field of school development is that schooling can make a difference to students' competences and attitudes in a way that is relevant for democracy. Theories of school development (Fend, 2008; Dalin and Kitson, 2005) distinguish between three main levels for initiating change within school practices:

- level of the school system;
- level of schools as organisations;
- level of different actors within schools.

At the system level, schooling is influenced by the legal setting, which defines the space for decision making for different political actors (national, federal, regional and school board actors). Further, policy makers influence the composition of students by limiting access and giving rights to entitlement to certain grades; they also influence the composition of the teaching body by defining the study routes that lead into the teaching profession, as well as selection procedures and remuneration. They can choose to give more or less financial autonomy to schools, and offer incentives (or punishments) for the (non)fulfilment of certain tasks. Further, policy makers decide on curriculum issues and on the mechanisms of distribution resources to schools or single tasks. Finally, policy is responsible for the character and liability of quality measures and for the legitimisation of the system to the public.

A second source for the varying potential of schools consists in the fact that they can act to different degrees as organisations. Being an organisation in the full sense of the word means having the right to create oneself as a social entity and to determine the end of that entity. Being an organisation implies the establishment of organisational goals and a structure of tasks, which enables co-operation and division of labour. To fulfil their tasks, organisations need certain resources at their disposal. Schools differ with regard to these criteria, and therefore their general scripts of organisational development need to be adapted. As the establishment of goals, distribution of resources, division of labour and co-operation of different subjects are all bound up with a multitude of interests, organisations rely on internal procedures when it comes to making decisions and controlling their implementation.

Finally, the individual members of a school are also actors for change or continuation. Individuals within a school can be divided into various groups. Three groups interact permanently: pupils, teachers and the school management. Further, groups interact but are not as involved in the core processes as the other three: parents, the community and educational authorities/supervisors. Schools differ with respect to the homogeneity of these groups, especially as groups and group members possess certain capacities that enable them to take part in educational processes. They all have limited resources, pursue their own interests, have ideals, and possess certain competences. This means that the educational processes of schooling are essentially built on differences and on the development of given capacities.

The countries in this study differ with respect to the weight given to these three levels in school development planning. However, contemporary thinking about the development of schooling in all systems is dominated by two competing yet also intertwined discourses: on accountability, and on autonomy.

The discourse on accountability tries to strengthen the function of schools by mechanisms of legitimisation and control. School is viewed as a highly reliable organisation that needs frequent monitoring by the educational authorities to guarantee that every member enjoys certain rights and fulfils his or her professional duties. School administrations follow the model of a professional bureaucracy, ensuring an equal distribution of resources, centrally planned initiatives for professional development and uniform procedures of student assessment.

The discourse on autonomy, on the other hand, seeks to strengthen the development of schools by methods of self-organisation. School is viewed as a unit of organisational learning. Development can be supported and asked for from the outside, but only the organisation itself can undertake it. Professionals are seen to be responsible for deciding how to distribute resources, what additional competences they need and how grading should be implemented. Autonomy is looked on as the precondition for meeting the individual needs of students and for adaptive education.

Any attempt to relate these two discourses to each other generates many questions, such as: Does a certain degree of autonomy invite corruption? Do rigorous accountability procedures and bureaucracy act as effective controls, or do they distract from pedagogical work and prohibit the development of self-responsibility? Is it possible to build up effective accountability systems that are so flexible that they do not harm adaptive approaches within single units of the system? Is there any evidence that professionals are sufficiently capable of deciding for themselves which further competences they need? How are the interests of different groups incorporated in an autonomous school? How is it possible to stimulate development within a context of autonomy?

As a general tendency, these questions are today often addressed by focusing accountability measures more on the results of schooling and allowing greater

latitude as far as processes are concerned (for example, Döbert, Klieme and Sroka, 2004): these developments represent a trend within many educational systems. The idea is that schools legitimise their relative autonomy by accounting for the outcome of their work. However, in practice things are more difficult: complications ensue when new accountability procedures clash with old approaches. Further difficulties are created by a lack of professional competences when it comes to interpreting centralised tests and student results, or in terms of working towards achieving the newly established benchmarks. Finally, complications may also result from difficulties in the definition and determination of the outcomes to be measured, because in an output steering system, the scope and measurement procedure define the relevant goals.

The tool focuses on the level of a school as an organisation, and is inspired by the idea that quality within schooling is best developed by means of participatory self-evaluation. Schools as autonomous entities and the different actors within them are seen as being able to ensure an improvement in quality. However, as this is not the dominant approach in all 10 countries, it is necessary to adjust this approach on various grounds.

#### **2.4. Theories of evaluation**

The field of research on evaluation focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of various evaluation approaches. Evaluation must not only describe a phenomenon, but should also contextualise this description with respect to purpose (Scriven, 2003). Prototypical contextualisations of evaluations are within personnel or organisational development, domain-specific research, and financial or legal controlling. Evaluation approaches and methods on how to conduct evaluation vary according to their context (Sanders and Davidson, 2003).

Three guiding purposes for the selection of approaches and evaluation methods may be identified. First, a unit (school, class, teacher, student) may need a certain type of information in order to optimise its work. Second, knowledge that can be used as a general resource for planning interventions may be required. Third, donors or responsible administrations may need certain information to legitimise their investment. Following Chelimsky (1997; Abs and Klieme, 2005), three evaluation paradigms can be derived from these purposes: developmental, research and legitimisation.

Working within the developmental paradigm requires the participation of all stakeholders, who are expected to engage in development. Even the evaluation criteria have to be developed or at least discussed with the persons in question, who are expected to change their behaviour or adopt new shared working practices. Evaluations that follow this paradigm focus on objects that can be influenced by the stakeholders, as otherwise they could lead to frustration.

In sharp contrast, the research paradigm excludes stakeholders from taking decisions on the evaluation. Even participation in an evaluation may be regulated from outside. People are randomly selected to take part in a study as a control or a treatment group, meaning that they cannot decide whether or not they are confronted with the intervention. The results are not necessarily discussed with the participants, but related to scientific theories and other research findings.

In similar fashion the legitimisation paradigm excludes those who are the focus of evaluation from all decisions about the evaluation process, albeit for different reasons. Whereas in the research paradigm exclusion is justified by the need to avoid influencing the phenomenon being studied, in the legitimisation paradigm the people being evaluated are aware of the criteria they are being evaluated on. It is the purpose of this type of evaluation to make them comply with these criteria. Unlike the research paradigm, the whole setting is constructed to elicit social desirability. In this respect there is a link to the developmental paradigm. Both paradigms want to influence the field, but whereas the developmental paradigm wants to make people change themselves, the legitimisation paradigm imposes external necessities. Within the tool these paradigms are introduced under the notions of quality assurance and quality control, and are discussed from the perspective of democratic citizenship.

Answering the demands of practitioners, researchers and professional societies for evaluation have developed standards for the planning and conduct of evaluations (for example, Stufflebeam, 2003). However, these standards are general statements and not specific to the purposes of evaluations, and may thus be used as broader guidelines but not as action plans.

## **2.5. Innovation research**

Research on innovation deals with questions such as what can be changed and how change happens. Of special interest in our context are strategies that enhance change by providing system actors with new materials. The literature on innovation makes it clear that change is generally difficult to achieve and typically constrained by many factors (Marinova and Phillimore, 2003; Rogers, 2003; Sternberg, Pretz and Kaufman, 2003; Spillane, Reiser and Reimer, 2002; Weiss and Bucuvalas, 1980). Constraints are related to what is already there, to the process of adaptation and to the expected use of an innovation.

Thanks to learning psychology we have long known that the single most important factor for what a person is capable of learning is what he or she already knows (Ausubel, 1968). At a system level, it is also true to say that given institutional or organisational patterns are a central precondition for change. We suppose that everything that is already in place formerly had – or even still has – a function in the system.

Not all innovations directly require something that exists to be abolished, but in every case innovations require resources that are used to sustain the existing system. A belief in the adequacy of existing approaches in the field of quality assurance is a central precondition for debates on innovation. Or, put differently: system actors will only be motivated to adopt new patterns or to change their existing patterns if new approaches are sufficiently convincing from their perspective.

Innovations may affect the working procedures of a system or can impact on both procedures and aims. In the first case, system actors contextualise the innovation by a kind of “utility test” (Weiss and Bucuvalas, 1980), checking whether the new ways of working are more effective or more efficient than the old ones. When they are convinced of the usefulness of the innovation, change can take place. From the perspective of organisational development, this kind of innovation is often referred to as “single loop learning” (Argyris and Schön, 1978). In the second case, system actors have to contextualise the innovation beforehand with respect to the objectives of their system. They check whether the proposed shift in ideology is consistent as such and makes sense. Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980) call this checking a “truth test”. If an innovation holds true within the ideological mindset of a system, it still has to pass a utility test, which makes the adoption of an innovation more complicated. Because an organisational change in terms of aims and procedures is required, Argyris and Schön (1978) talk of “double loop learning”. One threat to this process is that change happens only at the level of officially declared objectives and not at the deeper level of working processes within a school. Another threat is that new working procedures are partially introduced, yet the need to rethink the whole system is overlooked. If so, this might affect the sustainability of the innovation.

Moreover, innovation research teaches us that it is not only the willingness and ability of the actors within one organisation that can be held accountable for change, but also their context. In our case, this means not only establishing the preconditions within schools, but also the different support and control systems that work around schools. These actors are central to the reception of an innovation in five ways. First, they have to agree on how to use the tool. Second, they must support change by recognising the new material. Third, they can integrate the tool into their practice. Fourth, they can sustain the implementation process by offering training on how to use the tool. And fifth, educational support and control agencies can make it obligatory for schools to use the tool or tool-related approaches.

### ***3. Methodology of the study***

This section provides a short description of the methodology of the study, offering a rationale for the selection of participating countries and experts, listing the guiding questions for country reports written by the experts, and finally describing the working processes behind the conducting of the study.



### **3.1. Selection of participation countries and country experts**

As mentioned above, the authors of the tool are educational experts with experience in South-Eastern and western European countries. For a project supported by the Council of Europe, precisely how other European countries react to the tool is of particular interest. The final selection of participating countries was made by the financing body of the study, the Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future”. This is reflected in the specific focus of the project: eight of the 10 countries (namely, Belarus, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Russian Federation, Czech Republic and Ukraine) have a common experience in that they suffered from German occupation during the Third Reich, and were obliged to suffer forced labour of their people during that period. Because of the history of the Third Reich, the two additional countries selected were Israel and Germany.

Today, the political preconditions of these 10 countries vary greatly. Eight share the historical experience of at least forty years of communism (except Israel and the western half of modern Germany). Eight are full members of the Council of Europe (namely, all except Belarus and Israel). Six are members of the European Union (with the exception of Belarus, Israel, Russian Federation and Ukraine). Notwithstanding these historical differences, all selected countries are currently undergoing a process of educational reform, and have witnessed changes within the system of quality assurance in recent years. Moreover, all are members of UNESCO, which also promotes the tool within the framework of its human rights activities.

Within the participating countries, experts in the field have been systematically selected, with first a list being drawn up comprising experts from the fields of science, administration and civil foundations for every country. These lists were then internally ranked on the basis of publications, before inviting the best-ranked experts to participate in the project.

### **3.2. Guiding questions for country reports**

To ensure comparable information, all country reports were obliged to follow the same set of questions. The questions aimed at assessing the relevance and usability of the tool in schools in the participating countries, and were developed on the basis of the points of reference stated in Section 2 of this introduction. They aim at exploring the preconditions for adopting the tool within each country in more detail, and are divided into four main blocks.

The first block asks about the existing approaches to school evaluation and related policies within countries. The second block deals with the understanding of the tool from the perspective of the country in question. The third block requires a synthesis assessment of how the tool is viewed from the perspective of the existing evaluation system within a country. The final fourth block requests ideas on how the use of the European material could be promoted. These ideas should serve as

possible starting points for practical work in the respective countries. The following list shows the guiding questions in detail:

**1. School evaluation in your country**

1.1. Does your country perform school evaluations?

- If so: what kind of evaluation is conducted? (Internal versus external; inspections and/or standardised assessment of achievement.) Please describe the typical procedure;
- If not: is there an ongoing debate on the evaluation of schools?

1.2. To what extent are methods of evaluation an issue in teacher training programmes?

1.3. How are the results of evaluation treated in schools?

- How are the results of assessments discussed in schools? What groups within the school participate in the discussion? What does the typical procedure look like?
- To what extent are school administrators and external counsellors involved in the treatment of evaluation results?

**2. The “Tool for Quality Assurance of Education for Democratic Citizenship in Schools”**

2.1. To what extent is the tool comprehensible and coherent? (If possible, refer to the individual chapters of the tool, and specify problems.)

2.2. Does similar material exist in your country already? (If so, please describe it.)

**3. The tool as an instrument of school evaluation in your country**

3.1. Conditions for using the tool in schools

3.1.1. What circumstances might promote the use of the tool?

3.1.2. What difficulties do you anticipate? Where do the obstacles lie?

3.1.3. What parts of the tool appear to be particularly apt for use in schools in your country?

3.1.4. Whom do you regard as the target group of your tool (pupils; teachers; school heads; school board; administration; ministries; other)? Please explain.

3.2. Systemic conditions of use

3.2.1. How does the tool (its design, procedure) match the objectives and ideas of quality assurance and evaluation in your country?

- Does the tool contain aspects that might cause a problem in the context of your country? Which? Why?

3.2.2. Considering the background of teacher training in your country, can you imagine teachers working independently with a translated version of the tool, or with the original English language version?

- What kind and scope of training or counselling would be required?
- What kinds of material might contribute to the use of the tool?

3.2.3. What other measures might facilitate its use?

- Resources?
- Incentives?
- Adaptation of the tool to the national context?
- Deletion of aspects for the national context?

3.2.4. How can the tool be applied to different school types?

- For what school types does the tool seem to be particularly apt?
- What problems occur for the other school types?

**4. Ideas for an implementation process**

4.1. How should a process be designed for the schools so that they experience the use of the tool as relevant and helpful?

- What could be the first steps in implementing the tool?
- Who might be the local contact persons or agency?

4.2. How could the use of the tool be integrated into international school partnerships (exchange of teachers/students)?

4.3. What kinds of alternative scenarios can you imagine for using the tool?

### **3.3. Working processes**

After obtaining the services of experts under contract in each country, drafts of country-specific reports have been written from August 2006 onwards. During a conference in Frankfurt (Germany), the first drafts were discussed in November 2006. At this event authors could compare their own work with the work of experts from other countries. Additionally a blind review process was introduced, which allowed each expert to receive feedback on his or her report. Scientists with experience in the respective country but not resident there were chosen as reviewers. On the basis of the discussions during the conference and these reviews, the country reports were revised by the experts. For most countries, a second review was made by the national EDC co-ordinator, who is responsible for linking the work of the Council of Europe with that of the national administrations. These second reviews centred on correctly describing the legal structure of the educational system within each country. Overall, this ensured an iterative process of finalising the country reports, mainly during 2007.

The final versions of the country reports were analysed as follows. First, the material from country reports was ordered in the way of juxtaposition. For this, the guiding questions and further theoretical considerations were used. After this, a comparison was made, which was first presented in parts at the 13th Congress of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), in September 2007.

Country reports differ in the extent to which they represent the official position of a country's administration. Things may look different when viewed from the outside

(for example, Wulf and Malerius, 2007). Nevertheless, although the working procedures within the project may allow for a certain number of evaluations that are specific to the political situation of countries, it is important to integrate these positions as part of the self-perceived situation in a country and to use this as a starting point in the implementation work.

#### ***4. Overview of the following chapters***

The following chapters contain the country-specific reports as provided by the relevant experts. First, we present reports from Council of Europe member states, and then the reports about the two additional UNESCO member states selected for this study.

Thereafter follows a comparative part that comprises three chapters. One chapter examines the tool and current approaches to evaluation from the perspective of evaluation theory. A second chapter analyses the conditions for implementing the tool according to country reports, while a third chapter puts together ideas with the aim of enhancing implementation.

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