Chapter 1
Make a Change by Exchanging Views

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ABSTRACT

Initially, this case presents a theoretical description highlighting how spaces are constructed. Perspectives onto reality are the elemental units of our world. They are changed through learning processes. Societal learning can enlarge and approximate spaces of understanding. Social spaces are a type of "social capital". Design of learning procedures refers to the design of structures in time, space and in the space of opinions that facilitates multi-perspectivist and multidisciplinary understanding of involved stakeholders. The following section of this case dwells on several cases of cooperative learning through dialogue: the project Schools on Ice, the UniGIS online curriculum, the UniNet network in Kyrgyzstan and Nepal, Global Studies, the ESD forum, the Environmental Systems Analysis Curriculum USW, and the European Union Twinning tool applied in Slovakia, Slovenia, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

BACKGROUND

The *organisations* involved in the following cases include secondary schools, universities, university clusters, transnational university partnerships, international environmental NGOs, and the European Union's external policy. These organisations range from public to private and from idealistic to pragmatic. All of them plan to "change the world" and for that target they undertake to *exchange views and perspectives* among the stakeholders concerned. This paper approaches to find answers to the specific set of questions through cases of international collaborative educational projects.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1.   What is the inner meaning of learning?
2.   Which role plays learning in global civilisatoric evolution?

3. How to overcome individualistic and sectoral views that hinder intercultural understanding?
4. Is it helpful to use recent concepts such as network society, social capital or structural capital?
5. Was "dialogic learning" and "exchanging views on reality" applied in more than a dozen cases of individual and societal learning and to what extent was this successful?

SETTING THE STAGE

Learning is Dialogue

As a starting point, we look at the core element of any social progress, namely at "dialogue". Dialogue leads to reflection and reflection, in turn, leads to awareness.

The final target of evolution (encompassing amongst others the evolution of mankind) is to *build consciousness* (Ahamer & Strobl, 2009). Consciousness governs procedures in the material world.

Dialogue is a suitable means to approximate divergent views – which is one of the main issues of learning – and to ultimately facilitate changes in consciousness.

Regarding learning, we may distinguish between *individual* learning and *societal* learning. Regarding the multiplicity of learning objects and learners, we distinguish the following types of learning:

- Individual learning
  ◦ traditional learning (1:1)
  ◦ interdisciplinary learning (1:n)
  ◦ intercultural learning (n:m)
- Societal learning, e.g.
  ◦ responding to climate change
  ◦ political integration (globally, Europe-wide).

We are traditionally used to approach learning objects from one perspective (1:1) and consider it a progress to view objects from several, interdisciplinary perspectives (1:n). A still more advanced learning procedure would take into account the *multitude of learning subjects* (m) in addition to the *multiplicity of learning objects* (n), we will refer to it as *intercultural learning* (m:n) in this text because subjects are considered to be rooted and coached in their respective cultures inducing the subject to see and view reality as they decide to.

Useful training situations are spatial planning exercises and other space-related procedures that are open to GIS applications (Jekel, 2007, 2008ab, Strobl, 2007, 2008), or political, technological, civil engineering, cultural or peace negotiations in the classroom (Ahamer, 2004).

Learning Means Converging Divergent World Views

For very complex, interdisciplinary and intercultural learning issues a purely cognitive approach (an individual learner cognises a well-defined object of learning) appears too simple and the approach of "converging individual perspectives" (Ahamer et al., 2009) seems more appropriate.

Here, the object of learning is not regarded as something unchangeable (such as facts in natural sciences), but rather as the result of a constructivist procedure.

In such a procedure, individual perceptions (e.g. of international conflicts such as the complex Nagorny Karabakh conflict between two Caucasian states) are reshaped and reframed, which constitutes the core of "learning" on a societal level.

An early historic example for such *dialogic reframing* might be Galileo Galilei's (1632) strategy of making a discourse out of life's irreconcilable problems: "Dialogue of the two most important systems of the world" that were at odds at his time. As another example, the "greatest American phi-

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