

# IRELAND AND NEW MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: AN EVOLVING EXPERIENCE IN DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** UNIDEV is a three year project funded by the European Commission with the aim of promoting development education (DE) around the theme of the post-2015 agenda in higher education institutions in the new member states of the EU. The project is implemented by organisations in Cyprus (the NGO Support Centre), Slovakia (the Pontis Foundation) and Ireland. The Irish partner, Kimmage Development Studies Centre (DSC), has been engaged in the provision of professional training and education on international development issues for forty years. As new member states (NMS), Cyprus and Slovakia are at the early stages of establishing their respective international development policies. Ireland, an old member state (OMS), has a lengthy and respected engagement in international development, together with an evolving experience raising awareness of development issues among the general public. The principal role of the Irish partner is to share the Irish experience in this regard, through practitioners, academics and policymakers in the three countries. Each of the project partners come up against their own particular challenges in achieving this goal.

This article outlines the background to, and purpose of UNIDEV, and specifically describes three major events organised in 2014 which help illustrate the project's role. As part of the aim of promoting DE, a successful Summer School was organised around the theme of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and the post-2015 agenda. This was attended by 60 participants from Cyprus, Slovakia and Ireland, and addressed by leading figures in the DE sector in Ireland. Later in the year Kimmage DSC hosted a workshop for seven senior visiting academics and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff from Cyprus and Slovakia at which a number of Irish based specialists gave their input on DE including: terms and concepts;

methodologies; the DE experience in Ireland in both formal and informal education; and workshop actions to mainstream DE in the respective new member states. The conclusion includes reflections on the project to date and recommendations.

**Key words:** Development education; European Union; new member states; post-2015 agenda; sharing practice.

The promotion of DE, or ‘global citizenship education’ as the concept is more widely understood internationally, is increasingly being pursued by the UN and the EU. As part of this, the European Commission is funding a three year project, ‘UNIDEV – Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice’, to give it its full title, which commenced at the beginning of 2013. NGOs from three EU countries are involved – the new member states of Slovakia and Cyprus, and Ireland, an old member state. The aim of the project is to raise awareness in the EU of development issues in the global community and the responsibility of citizens to engage in sustainable living. This involves: enabling citizens to gain a greater understanding of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their progress since 2000; supporting debate on the post-2015 development agenda; and promoting the concept of Policy Coherence for Development. UNIDEV is designed to raise public awareness and understanding of development issues in order to stimulate greater debate and action on the MDG agenda and the post-2015 framework, and fairer relations between the global North and South. One means of achieving this is by building the capacity of academics in NMS to integrate DE in theory and practice at third level institutions through collaboration with, and the support of, academics in OMS.

### **Summary of DE challenges in Ireland, Slovakia and Cyprus**

Although Ireland does not have a dedicated DE policy for the academic sector, Irish Aid - the government’s programme for overseas development – launched a strategy plan for 2007-2011 entitled ‘Promoting Public Engagement for Development’, which has recently been extended to 2015. This strategy builds on over thirty years’ experience of supporting

development education in Ireland and is centred on the issue of poverty reduction. Its aim is to:

“ensure that DE reaches a wide audience in Ireland by increasing the provision of high-quality programmes to teachers and others involved in development education and by working with the education sector, NGOs and civil society partners” (2011: 8).

Government support for DE in most NMS is quite different. Cyprus does not have a DE strategy, although there has been a sustained effort by NGOs working in the sector to engage in dialogue with the Ministry of Education to develop a draft proposal. A recent Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) study (2010) concludes that DE is still in its infancy in Slovakia. According to the DEAR report, the most challenging issues facing the teaching of DE in the two UNIDEV NMS countries are: a lack of expertise and knowledge among academics of the concepts of DE; a lack of experience by academics of grassroots and policy issues that affects local communities in developing countries; and a lack of opportunities for students to engage in theoretical and practical learning about DE related disciplines.

As a result of these norms, there exists a widespread apathy in the academic field about international development issues such as global poverty, the MDGs and the post-2015 agenda, migration, fair trade, human rights issues, the effects of globalisation and the importance of Policy Coherence for Development. It is often the case that NGOs in NMS lead the DE debate despite their (often) limited experience of working on issues of DE and development cooperation. Whilst this has some advantages, many NGO actors lack the academic discipline to structure teaching to academic standards. It is also common for universities to rely on international experts to deliver elements of teaching to students. This consequently reduces the incentive and capacity for local academics to build capacity and up-skill. As many of these issues need informed practitioners to fully explain the often conceptual nature of the subjects, it is the overall aim of the UNIDEV project to fundamentally change the nature of the way that teaching and learning

about DE takes place in the two NMS by developing a DE curriculum and learning materials. It is anticipated that partners from the NMS will benefit from the experience of working with academics in the DE field in Ireland who have received much more sustained support from government agencies.

### **The UNIDEV experience**

The project uses a variety of approaches to stimulate greater levels of teaching, learning and knowledge to academic staff and students. Regular three-way Skype discussions between the partners are the practical method of communication, and summer schools, workshops, seminars, open lectures, an eBook, a website with a library of resource material are all example of project activities. The budget also allows for a field trip to a sub-Saharan African country for selected NMS participants to help associate DE issues and concepts with the reality on the ground. So how is the UNIDEV project progressing, what learning has taken place, and how? In the next section, I look at some of the principal activities in 2014, the second, and most active, year of the project which included a public lecture and workshop by renowned activist Gustavo Esteva. It also included a summer school and a 'Shadowing Placements' week. These activities addressed the following aims of UNIDEV: enhancing the expertise and knowledge of the concepts of DE and the post-2015 agenda; building experience of grassroots and policy issues that affect local communities in developing countries; and creating opportunities for engagement on theoretical and practical learning about DE related disciplines.

#### ***Promoting reflection and debate on twenty-first century development***

In June 2014, grassroots activist Gustavo Esteva visited Dublin at UNIDEV's invitation. In collaboration with the *Community Development Journal*, Kimmage DSC (the Irish UNIDEV associate) hosted a well-attended public lecture and workshop. Recognised as a leading thinker in the 'post-development' movement, Gustavo has been a central figure in a wide range of Mexican, Latin American, and international NGOs and solidarity networks, including the community-based organisation Universidad de la Tierra en Oaxaca (University of the Land), which he founded and

coordinates. In 1996, he was an advisor to the Zapatistas in their negotiations with the Mexican government and he is a strong advocate of Zapatismo. The Zapatista project is constructed on three foundations: education; health care; and collective development using a cooperative model of economic development based on respect for traditions and customs (*usos y costumbres*) and the decentralisation of power to the community level. The Zapatista movement offers inspiration for millions of people around the world who are building their own local alternatives to neoliberalism (Mexico Solidarity Network, n.d.)

This event was principally for the benefit of development students, academics and NGO practitioners in Ireland. Attended by over 130 participants, the public talk and ‘Thinkery’ the following day generated much debate and new ideas. Gustavo’s appeal is to revive the old practice of ‘the Commons’ or ‘commoning’ as a grassroots alternative for communities to take control of their lives and resources. Frank Naughton of Kimmage DSC, one of the contributors, included the following reflection on his experience of the day:

“It is wonderful to have a chance to reflect on a big idea now and then. It makes a change from the dreary tedium of talk about compliance and codes of practice and governance. A concern of mine in recent years has been the way the ‘Third Sector’ in Ireland has come to mirror in its practice and thinking the State on the one hand and the ‘Market’ on the other hand. And worse than that the way it has lost its ability to think and imagine life any other way. The Commons strikes me as a magnet which might help that sector re-imagine and re-act in new ways” (private correspondence).

***Engagement and understanding of global citizenship and post 2015: UNIDEV summer school***

In July 2014, UNIDEV, through Kimmage DSC, organised an international summer school with the expressed intention of creating a space for critical debate around the opportunities and challenges associated with GCE and the

post-2015 agenda, as well as cross-border and cross-sector debate and networking about global justice and poverty. Sixty participants from Cyprus, Slovakia and Ireland – academics, post-graduate students and senior NGO staff – attended. The theme was ‘Global Citizenship Education in a Post-2015 Context’. The format for the four day event was a morning presentation by an invited specialist speaker before attendees separated into facilitated workshops to debate themes from the talk and issues raised. The afternoon session followed the same format. The first day opened with an introduction to the concept of global citizenship from Niamh Gaynor of Dublin City University (DCU). Unpacking the varied definitions of global citizenship, Niamh then drew a number of connections between our choices and actions in Ireland, which have consequences for other regions of the world. Caoimhe Butterly, an experienced activist on global human rights issues, then presented her reflections of collective action in pursuit of social justice in regions across the world. Caoimhe focused on the transnational aspects of action, through coalitions, advocacy and networking.

From this interesting introduction to the concept of global citizenship (GC), the presentations led to an opening round of stimulating discussions between participants as to the meanings, implications, challenges, and opportunities of GC. The discussions were enriched by the range of perspectives coming from Slovakia, Cyprus and Ireland, and for a number of participants, perspectives developed from their personal and professional experiences in many other countries. Recognised as a leading authority on DE research in Ireland, Audrey Bryan of St Patricks College, Dublin delivered a paper which drew upon her research in the area of GCE, to provide a critical analysis of theoretical models which have framed a great deal of GCE practice in Irish schools. Nataša Ondrušková provided an introduction to the values base upon which she argued GCE is based, with particular reference to her work in third level education in Slovakia. As well as increasing understanding of GCE in a Slovakian context, the presentation again raised questions around the challenges of connecting the theory of GCE to the practice.

The third day of the summer school was constructed around the post-2015 agenda and the subsequent position and role of GCE. Frank Geary, Director of the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) provided an insight into the successes and failures of GCE and the MDGs. Reflecting on the criticisms levelled and the lessons learned from previous approaches, Frank provided a thought-provoking discussion around potential engagement with political processes. The afternoon presentation saw Hans Zomer, Director of Dóchas, the Irish association of NGOs, discuss the post-2015 agenda and citizen engagement. Against the backdrop of the vast political machinations driving the post-2015 agenda, Hans provided examples of how Irish citizens have been engaged in global issues. Both of these presentations raised a multitude of difficult questions for participants from each country, primarily around the challenge of engaging with political processes, and importantly around the need for action as well as theoretical thought. The presentations also prompted a return to discussion around the wider aims of GCE and in particular in regard to the asymmetric relationships between the global North and the global South.

Annette Honan, independent DE consultant, opened the final day's proceedings with a consideration of the successes and persistent challenges for NGOs in relation to DE. Louiza Hadjivasiliou, the UNIDEV project coordinator, then focused on Cyprus in a presentation which considered the involvement of NGOs in the promotion of GCE. Once again, the presentations allowed participants to form connections between their own contexts and the work in other regions. Doctorate researcher Ben Mallon of the Development Studies Association of Ireland (DSAI) summarised the summer school thus:

“the four days served multiple ends. The presentations provided a critical introduction to the position of GCE in Slovakia and Cyprus, and a deep analysis of some of the theoretical and practical challenges facing GCE in an Irish context, with particular reference to the post-2015 agenda. Each presenter prompted in-depth workshop discussions around the *challenge of linking theory and*

*practice*. Participants were able to draw connections between their own practice and with the work taking place in other countries, as well as extend their own networks. Most importantly, the event continued the discussion around collective action for positive transformation in relation to issues of global justice and poverty” (2014).

### ***Building DE capacity through the Shadowing Placement process***

As a response to participant evaluations after an initial Shadowing Placements week in 2013, a second one was hosted in Kimmage DSC in September 2014 with an improved programme to increase participant experience. A more targeted activity than the summer school, the idea was to invite a small number of senior academics and NGO staff from Cyprus and Slovakia to ‘shadow’ or engage with Irish DE practitioners in a more intimate setting. The enthusiastic participants – three professors in university departments of economics, human rights law and business in Cyprus joined with senior staff from two Slovakian NGOs – engaged eagerly with the Irish DE specialists during the four day workshop. The placements prepared academics for introducing DE into their particular departments in the case of the universities, and supported the Slovakian NGO staff integrate DE into their education system.

Eilish Dillon from KDSC, who has been involved in DE and activism on international development issues in Ireland for over twenty years, facilitated the four day workshop, spending the first morning clarifying the concepts associated with DE.

“Development education aims to deepen understanding of global poverty and encourage people towards action for a more just and equal world. As such, it can build support for efforts by government and civil society to promote a development agenda and it can prompt action at a community and individual level” (Irish Aid 2007: 6).

During the session it became evident that the meaning of DE does not translate well into Slovak or Greek – ‘Global Citizenship Education’ appeared to describe the concept more accurately for the visitors. As the participants were largely unexposed to the whole field, time was spent exploring the differences between DE and development studies.

The second half of the day was led by the experienced facilitator Alan Hayes, a DE trainer with the National Youth Council of Ireland for seven years and now a consultant helping to build the capacity of the youth and community sector to integrate global awareness and action for social justice into the core of their work programmes. Alan believes strongly in the effectiveness of experiential learning and introduced the group to different participative learning tools, including some novel and unconventional approaches to the delivery of DE. As might be expected, the methodologies he used actively involved all of the participants. In the final evaluations, this, along with the morning discussion on DE concepts, were considered particularly valuable sessions.

Presentations followed on the history – and a critique – of DE in Ireland by Meliosa Bracken, prominent researcher and consultant in the sector, and the current state of DE in Ireland by Frank Geary from IDEA. An afternoon session was given over to the challenges and successes of DE in higher education institutions in Ireland by speakers working in the sector - representatives from the Development and Intercultural Education (DICE) project presenting on progress in primary teacher education; Dr. Gerry Jeffers, a long time champion of the cross-curricular integration of DE in the National University of Ireland Maynooth; and the third level organisation, SUAS, on instigating non-formal avenues to DE for higher education students.

Two speakers from the global South gave presentations on issues and debates on the post-2015 agenda in relation to the needs of their respective countries, a valuable point of reference. The group also took a field trip to Dundalk to learn how Development Perspectives, an NGO from

the area that specialises in DE, is liaising with the Dundalk Institute for Technology (DkIT). This proved to be very informative and worthwhile for the visitors in illustrating how the two organisations work together in engaging students in development issues. One of the key learning points from the project was that the introduction of DE into higher education institutions is largely dependent on the enthusiasm from the senior management – in this case the president of DkIT.

Finally and most importantly, a full day was spent on participants' identifying and presenting priorities for the development and mainstreaming of DE at higher level education in their respective countries. With the benefit of feedback and recommendations from some of the week's speakers the exercise was seen as hugely beneficial.

## **Conclusion**

The mainstreaming of DE, or global citizenship education, in Ireland has not been without its challenges, and there are still major barriers to achieving the priority it warrants. There is however a strong NGO tradition in Ireland, a platform from which DE has evolved. Many NMS, in particular Slovakia and Cyprus, are still at the early stages of their DE policy and practice. With over thirty years' experience of attempting to raise the profile of DE in formal and informal education, the Irish sector has valuable learning to share with its partners in the NMS although clearly does not have all the answers. The UNIDEV project is one attempt to fast-track the evolution of DE in NMS, as well as an opportunity for Irish practitioners to learn from their colleagues in Europe. The summer school, attended by a broad range of participants engaged with development – post-graduate students, NGO staff, academics – was widely recognised as a successful learning experience. Evaluations at the end of the four days were uniformly positive. Expert speakers and a stimulating environment encouraged thought provoking discussion after each presentation. The two co-facilitators skilfully ensured that different experiences were articulated, opinions were expressed and argued, new ideas conceived through debate, and assumptions questioned.

The Shadowing Placements week was more intense. The highly motivated individuals attending were there to learn from the Irish experience before embarking on the introduction of DE programmes in their own institutions. It was a good balance of theory and practice and once again the evaluations demonstrated transformative learning for the participants. UNIDEV is continually in touch with the Shadowing Placement participants to support them in the challenges they have in introducing DE into their very busy work schedules. Many participants from the summer school are also still in communication with UNIDEV staff and continue to use the website as a resource. It is perhaps a little premature to look for long-term outcomes of the UNIDEV project at this stage with a year of the project still to come, but follow-up research on the project's implementation will be undertaken upon completion.

What can the old and new member states offer each other? The focus on maintaining and increasing research in DE is critical to the success of academic teaching in NMS as well as old member states, and UNIDEV aims to stimulate interest in research over the long term. What became clear is that each country has its unique challenges and environment to work with. Perhaps the more obvious learning direction is from the OMS to the NMS but it must also be emphasised that for the Irish participants in the Summer School, as well as for Irish-based speakers involved in the Shadowing Placements, there has been an opportunity to understand in greater depth the challenges of teaching and learning DE in a NMS. Certainly, one key project outcome will involve Kimmage DSC developing new methodologies for working with academics and students from NMS.

There has been much of benefit for participants. And what learning is there at this stage for the UNIDEV project itself, to support its aim of promoting DE in the EU around the theme of the post-2015 development agenda in higher education institutions? Greater prioritisation and focus on DE is required by the participating NMS governments at both policy and funding levels, as has been the practice in Ireland. Organisations and institutions need to be targeted. This means more work with the NGOs and

in particular the universities to get further traction, particularly at departmental levels. Overall a coordinated, supported pan-European effort is essential to increase awareness of the importance of global citizenship to confront the complex global issues we all face.

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