

Some aspects of the development strategy in civic education for the activity of the third sector in Belarus^{*}

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The point or essence, and the main aim of civic education is the training of people to a responsible life and activity under a market-democratic society. The content of civic education covers the following:

- getting a basic knowledge about a society, its politics, legal practices, economic environment, and information directly related with everyday issues;
- mastering democratic values and norms that facilitate the shaping of an independent civic position, i.e. (the priority of human rights and freedoms, tolerance, compromise, and cooperation, etc.);
- skills development for competent and responsible civic participation (for example, ability to think critically, to present and protect own interests respecting other people's interests and rights, to solve together common problems, to make a well-grounded choice and to bear responsibility for it).

Unlike the usual political education the content of civic education can not be axiologically neutral to the process of its perception. This education should purposely produce an effect on a person's values. It should help people shape the qualities needed for democracy; such as aspiration to freedom and consensus, responsibility, civic spirit, patriotism, readiness to compromise, and partnership. Accordingly, civic education is a person-oriented education, aimed at shaping a rationalistic and democratic mentality that forms a positive civic political culture.

The main result of civic education is the development of competent people striving to participate in socio-political life and being ready to be personally responsible for their own well-being and the well-being of the society that they live in.

The mission of civic education in Belarus is to facilitate the shaping of a civic society and a democratic law-based state. A specific character of the core goals of civic education under the conditions of the Belarusian transition society are these. The facilitation of the political socialization of the growing generation, and the equally critical political re-socialization of the adult population ("reconstruction of civism") and support in the shaping of democracy-oriented elite groups of society.

These goals must be achieved within the frames of the national system of civic education, which should cover three interrelated subsystems — education for children, young people and adults including formal, non-formal and informal (self-education) education. Today the most complicated task is to reconstruct civism, to shape a sustainable democratic culture among adults, since in their education civic knowledge, attitude and skills on this topic were not tendered.

All of these actualize a necessity to include a civism component into both systems of secondary and higher education, and adult education. In continuing education, civic competencies are being developed, which include the mastering of new professional and social skills as a way to effect changes in society and the status of a person.

Belarus is still characterized by an undeveloped maturity of socio-cultural pre-conditions for the building of a civic society. A major part of the population is structured as non-associated groups, characterized by a low level of national self-consciousness and social mutual trust, orienting itself on an individual (patron-customer) form of interest articulation and the state patronage. These groups do not show a clear aspiration to have structured collective activities. The idea being that a united people can change life conditions is slowly being disseminated.

The mired attempts of civic society development in Belarus require a re-thinking of the mission, goals and potential results of civic education carried out by the third sector. The efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are needed to be concentrated on broadcasting European democratic values and norms into the widest groups of the population. The educational programmes of NGOs should facilitate strengthening of Belarusian identification, patriotism and the state system, the development of civic self-consciousness and the skills of a collective self-organization. The education of agents of mass civic society, able to produce a competent and constructive influence in all fields of life and activity of Belarusian society, should be treated as a mission and the core result of a civic education [1].

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1. General characteristic of civic education in the third sector of Belarus

The current stage of civic education development in Belarus is characterized not only by the fact that the third sector understands its necessity, but also by the introduction of civic discipline into the system of state education. The Concept of general education reform says that civic education is one of the main objectives of a modern school and names prioritized directions for the shaping of civic competencies of a person:

- legal cultural education and citizens' upbringing in the law-based state;
- Mastering moral culture, the basis of which is formed by values common to all mankind: humanism, mercy and tolerance.
- Mastering of civic culture via engaging teenagers and young people into public life [2].

At the same time it should be admitted that mainly NGOs initiate civic knowledge dissemination and civic competencies development in Belarus. They have accumulated significant experience in the field of non-formal civic education and enlightenment. Analysis of it shows positive and negative tendencies of NGOs' educational activity.

On the one hand:

- A number of educational NGOs is growing, geography and theme covering of their activity are increasing;
- content and forms of education are becoming more diverse;
- informational and methodical aids are being developed;
- professionalism of trainers and teachers is growing.

On the other hand:

- There is no system in the activity of many NGOs, it becomes apparent in aiming at once-only projects, not at long-term educational programmes;
- Circle of customers of the third sector's services in the field of civic education is still limited and, as a rule, elite-narrowed;
- Training and re-training of multipliers' groups are not given enough attention;
- There is almost no monitoring and analysis of long-term, post-project effects.

A common result is the low efficiency of the majority of NGOs declaring civic education as the main activity. We ought to establish the fact that they do not fulfil their mission — facilitation to shaping of subjects of civic society. It produces a negative impact both on development of civic education and on building civic society.

2. Strategic development directions of civic education in the third sector

Increasing of the field of educational NGOs' reality supposes that they understand and accept mission of civic

education in self-determination regime, collective communications and agreement of approaches worked-out [3]. In this respect I think that the following activity directions of educational NGOs are perspective.

2.1. Creation of a constant-acting and multi-stage system of civic education aimed at various target groups of young people and adults

The system of civic education in the third sector is a totality of interacting successive educational programmes of different complexity and directions, educational NGOs and their coordinating structures.

Creation of the system of civic education will let us unite efforts of many organizations, increase efficiency of resources usage, offer programmes of various complexity and of different directions, shape and support own personnel base, facilitate mass training of competent citizens and creation of democratic elite.

Coordination of educational projects and programmes being held by different NGOs must be aimed at enabling each representative of this or that target group to pass all levels of civic education and enlightenment (initial, basic and advanced). NGOs must be aimed at facilitating the creation of the system of civic education both on local and national levels [4].

2.1.1. Development and implementation of multi-level programmes of civic education

Creation of the system of civic education supposes that NGOs aim themselves not so much at once-only and sometimes sporadic projects, but at long-term educational programmes. Such programmes must be systematic, be of different complexity and directions within the frames of common module system of educational programmes, focusing on the final result, respond adequately to requests of target groups, be practice oriented.

2.1.2. Switch to predominantly long-term forms of civic education

The re-orientation of educational NGOs towards relatively long-term forms of education is expedient. In the Belarusian conditions the main educational events can be presented by study circles, folk universities, schools for civic education and higher specialized courses.

Study circle is relatively a long-term form of collective self-education for various population groups, based on exchange of knowledge, experience and skills between circle's participants on commonly-developed schedule (minimal duration is 2-3 months).

Folk university (FU) is a form and programme of civic education and enlightenment for wide groups of population (basic level). The FU's schedule is mainly an extensive course of civic subjects (120 and more academic hours) with a duration from 3 months to 1 year.

Civic education school for is a form and full-time training programme for intensive education in the basics of civic knowledge (80-220 academic hours up to 2-3 weeks) for specific target groups: school and college,

journalists, students, trade unions members, young politicians, women, political parties' activists and NGOs, etc. The school's format allows study of subjects traditionally included into schedules of more advanced levels.

Higher specialized courses (schools, seminars, etc.) are advanced programmes of intensive (or extensive) training or re-training of groups of multipliers in the field of civic education (lecturers, trainers, school and college teachers, journalists, etc.) and managers in education.

The curriculum for multipliers, along with subject knowledge, must include specialized modules dedicated to teaching methods and techniques, and pedagogical methods. Training of managers supposes a development of flexible module curriculums in the field of management and marketing, taking into account the specifics of a civic education.

2.1.3. Strengthening the existing networks of educational organizations, improvement of the coordination between the structures of civic education

Priority/development should be given to common projects of NGOs, educational programmes, which are aimed at systematic and long-term activity with target groups.

This approach supposes development of allied educational programmes. It requires uniting and coordination of efforts of different educational NGOs. Development and implementation of allied (local or national) projects covering the project packages of separate educational NGOs can be one way implementing such cooperation.

The organizations should have an opportunity to produce influence on the decision-making process at all stages of development of the allied project that will allow them to participate more efficiently in joint activity and evaluate the advantages of common development in practical work. Therefore, the common project must be developed in a dialogue module. The concerned NGOs form a working group, within its frames they together develop a project concept, activity plan, allocate functions and responsibilities. Then each organization drafts its own project to be integrated into a common one. As a result a kind of cooperation of organizations interacting with each other on principals of horizontal coalition is created.

The horizontal model of implementation of the allied project supposes a single finance responsibility of each organization-participant before a donor and its double responsibility — before a donor and project council — for implementation of their project functions. The horizontal model of coalition can operate on local and national levels. On the one hand such model allows saving the autonomy of organizations and on the other hand to concentrate and use their resources in the most efficient way and to increase sustainability of the system of civic education.

2.2. Aiming at training and re-training of multipliers' groups

At current stage of development of civic education the organizations of the third sector need to concentrate

attention on intensive training and re-training of multipliers' groups, especially of those categories that have basic college background and functional access to wide audience.

2.2.1. Training and re-training of multipliers, whose professional activity directly connected with civic education

First of all it regards teachers of secondary school and college teachers of socio-humanitarian subjects. They are the most massive and professionally trained multiplication group having access to the wide young audience. Teachers of socio-humanitarian subjects produce sufficient influence on socialization of new generations, who are coming into social life and who will shape a new look of Belarusian society in the future.

There are many examples when teachers having been trained at advanced training courses at schools for civic education became multipliers of civic knowledge in the third sector. They hold their own seminars and conferences, run study circles and implement other kinds of educational events aimed not just at their students, but at the audience beyond school. Such practices allow for the growth of a network of non-formal civic education at the cost of new regions and groups.

2.2.2. The elite-based recruitment of new multiplication groups, which are not professionally related with civic education

We mean such elite groups, whose representatives are often lead public opinion. They are school teachers and lecturers of non-humanitarian subjects, of ecology, social workers, journalists, entrepreneurs, deputies, officials, etc. Their civic education is not just essential element of professional competence but it is an additional factor that significantly increases influence of civic education agents on people's aims and believes.

2.3. Increasing the access channels of NGOs' educational programmes to non-associated groups of Belarusian society

The mass training of multipliers is a necessary but insufficient condition for successful implementation of projects in the field of civic education. NGOs should also have channels to transmit civic knowledge and skills to young people and adults in Belarus.

2.3.1. Implementation of programmes of civic education and enlightenment for wide groups of society (politics, economy, history, law, etc.)

It is wise to re-start or continue implementation of those common educational programmes (projects) that already time proved their sustainability and efficiency, for example, programmes of the Folk University or a cycle of seminars dedicated to legal education. Along with this such programmes aimed at the widest target groups are implemented as a rule via very limited access channels (pro-democratic NGOs, parties, trade union organizations). As a result it often turns to be that the main part of the audience is represented by activists of these structures.

2.3.2. Integration of civic education programmes' into other kinds of educational programmes or practice-oriented projects

Education for civic competence is done not just directly but indirectly – via teaching intellectual, social and professional competencies. Therefore, public associations and other organizations whose profile is connected with humanitarian aid and meeting socio-cultural requests of rather wide non-associated categories of citizens can become the main access channel for programmes of civic education in Belarus. Both educational organizations and institutions not connected with civic education and various non-educational structures engaged in the field of social protection and rehabilitation, sport and tourism, Chernobyls' ecological, cultural, youth organizations, and women and religious associations among others belong to these category.

2.3.3. Engaging of "the equal groups" into programmes of civic education and enlightenment

So-called "the equal groups" can become the important influence channel for educational NGOs on shaping civic aims and orientations, members of such groups are tightly connected with each other and have nearly equal status. They are friends, close house's neighbors, courtyard groups, small working groups, etc. The membership in "the equal group" usually induces people to follow common aims and behavior models. Thus, such groups are powerful factor of socialization.

Engagement of "the equal groups" into a network of non-formal civic education supposes an analysis of their needs and interests, access to non-formal leaders, turning of the latest into specific influence agents of NGOs and working out mechanism to motivate groups to participate in training programmes. As a result a subject pressing for this or that group is shaped and optimal form of education is chosen, most likely it can be a study circle.

2.3.4. Rendering assistance to self-organization of non-associated groups

The priority should be given to those educational projects, whose final result can be presented in the creation and strengthening of new public associations and initiatives consisting of non-associated people. New agents of civil society will need additional information and education services facilitating their sustainable development and competent presentation of their specific interests.

2.3.5. Creation of new educational initiatives based on multiplication groups, acting in socially homogeneous or similar to them environment

Such initiatives can become the most efficient communication channel between educational NGOs and non-associated groups. For example, with a help of theaters' initiatives it is possible to implement various educational programmes for teachers and students' parents, including those, which are aimed at increasing civic consciousness and competence. Own autonomous educational projects based on recommendations given by more experienced local and international NGOs can be developed by efforts of new initiatives.

2.4. Development of training, instructional and technology support for civic education

Carrying out of the above mentioned directions in civic education development supposes creation of an adequate training and instructional base, development and launching of various study causes, techniques, preparation of training and teachers' materials and also mastering of technologies and means of distance learning.

2.4.1. Development of multi-variant training courses with relevant educational techniques on the basis of educational programmes

The most advanced NGOs should focus their efforts on development and approbation of varied training courses at all levels of civic education, taking into account specific needs of different target groups.

First of all, it is needed to develop integrated training courses basing on local and international experience, for example, such as "Civic Education", "Teaching democracy" or "Human rights". Their study helps to understand fundamental democratic values and to shape civic orientations and aims.

Secondly, in the field of civic education it is important to pay attention to the development of specialized advanced training courses and advanced training for multiplication groups representing different social groups and taking into account their specifics.

Thirdly, it is necessary to use widely known techniques (for example, teaching democracy via studying foreign languages) and to develop new ones with an active usage of civic knowledge potential of other training and education information courses aimed at shaping general culture of personality, its adaptation to society life (teamwork, communication skill development, Internet, etc.). Civic education can be integrated into training programmes in the field of ecology, entrepreneurship, farming, sustainable development of local communities, advancing women's and youth social groups, etc. It will let make civic education in context of solving the most important problems for a beneficiary.

Fourthly, the prior attention should be given to practice-orientation of training courses. It is in teachers' reliance on everyday experience and in the fact that the development of civic participation skills, origination of new initiatives, and the solution of any common problem together, etc.

Study courses should be in modules (blocks) structured, be composed of completed parts (study modules) that allow different educational trajectory of their study and usage of the same course in educational programmes of different volume and aims.

2.4.2. Development of new generation of variant workbooks and other kinds of trainer's materials aimed at values of modern democratic society

Training courses and techniques successfully tested in education process are needed to be presented in paper or electronic manuals, basic lectures, workshops, collections of tasks, reading books, glossaries, and testing systems among others.

It supposes contests, creative workshops for authors of manuals, re-training of multipliers, creation of regional testing sites to test new trainer's materials.

Publication of qualified trainer's complexes for multipliers with recommendations on usage of interactive training techniques should be given prior meaning.

2.4.3. Usage of technologies and means of distance learning

While developing training courses and manuals it is needed to direct at a wide usage of network means, multimedia technologies, specialized soft ware. A number of target groups even today can combine internal and distance education using case-studies, TV- and on-line training technologies.

2.5. Development and launching of the unified system for quality standards in education activity of NGOs

A necessity to train competent citizens and multipliers requires a further increase in the professionalism of civic education. Therefore, a problem of quality evaluation of NGOs' educational services became actual at the current stage of its development in the third sector in Belarus.

The quality of education is characterized by the degree of its correspondence to approved requirements, social norms and educational standards. Informal nature of civic education within the frame of the third sector and current level of development of networking structures of educational NGOs impedes the opportunity of working out of compulsory criteria for quality evaluation of their activity.

Along with it a unified system of such criteria could let compare quality of education services independently from their profiles and regional specific. Therefore, the most advanced in civic education NGOs can develop their interior, corporate system of educational standards. On the one hand if it meets requirements it should be a specific "entrance ticket" to corporation, and on the other hand to have recommendative nature for other organizations of civic education.

2.6. Monitoring of long-term study effects

It is very important that educational NGOs have a rule to collect systematically and analyze information about activity of participants of projects implemented, about activity appeared as a result of new agents of civic society. The efficiently set monitoring will let NGOs organize additional training, accompanying consulting for them, to correct well-timed educational programmes and training courses.

2.7. Information-analytical and marketing support to activity of educational NGOs

Development of this direction is a necessary condition for efficiency of the whole system of civic education. Anyway research and information activity marks any advanced NGO. But in perspective it is wisely to establish specialized information-analytical centers by educational coalitions, which would professionally serve the interests of organizations-members. Such centers could solve a task of two-kind: first of all, identification of needs in education, in sup-

ply of trainer's materials, new educational programmes and courses; secondly, collection and systematization of information on available educational services, holding of advertising campaign, placing requests in education.

3. Development of cooperation between educational NGOs and the state educational institutions

Creation of the national system of civic education supposes close cooperation between all society sectors: state, business and non-governmental (non-commercial). The reduction of tense and distrust between NGOs and state educational institutions (SEI) seems to be especially important, to make them opener for inter-sector cooperation and flexibility in decision-making.

Achievement of this goal becomes complicated by the fact that in contradiction to other countries there is no legislation basis regulating a mechanism of cooperation between NGOs and state structures in Belarus. For example, there is no a basic law on social partnership which would fix cooperation between NGOs and the state as a permanent process and clearly denote the main principals of partnership, a mechanism of their implementation, and responsibility of the sides. There is no special act on civic education. In the present legislation civic education is not mentioned neither as special kind of education, nor in the general notion. Nevertheless, the current frames have many opportunities for mutually-beneficial cooperation between educational NGOs and SEI which are not almost used.

3.1. The opportunities for cooperation between NGOs and state educational institutions

Educational NGOs and SEI have different possibilities of mutual interest. These possibilities can be qualified as a favorite pre-requisite for mutually beneficial cooperation between NGOs and state in development and implementation of modern policy in the field of civic education.

3.1.1. Opportunities of SEI as pre-requisites for partnership:

- Steady financing;
- Premises, lecture rooms, equipment, communication;
- Possibilities for vocational training, advanced training and staff re-training;
- Influence on elaboration and adoption of the state decisions including standard legal acts;
- Databases on target groups, statistic data;
- Analytical resource;
- Access to the state mass-media;
- Developed market of educational services.

3.1.2. NGOs' possibilities for development of partnership with the state educational structures

- Human resources – personnel, trainers;
- Premises, equipment;

- Finance, including donors', international grants, donations, etc.;
- Customers, motivation, information on customers;
- Innovative training programmes, courses, techniques, technologies;
- Familiarity with needs of some target groups (for example, disabled people, victims of the Chernobyl disaster, etc.)
- Analytical resources;
- Abilities for competent participation in working-out of standard legal acts;
- Possibilities for free-of-charge education.
- strengthening influence on processes of regional development and in their activity;
- opportunities to represent and lobby customers' interests in the authorities;
- participation in development of common educational projects and getting additional finance for them;
- credibility and reputation including government bodies;
- shaping of positive public opinion;
- access to information;
- increasing of educational service quality;
- advanced training.

3.2. Mutual benefits of partnership between SEI and NGOs

The available possibilities of SEI and NGOs let them get extra opportunities or mutual benefits of partnership.

3.2.1. SEI can get the following benefits out of partnership with NGOs:

- opportunity to hire NGOs for providing educational services;
- extension of education activity;
- delivering exact educational services aimed at true needs of people;
- engagement of new people;
- engagement of extra resources: material resources including finance (off-budget, donors'), organizational, human, etc.;
- strengthening trust to authorities;
- shaping of a positive public opinion;
- advance training;
- new potential for problem solving, innovative training programmes, techniques, technologies;
- analytical consulting;
- monitoring of unbiased information on current situation and additional possibilities to make influence on the situation.

3.2.2. Benefits NGOs will get out of partnership with SEI:

- potential to increase participation in the market of education services;

3.3. Strategic directions for cooperation between NGO and SEI in the field of civic education

The development and implementation of common projects of educational NGOs and SEI on the following directions seem to me the most tangible:

First of all, cooperation in trainers' materials support to civic education, development of joint educational programmes, training courses, manuals, etc., exchange of training techniques and technologies.

Secondly, participation of NGOs' trainers and teachers in extra educational programmes for students of secondary schools, vocational schools and colleges (optional courses, specialized courses at the students' option, study circles, etc.).

Thirdly, participation of SEI in the NGOs educational projects (teachers, material resources, target groups).

Fourthly, support given by educational NGOs to the state system of advanced training and re-training of educational personnel (off-budget finance, intellectual resource, programmes of additional education, innovative training techniques, etc.)

These I think the prior directions according which the third sector should develop civic education in Belarus in the nearest future. Of course, the offered strategy does not have pretensions to all-roundness and completion. The complex strategy development of civic education can be worked out only as a result of the common efforts of scientific and teachers' community. Just some institutional and organizational-training aspects of the issue to be considered are reflected in the present article. The content of civic education is beyond the frames of the article, this subject is for another discussion.

Notes

1. Members of the educational NGOs who participated in the Open Space "How can we develop civic education by efforts of the third sector?" also have come to this conclusion (Minsk, May 23, 2004, the minutes N 1, the group leader — Svetlana Matskevich).
2. Concept of general education school // The collection of standard acts of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, 1998 — N 2.
3. "How can we develop civic education by efforts of the third sector?" (Minsk, May 23, 2004, the minutes N 1, the group leader — Svetlana Matskevich).
4. See more detailed: Victor Chernov System of civic education in the third sector in Belarus // Educator, 2004 N 1. — pp. 7-10; Irina Bugrova, Galina Veremetchik, Victor Chernov Adult education as a factor for society development: experience and perspectives for Belarus // Perspectives of public development of the Republic of Belarus. The conference materials "Belarus and the Ukraine — a bridge between expanding EU and Russia?", May 2-3, 2003 — Dortmund — Minsk: 2003.