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EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP :
FROM POLICY TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE THROUGH QUALITY ASSURANCE
(EDC-QA PROJECT)

*Stocktaking on quality assurance
in education and EDC*

Country report : Albania

By

Milika Dhano

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1. General data

Albania: 28.748 km²

Population: 3.387.327 inhabitants

Age structure of the population:

0-4 : 9,7% of the population

5-14: 22.6% of the population

under 24: 48.86% of the population

Expenses in Education (2000) 2.7%

(1995) 3.7%

(1990) 4%,

During the '90s, total government expenditure on education was reduced by 35% in real terms, registrations were reduced by 15%, per-capita student expenditure was reduced by 20% (report of OECD on Education Development in Albania).

Levels of education administration:

Central level: Parliament, Parliamentary Commission for Education and Culture, Council of Ministers, Ministry of Education and Science, Pedagogical Research Institute.

Local level: (there are 37 municipalities and 320 communes in Albania) Local education directories, Municipality/ Commune Council, District Council and respective departments of Education and Health.

School level: director, vice director/s, teachers council, parents council, school board.

The legislative basis:

Constitution of the Republic of Albania

Law on pre-university level (1995, amended in 1998)

Normative acts for the public schooling system

Normative dispositions for pre-university education (July 2002)

Law on private education (1995)

Law on Higher Education in Albania (1994)

Legal acts issued thereafter.

2. Methodology of research

This stocktaking report on “Education for Democratic Citizenship: from Policy to Effective Practice through Quality Assurance” has been prepared under the framework of a Stability Pact and UNESCO project. This report forms part of the initiative to create a regional overview of the efforts made in South East Europe to move from policies into action in ensuring quality and empowering democracy in schools. Albania is one of the countries contributing to the overview. It has wide experience of projects designed to enhance democracy and citizenship in education in pursuit of higher quality schools.

The issues covered are:

- Current interest in Quality in Education in Albania
- Current interest in Quality assurance systems in Albania
- Empowerment and devolved responsibility
- Self improving schools
- Training and consultancy support for schools
- School development planning
- National/ international benchmarks and assessment processes
- National Inspectorate
- Curriculum and definitions of “Quality”
- Accountability
- The way forward
- Conclusions and next steps

The “Quality assurance” concept in the research report is used in the terms agreed upon at the project core group meeting in Ljubljana, Slovenia in February 20-22, 2003. This concept is largely based upon the concept paper presented to the working group by Cameron Harrison.

Quality assurance is considered a powerful tool, effective in producing change. Quality assurance implies giving responsibility for the quality of the product to the producer – in this case mainly teachers. The place where quality can be naturally assured is the school. The improvement process can be driven by the school itself; it cannot be imposed from outside. The school has to want to change. A quality assurance system includes:

1. A curriculum framework, as the conceptual system of reference. It includes the agreed definitions of educational goals and of standards.
2. A reference framework to assess school quality. The frame of reference should describe a process which continually asks the question: “How good is my school?” and should include relevant evaluation instruments.
3. Support for introducing and implementing a quality assurance system, both procedural and practical.

4. Validation of the school development process: provision of feedback on what the school is doing through inspection, peer evaluation, performance evaluation, etc.
5. A dynamic to motivate for change and ensure accountability for the development process mainly by publishing performance results or inspection reports.

(Excerpt from the project core group meeting report)

The generic characteristics of a quality assurance system in education in Albania were explored through a whole range of investigative methods.

to gain a current view of what the Ministry of Education and Science is doing in terms of assuring quality in the system, Prof. Dr. Ilija Paluka, a Ministry contact assigned by the Ministry leadership, was interviewed after many other steps were taken to explore reality from different perspectives.

In order to have a thorough picture of what is actually happening in the system to assure quality, and to ask whether the engagement, commitments and steps taken toward education for democratic citizenship help in assuring quality, the following activities were carefully carried through:

- Documents, publications of education agents, and articles related to education improvement were studied, the most noteworthy of these being the CCNM/DEELSA (2001) report of OECD on the development of education in Albania. This is the final product of a Soros project on measurement and evaluation of the education system and policies in education,
- The latest publications of the last three years of the Pedagogical Research Institute were consulted.
- The spectrum of publications in support of education were noted.
- National events related to education, organized by the governmental and by nongovernmental organizations and institutions were attended.
- Target groups of teachers, trainers, university professors, youth workers and NGO staff were interviewed.
- Experts from the Pedagogical Research, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Local Government were interviewed.
- Project directors and managers, teachers and trainers working for the following education sites were interviewed:
 - “Democratic Citizenship Education in Albania” project, (University of Washington, with the financing of State Department, USA),
 - “Human Rights Education and Intercultural Education in Albania” (UNESCO), “Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking” project (International Reading Association with the support of Open Society Institute, Soros Foundation),
 - Project leaders responsible for implementing the “Step by Step” project (Open Society Institute, Soros Foundation) were interviewed in small groups,
 - Center for democratic education, a Soros spin-off national program
 - NGOs whose work was related to EDC directly or indirectly ,

- Case workers.
- School workers and volunteers.
- Authors and consultants of “Normative dispositions for pre-university education” document.
- Teachers, mainly of social studies.
- Publications and pronouncements of important publicists and analysts.
- The report of the National Center of Education Evaluation and Testing.
- Local universities of Gjirokastra, Shkodra, Korca and Elbasan, where teachers are trained.
- University staff from University of Tirana, University of Elbasan, University of Shkodra, University of Korca, University of Gjirokastra; both leadership and staff involved in initial teacher training programs.
- School inspectors, directors, local education directories.
- The staff of the “Centers for Democratic Citizenship Education” in four universities of Albania.

The input presented by Cameron Harrison in the project core group, (previously presented as a consensual conceptual research framework), as well as the research instrument (previously briefly presented as covering research areas), are strictly adhered to in this stocktaking report. I also highly value the inspiration I have had from the reflective writings of Prof. Dr. Artan Fuga, one of the most outstanding analysts of the present developmental processes in Albania. In addition, I wish to acknowledge the serious and reflective contribution made by Prof. Paluka as the spokesperson for the Ministry of Education and Science for this study.

3. Background of the quality assurance effort in the country

The experience of Albania during its recent transformation phase is important. It also has a wider significance. Albania’s experience clearly testifies that the destruction of a totalitarian regime does not *automatically* lead to an open civil society. Demolishing totalitarianism does not necessarily mean that the way to democracy is open, and modern open concepts of citizenship may remain weak in the face of continuing – and sometimes even strengthened – political partisanship.

The hope at the beginning of the nineties was that the transition period was going to be short, that democracy was waiting at the back gate. This has proved an over-optimistic view. Presently, Albania is going through a long transitional period. Democracy in the country remains fragile, a conclusion that can be easily read, directly or between the lines, in almost every report on the development of democratic processes in the country. Some people are tired of this, including some donors. Many hasten to criticize; Albanians resort to feeling shameful and incapable. These years have taught us a historical lesson: transformation takes a long time and is complex. It is social, economics and value based. It needs monitoring, and thoughtfully constructed steps. This transition period is as threatening to democracy as the totalitarianism itself was, if it is not well monitored and reflected upon. The development of appropriate

solutions – including the quality systems needed to achieve these - can be critically arrested by background factors.

It may have been easier in countries that were better off economically. The path to democracy in these countries may have been easier. Quality systems are more prone to work out in better off societies. The empowering of democracy might have been more predictable. But in a country like mine, it was so easy to topple the old regime, so easy to divorce from the immediate reality in the hope of a better future. It proved, however, much harder to be consistent with the new love, to be consistent in preserving and promoting democracy in a situation where the GDP is as low as 1.650 USD/capita (1999). Engaging and motivating quality producers where reinforcing incentives are extremely poor is difficult; concentrating their creative potential into quality systems seems to be the hardest thing for every education manager.

Democracy is so hard to establish and preserve in a country like Albania because the current shape of society, economy and culture is, at least in significant part, the product of an utterly failed and destroyed economic system. The economic basis in Albania has never been developed enough to generate the values necessary for nurturing long-term quality assurance initiatives. The political discourse never seems to reach the level of generating a democratic political culture.

The fact that the country emerged from a fierce political class struggle, with very tense social relations probably hiding a suppressed ethnic agenda, leads us to suppose that there has been no political development, or at least none developed enough to be the basis of citizenship and conscious citizens' action and participation. It seems that the rank and file lack a complex and realistic perspective of what benefits they might receive from genuine engagement in political life. This has created passivity, vulnerability and sometimes a blind dogmatism on political affiliation. Most of those who are engaged in political life seem to do it mainly in the hope of an immediate future benefit - most of the time, materialistic. Politicians and politics are mostly considered as a milk cow and not as a means to the transformation of citizens' consciousness and contribution to socioeconomic life.

The fact that Albania has never had a significant prosperous middle class has historically contributed to the fact that a high society has never been there to feed high expectations back into society, especially in term of education and schooling of the younger generation. The inspiration of the rich has never shone in Albania. Using Cameron's metaphor, "the pride of a rich uncle" has never been there. Alongside that, the country has lacked the chance to have an elite and elite-producing education system. I may not be correct, but some countries have been lucky enough to have a rich and inspiring stratum of society, believing in the worth of human respect and dignity and encouraging political rights for all.

The fact that Albania has never had a strong economic development has led to the lack of a middle class. The lack of such a social stratum has brought about the uncertain commitment of people to democratic processes and democratic parties. Historically, the middle class has fed democratic parties and the value system related to democracy. Such prosperous families tend to seek better education and as a result they are often more inclined to be politically open minded and not blindly follow parties and doctrines. The fact that Albanian education has never served the needs of a well educated middle class has implications for current attempts to develop processes of democratic citizenship education.

The fact that we have lacked steady economic development has created serious financial problems for the governments of the transition period. The very high relative cost of education, because of the poverty of consumers and communities, has made the issue of the maintenance and functioning of the education system very difficult.

Ironically, and sadly, the impact of development projects designed and funded by external benefactor countries and agencies in the early nineties not infrequently had significantly negative outcomes. Schools started to believe that other rich countries should donate for development sake, thus minimizing the good of whatever inner resources were present in the school. Consequently, inner resources are neglected, if not forgotten, thus compromising the possibility of entrepreneurship, self-reliance and self-belief. According to the OSCE report on the development of education in Albania (See report, page 14) “... *the present organisational structure of education is powerless in a country with 2,200 schools and 700,000 students.*”

The real resources for education have dropped from 4% of the GDP at the beginning of the transition period to 3% in 1998... lack of resources have weakened the system year by year, despite the reduction of the number of the school children involved in the system...”.

These are some of the reasons why it is so difficult to monitor a quality system in education and sustain a positive internal dynamic for improvement in the country’s schools.

4. Current interest in quality in education in albania

A common and readily-used term amongst almost all actors within education in Albania is the term “quality”. The over-use of the term “quality in education” in daily rhetoric is not sufficient reason to believe that it has a shared meaning among users. In the discussions we organized, more often than not the shallowness of the understanding of this concept was very evident. This might be a result of the fact that the education research brain is still somewhat lethargic, or that people may talk of their earnest desire, or that most of the ideas of democracy and the mission of education in a democratic society have either been imported into Albania, experimented on, or induced by the donors’ persistent philosophy. The shallowness of the concept makes the rhetoric of top leaders of educational change and reform sound blunt, overburdened, not straightforward. This conceptual shallowness does not allow them to consider particular aspects of routine school practices, of school management and development. People at the grassroots feel more vulnerable, passive to the point of expecting school quality to be donated to them, not of assuring it themselves as main actors. As the OECD report indicates, “...*education is not considered to be a decisive contributor in the economic development of the country, it is mostly considered as a cost and not as investment. The governmental and state structures remain mostly politicized and the civil society agents do not enjoy sufficient support...*” (OECD report on the development of education in Albania, page 15)

Pressure for success, and reflection have led the Ministry of Education and Science to admit “...the present change platform can be identified in line with the main strategic objectives of educational development of the country:

- *Education of society in democratic citizenship values,*
- *Education of society with skills for a market economy.”*

In the highest levels of education leadership, efforts are being made to have at least a well-articulated rhetoric. In spite of the lack of a well accepted national transformation platform of education development, the Ministry is working on the basis of the three year program presented by the present Ministry leadership in August 2002. The already accepted fundamental strategic objectives in education form the fundamental framework of this working document. As is clearly seen from this very recent engagement (the above statement is taken from the report of the Minister of Education in the Ministry Assembly for the analysis of the work of ministry during the first 6 months of 2003), the Ministry of Education politically admits to having a special interest in democratic citizenship education and promises to arrange resources and actions in accordance with democratic citizenship education issues. This is a significant and substantial commitment, demonstrating the conceptual development of leadership staff in considering citizenship values to be the means of ensuring progress in the system. The last changes include improved action in favor of the new central and local managerial schema so that education administration allows for a new dimension of educational reform which, according to the same document consists of:

- Reform of pre-university education,
- Reform of tertiary education,
- Reform of scientific research,
- Reform of financial schema.

As the report clearly shows, the top leadership in the education system is involved in structural transformation, but the process has come at so complex a time, that it is not yet clear whether it is being monitored as a quality assurance process. The fact that people down there in the districts, the local education leadership staff, the school headmasters and teachers, parents and students, are facing changes within a situation of extreme difficulties and chaos indicates that the restructuring process cannot be judged to be in line with quality assurance principles – despite official rhetoric asserting that it is. This leads us to one of two conclusions: a) educational change in the search for quality assurance should be a national, all inclusive action and action should be simultaneously taken top down and bottom up, or b) that the speed of change started somewhere in the system should be preserved but that some way has to be found to reshape current processes along QA lines: this would require significant dynamism and determination.

Whatever steps are taken towards restructuring as a quality assurance endeavour, they should be backed up by proper data and proper organizational resources and procedures. The Ministry of Education accepts that “...*the main documents have been produced but the Ministry of Education and Science in fact has not always touched the bottom line of the educational issues and concerns*” (“Challenges and Achievements, Problems and Alternatives” - report presented by the Minister of Education and Science of Albania for the period January –June 2003; page1). The quality of the leading documents of reform in education often lack depth and internal coherence. The ineffectiveness of the main documents produced is a consequence of the inadequate compilation process, of the fragmented character of initiatives in education, of the rushed style of document processing and adoption, of the donor-driven initiation of document production, of the extreme needs education is facing, of the present government ambitions to reach comparable development indicators to those of other SEE countries, etc.

The following are some of the conclusions drawn from school visits, target group discussions and round table meetings with actors at different educational levels. All suggest that more needs to be done in terms of assuring quality in the system.

- In order for the system to work towards quality assurance, the school, which is the main action place, should enhance democratic skills among students. As things are, it looks more like a sinking ship than a powerfully machine favoring democratic skills. Citing the OECD report findings: "...low teachers' status, low salaries, unqualified teachers, emigration, private classes, lack of teaching staff, teachers employed in second and third jobs, teachers waiting on waiting lists, education administration not capable of resolving school problems...", (OECD report on the development of education in Albania , page: 16, 57). School infrastructure, the lack of a sustainable strategy for addressing related issues, comparison with private sectors of education, makes school look more like a drifting boat than a powerful engine leading towards democratic harbors.
- *Schools should belong to the community.* This is an interesting priority. Is the present school empowering the community or is it serving the community? Should it empower the community or should it serve the community? This is an overused rhetoric, but little action has been taken and even less good practice disseminated. Normative dispositions allow parents and community to take a decisive role in decision-making, in exerting real competences in promoting values and enhancing democracy (refer to normative disposition chapter X). The reality is significantly different.
- Quality assurance advocacy bluntly states that the responsibility for quality lies with the producer. In this case, the *school has to strongly encourage competition* and develop a system of rewards for excellence. The way learning is designed, schools continue to encourage conformity, compromise, rote learning through a powerful principle of trust in what is presented in school curricula and textbooks. There is very little room for critical thought or constructive competition.
- Quality assurance does not happen by chance. It needs a purposeful course of action, carefully designed and more carefully monitored. *A school should be an institution with a clear quality assurance and democracy attainment mission.* Is our school mission led thus? Or, is it led by rules, regulations and normative acts? Unfortunately, the answer is YES, the Albanian school is an institution led by regulations and normative acts, open to punishment, very pressed for immediate statistical good results. Visionary institutions allow for personal initiative, incorporated action, participatory and shared contribution. They minimize the importance of the day-to-day statistics and consider the personality of children in a more holistic way.
- *School should lead the students towards achievements and accomplishments.* Students' being performance driven or achievement driven are characteristics of two very different school systems. An authoritative, state-controlled education system looks for high performing children in those subject areas selected as important. A democratic school concerned with quality assurance can be similarly concerned with cognitive performance in traditional subjects. But it can also generally support a focus on a broader range of important issues. It can emphasize, equally, student performance as citizens and social beings. Traditionally performing schools are valued according to their inputs; achievement

focused schools are valued according to their output. Those interviewed gave the impression that this philosophy, though often spoken about, is not clearly understood..

- *Schools that work for quality take care of students' needs.* Up till now, the school concentrates on the bureaucratic needs of the education administration, rather than being concerned with the real learning conditions and personal development needs of students. Real change in the learning environment seems to take so long to accommodate students' needs. The fact that Albanian students did remarkably poorly in PISA testing once more proves that students' needs are not being met within the system. As long as bureaucratic needs are the priority, attempts to develop quality are handicapped.
- The issue of school assets and education property critically compromises any potential good will towards a quality assurance system. The OECD report gives a very accurate picture of schools being stripped of whatever property they have, even didactic. Their eyes are turned to the government, their pockets being empty, their classes being dramatically ineffective, their potential left unstirred, their only aim is spending money, not making money. There is very little data proving that schools are exerting their right, given by the law on pre-university education, to make money by serving third parties. *The school is an institution that may make money out of legal activities.* Schools seem to be paralyzed in their money-making initiatives.
- Quality assurance requires more liberty than schools actually have. Though decentralization is declared an aim for the second half of the year in the report of the Minister of Education, though the Minister personally addresses the difficulty he has felt in being understood in his aims for decentralization, teachers and education actors are not being supported to bear more responsibility in assuring quality themselves. Schools are changing, but they largely incline towards centralization. *"They respect hierarchy more than participation"* was the description the Ministry spokesman used of how local authorities act when they have more liberty for independent action. *Without the freedom from centralized practices, being charged with quality assurance responsibility will remain utopia.*
- *The school should reflect the values created out in the market place.* Economic growth is accompanied by value transformation. Interviewers admitted that schools are not open to value transformation; they harbour the vegetating old value system and dubious morale. Schools seem the hardest and/or the last place to change values though they are believed to be the fastest. Quality assurance is a systems theory. Values are transferred from one system to another. Schools need to be penetrated rather than shielded. It is admitted that the school is not reflecting flexibility in terms of value transformation and is not preparing students for success in a market economy.

As the above proves, there is concern in the system about quality assurance, both at political and implementation levels, but the fact is that there are many compromising factors running counter to the aim, and likely to lead to the abortion of the aim if care is not taken in time.

5. Empowerment and devolved responsibility

There is a widely held consensus that decentralization is a priority – possibly even an emergency - that needs to be attended to, and that the increase of local government competencies is an imperative for democracy. This idea is being more and more generally

accepted by the country's leadership. The legal framework is being worked out so that it is more easily put into practice. But still, the concept of decentralization in education has a top down image. There is an already identified need for more radical change in the field of finances and decision-making. The Ministry of Education is proud of initiating fiscal reform in 2003 and a concrete plan to be carried out in 2004. Local government, though expected to lead the change, lacks the finances and the responsibility to take over duties like recruiting teachers, despite having the will to do so. The way things are, they cannot even place a teacher in a position in school. The project strategy presented some years ago seemed to be too narrow to cover all the needs of the system. The ministry is working with a three-year strategy. A long term strategy (10 years from now) is being discussed at the Pedagogical Research Institute right now. It is too early to comment on the way it is being worked out. "...*Albania has clearly stated that public order assurance, poverty reduction and education as part of it, are the national priorities. They seem clearly declared and adhered to. But the country is facing severe emergent needs in the infrastructure and the set of the priorities seems to be somewhat different from what country badly feels daily. People in education administration seem to be more pragmatic in the way they spend money. They are looking for ways of finding a quick profit return as compared to long term investment in a field like education...*" (OECD report on the education development in Albania, page 15).

The restructuring is going to charge the local government level in education with more responsibility. The local education directorates' main responsibility is described as: "...*Quality assurance through inspection and training and qualification of the teaching staff*". As can be clearly seen, quality assurance is easily foreseen to be the responsibility of local actors, which seems a very advanced conceptual change, but *inspection*, which in itself is a more controlling mechanism than one provisional to quality, is seen as being the mechanism. This proves the need for more sophisticated updating because of the tendency to keep control of schools. *The fear is that quality assurance is discussed, but quality control is meant.* Inspection responsibilities are delegated to local directorates. As part of the restructuring, the local education offices are going to be placed in charge of staffing schools, advising and attending to operational needs.

The Ministry of Education organized a national conference on decentralization during the first half of 2003. The need for the conference arose as a result of the lack of clarity concerning the conceptual steps to be taken in implementing decentralization in education. The ministry is concerned, not to reduce the issue of decentralization into technical elements, but to have it implemented as a philosophy of involving more people in the decision making process in education at a local level. The Ministry of Education clearly stated at the conference, in line with the derivative responsibilities and long term objectives of the development of education, that decentralization is not an exclusive policy, but on the contrary an *inclusive and complementary trend of action*. The MoE proposes to develop decentralizing practices within the education system as well as outside it, in cooperation with the direct beneficiaries and other interested actors in education. Ministry leadership aims to achieve this objective *through co-responsibility, with the aim of assuring quality services in education*. The Ministry of Education is open in its appeal to local government to share responsibilities in the following field of action in education:

- Recruiting staff

- Appointing school directors, as well as the leadership staff of education, at local level,
- Assigning scholarships
- School inspection
- Developing and implementing part of the curriculum so that the local needs are better reflected
- Overseeing the development of vocational education
- Presenting demands to higher education in support to its development
- Assessing the quality of services provided in their area, etc.

The ministry seems serious in its commitment. It is expressing its will to implement the new policies in devolving responsibilities. The restructuring phenomenon is progressing towards devolving responsibilities. There is a memorandum of understanding, as well as a working agreement, between the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Finances to transfer, wherever workable, regulatory and managerial competencies. The budget for 2003 is going to be administered according to the given competences and responsibilities by local government. The Tirana Municipality is taking over the responsibility for making fundamental capital investment in education during 2004 under World Bank supervision, as Tirana is the largest municipality in the country, possessing the necessary capacities for self-management of large funds.

These are some of the most promising steps taken thus far in assigning responsibility to the local level. There is more foreseen in the papers, but it is going to take longer to achieve the status of shared responsibilities as the expected actors need more training.

6. Self improving schools

There is a network of schools that have prepared plans of development. Some of them have a long history of partnership with international donors in taking care of the emergency infrastructure needs and of the social infrastructure in the school. They have been working seriously in involving the parents' community in school affairs. The Ministry spokesman talked highly of them, but admitted that not much had been done to have their experience generated to other schools. They are so good and isolated that the fear of other schools is that they are never going to be as lucky as these pilot schools have been.

The top leadership of the Ministry of Education admits that the information gathered from the quantitative data has not been translated into knowledge and policy to intervene in the most critical schools to transform them.. The experience gathered in these schools is related to content, management, human resources and financial resources. Some of the shared principles of teaching democracy in these schools have been:

- meaningful learning,
- integrated learning

- value based learning
- challenging learning
- active learning
- reflective learning

These are stated to be teaching principles in these pilot schools, in contrast to the others. They have experience in planning learning activities that are unique as compared to the routine teaching methods that are practiced in most schools. The pilot schools that were interviewed showed that there is a real all-round understanding of the values of citizenship studies as well as the capacity to use them in school day life. Future development demands more intentional dissemination of the experience gathered in the pilot self-developing schools.

7. Training and consultancy support for schools

Of hundreds of teachers of social studies and citizenship questioned, all admitted that they seriously lack training and that they badly need to improve their teaching skills. They also asked for the time and the opportunity to meet locally as teachers of the same subject. The in-service teacher training is very inefficient. The Pedagogical Research Institute helps with some training programs, once the school states its particular needs. The Pedagogical Research Institute is also empowering some policies and the political commitment within the system to have all teachers trained in fields such as democratic citizenship and human rights education. There is a national program recommended to all schools to find donors and work with them. The reality is that schools are poor. They drastically lack money for training. They also lack fund raising skills. Training consists of one-day events, donor driven; in-school training is highly compromised. Teachers share, most of the time, ignorance and not experience.

As stated in the report of the OECD on the development of education in Albania, the schema of teacher training is not well thought out. According to the new regulations, schools are required to develop schemas of “ in-school training” -this means that teachers train teachers. This is not bad, as it should allow schools to try to generate funding for training, but in reality the opposite occurs. There is hidden compromise, unspoken alliances of schools and the local directorates, which are in charge of monitoring qualifications and school control, neglect of the training component for monetary reasons.

There is a control and qualification unit within the structure of the local education department, who, in all districts (representatives of at least 80% of the local directorates were interviewed), are not clear how they can do what teachers expect of them. This may be a result of unclear job descriptions, unclear parameters of measuring, unclear responsibilities and liabilities, extreme negative experience of the previously discussed problems high in the hierarchy, the constant hope or pressure of restructuring, being unable to cover financially the cost of monitoring schools. ... *“There are schools as far as 8 hours walk away”*- said an inspector in Permet after his colleague from the local educational directory in Tropoja had admitted the same.

There are district local departments that are more advanced in providing consultancy to school planning activities. We met inspectors in districts like Korca, Gjirokastra, Shkodra who are leading schools initiatives for more affirmative action towards making schools more active and democratic. The education directorates are supported by locally accumulated and trained expertise. In the districts where local universities are situated (Korca, Gjirokastra, Shkodra and Elbasan) there is a permanent trained team of teachers and university professors (Centers for Democratic Citizenship Education) who are now bound in a network. These centers have an annual plan to support schools in taking steps in citizenship and human rights education. They have their own web page and their own Yahoo group. They are trying to liven up national experts from all over the country, as well as a network of 250 potential trainers of EDC and human rights trained in a State Department-University of Washington project, CoE, AEDP, UNESCO, Centers for democratic education, Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking, Step by Step, Soros program. They are trying to network with the teachers trained in the “Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking” project, some of whom are almost certified as trainers of RWCT. This critical mass of teachers is bringing input and initiative to schools and districts in terms of assuring quality. In the process of activity of the four centers for democratic citizenship affiliated with the 4 universities in Albania, lots of synergies and byproducts have been witnessed.

- The following are some good points noticed in the activity of the democratic citizenship teams set up at the local universities in Albania:
- Dissemination of ideas on the role of education in a democratic society among schools and teachers, setting the potential for a movement towards quality assurance within the system.
- Awareness raising among the decision making bodies in the Ministry of Education and Science.
- Adoption of interactive methods of teaching and learning in Social Studies.
- Increase in students’ participation in community and extracurricular activities.
- Development of a mandatory training course in Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship Education for the in-service teacher-training program by the Pedagogical Research Institute.
- Advancement of the universities’ role as agents of change in their local areas.
- Cooperation between local educational directorates, schools and universities at local level.
- Donors and international organizations’ awareness of the university centers being raised.

7.1. Emerging institutional cooperation

So far, the teams have developed permanent plans of action for the centers in respective universities. There is a tendency to share expertise between groups. All centers so far have been attracting the attention of, and cooperating with, or have plans to continue cooperation with:

- **European Community** (an activity sponsored by the Council of Europe has already been developed with the village schools in Shkodra to promote partnerships).
- **Council of Europe, Stability Pact. Austrian Government and Swiss Government** provided training on July 1-2, 2003 to the English speakers and computer users from the

four teams to introduce advanced communication technology in education for citizenship education, so that they become more skilled as resource multipliers.

- **UNESCO** provided advanced training in Human Rights and Intercultural Education to the team members in Shkodra, Korca, Elbasan and Gjirokastra Universities.
- **“Call for Peace”**, a project of the government of the **Netherlands** is working with the team from the University of Shkodra to provide training in community awareness on law empowerment.
- **“Step by Step” OSI** project aims at introducing methodologies of democratic education for young children to both teams of Gjirokastra and Shkodra.
- **“Living values” UNICEF New York program**, in cooperation with the “Living values” Program in the UK, are planning to extend the training provided in Greece to Gjirokastra University by this fall.
- **Local Government in Gjirokastra**, in cooperation with the EDC center, has organized a city day of parenting.
- **Schools** have organized activities on the promotion of certain books (Adolescence) and programs.

7.2.Immediate impact within universities involved in the project:

The University of Shkodra is looking forward **to setting up a branch of Civics teachers**, an initial teacher training program leading to a diploma in Civics.

The University of Gjirokastra is looking ahead **to introducing 2 courses on citizenship and democracy** this coming school year, under the framework of the initial teacher training in their university.

The Universities of Korca and Elbasan are introducing citizenship and democracy issues in their teacher training programs.

8. School developing planning

Restructuring of the infrastructure is problematic. The division of responsibilities between local and central government is not clear. Political pressure on the education units is great. Financing in education seems very confused. Transparency of all round governmental and nongovernmental financing in education is lacking. No system is in place to assess students’ progress in learning life and citizenship skills. The professionalism to support reform in the country is lacking. The trained staff seemed to be suppressed by unknown factors. For all these reasons, it is not certain that there are schools who are really making independent decisions on their development. It is reported in the Ministry of Education that there are 15 such schools in the whole country, schools that have a self-development plan. In fact, it has happened as Harrison mentions in his preparatory statement for the project, *“The problem for government is not that minority of good schools are already doing well. Even if they are left alone, they will get better. The real difficulty is that majority of ordinary or average schools who are currently under-performing. How are they to be helped to get better?”*”. Two headmasters of self-

development schools were interviewed. Perhaps worryingly, they were largely developing plans based on donors' developmental consultancy and instructions. This raises the question of whether education reform is being developed according to local perceptions and analyses of need, or is being imported into the country, reflecting the priorities of external agencies. If it is imported, people do not tend to "see the instructional manual"; they use whatever is brought to their schools in the way they know best. In some cases the imported material is abused.

There are only 15 secondary education schools in Albania that have their own development plans. They are the result of the ministry's effort to develop self-governed schools. Their experience is isolated, no attempt has been made to have them disseminate the benefits and challenges of being on their own.

9. National and international benchmarks and assessment process

From the documents consulted, from the target groups brought together for discussion, a strong impression is gained that there is no serious evaluation of the system so that the best alternatives of action and coherent restructuring of the system can be worked out.

Through a World Bank Grant, a National Center for Educational Assessment and Testing has been set up. It is progressing. It started as a department of the Pedagogical Research Institute, but is now separate, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. "*There is an admirable cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the National Center for Educational Assessment and Testing*" -the interviewee at the ministry claimed. This center has managed to implement national testing of 4th graders in three main subjects. Lately it compiled a report of processed data and necessary recommendations for policy makers. This center has taken over the national testing of students upon graduation from compulsory education as well as secondary education and tertiary entrance education.

In the hope of obtaining an accurate picture of the system and the gaps in its development, the Ministry of Education has lately designated a Policy Analysis and Planning Unit within the Ministry. This Unit is responsible for assessing the situation, based on the information gathered, as well as for assembling proposals as to the best options of action. This unit is new, but it is considered to be a demonstration of professionalism in decision making and policy making. It is the style of work this sector adopts that will count for real value of the system.

An AEDP project resulted in the publication of three successive reviews on the techniques and related problems of educational assessment. Hopefully they may help the system take more informed decisions in the future.

10. National inspectorate

After the new restructuring of the Ministry of Education, there is now a department of inspection. Their first six months activity has been severely criticized by the minister of education. The inspectors still use very traditional methods of inspecting. This is seen in their reports presented to the ministry. The way the role of the inspectors is seen is mostly related to the control of the quality of educational services. This department is still isolated, working separately from the other interested education bodies in assuring quality. It is easy to see a tendency towards the preservation of exclusive rights for controlling other education structures.

Their cooperation with the national center of educational assessment and testing is weak. The directorate of inspection is facing the need to be a more integrated part of the mechanism of assuring quality in education. This directorate, though newly created, has been strongly criticized for its lack of will to take over the responsibility given to it.

It has been asked whether it is wise that the National Inspectorate of Education be under the supervision of the Ministry. The Ministry's response is that until it gets stronger and clearer in its vision and operation, the inspectorate is going to remain under the umbrella of the ministry. Later, it will be independent from the ministry.

As a result of the restructuring of the Ministry of Education, there is a newly set up department of control. As is mentioned in the ministry documents, this department is doing well in organizing and reaching results through control. Strangely enough, this accolade comes despite the fact that the department lacks criteria of assessment and control. The suspicion is that the work of the department strongly relies on personal and opinionated considerations and not on shared professional criteria.

School inspection is seen as a massive and populist phenomenon. Being concerned with the democratic character of schooling as well as with the responsibilities local government is going to take over, the Ministry of Education is inviting local government to take active part and responsibility concerning school inspection issues. The concern is that professionalism in the field of inspection is practically non-existent, that inspection is profession bound, and that teachers might be threatened by public discrimination and a probable political agenda. Inspection is too dear to the heart of the system. Policies of involving local government are going to affect the system. So far, the invitation has not been accompanied by guidelines for clearly shared responsibilities and liabilities between national inspectors and local inspectors. School assessment, accreditation and inspection are crucial and must maintain professional standards. Otherwise, people might be reminded of the old way of respecting "the masses", where the village baker went to "inspect" a history class. He heard the teacher telling students about the Commune of Paris. The baker, the Inspector, said their village commune was better than that of Paris and criticized the teacher for being ignorant about the fact.

11. Curriculum and the definition of quality

The school curriculum in the Albanian education system is largely centralized. There is only one approved national curriculum. Since the restructuring of the Ministry of Education and Science (January 2003), there exists a very important department in this ministry: that of the curriculum development. This department is charged with the political and managerial role in compiling and implementing the new curriculum. On the other side, the Pedagogical Research Institute is in charge of developing the curriculum. Lately this Institute had developed a national curriculum framework, education for citizenship education included.

Curriculum preparation is the responsibility of the Pedagogical Research Institute, but there are no formal working arrangements between this institute and the universities where teachers are trained. The working groups are largely chosen on individual preferences. There are plans to revise the whole status of the Pedagogical Research Institute. The ministry is talking of a change/reform in curriculum. There are new curricular frameworks prepared by the Pedagogical

Institute. The following steps which the ministry plans to take may lead to more detailed help for teachers.

The national curriculum on EDC is supplemented by teachers' manuals and teaching materials. The program on Human rights and Citizenship has become national. There are a lot of materials produced under the "Democratic Citizenship Education in Albania" project, UNESCO Project on Human Rights Education and Intercultural Education in Albania, Step by Step, etc. A large-scale extracurricular action is being taken in the field of democratic citizenship education. Teachers' manuals have been prepared, a more theoretical manual on the role of schools in a democratic society has been written under the guidance of the University of Washington, with the financial support of the State Department. 250 trainers are certified throughout the country. 2,700 teachers of social studies have been trained in interactive methods for teaching democracy at schools throughout the country. 4 university centers have been trained to develop resource centers for the regions. Satisfactory synergies and networks have been set up amongst the actors in the field of democratic education. Human rights trained teachers have been trained in democracy and citizenship. Also, the critical thinking network certified teacher trainers are a potential mass of teachers who have a vision of what the curriculum, especially in social studies, should be aimed at and how it should be developed in order to impact upon quality assurance in schools. They need to be used in the process of curriculum development that is going to be launched soon. They are the future potential local predictors. The curriculum no longer needs to be imported. It can be locally developed, based on this accumulated experience. Teachers may start to believe more in the potential they themselves have to develop a curriculum based on their daily reflection and learning.

Curriculum development is said to be costly. On the other hand, projects like "Democratic citizenship education in Albania", "Reading and writing for critical thinking "Education of human rights and intercultural education in Albania" seem to have done a lot with little money. *"Maybe it is high time to have all the donors be more oriented into implementing developed curricular documents, rather than writing endless reports on what should be done from different religious or political feelings and viewpoints"* (recommendation made by the OEDC experts in their report).

The secondary education curriculum in Albania is undergoing a conceptual reform as to its character. There is a proposal to "profile" it – that is, introduce separate specialized (social and scientific) streams at gymnasium level. The hope is that the students will learn more and gain more life skills. This program was endorsed in 1999-2000. There is much approval on one side, while it is contested on the other. Time is needed to see the benefit of it, but what is important is the fact that students of social profile seem to have more liberty in learning more about societal issues, democracy and citizenship included. There is hope that schools will become more value based and more effective in their efforts to assure quality.

The Albanian government is giving a great deal of support to setting up pilot schools, schools where Western schools' systems are tested to find whether they work in an Albanian context. As they are still in the testing period, little is known of their experience, less has been learnt about the way they are run. Headmasters of these schools (interview with the director of tourism school in Saranda) are proud of what they are doing in terms of equipping students with updated skills as well as with life and citizenship skills. It is perhaps time to study their effectiveness in terms of quality and have their experience disseminated throughout the system.

Private schools are mushrooming. The Government has a report on the visits inspectors made to 70 schools. The impression of one of the team members was that they are largely seen as businesses and not as schools. Those who have the money have little to do with the philosophy of running a democratic school. They are interested in making money, not in training teachers. The food of the stomach is more important than the food of the brain in some of these schools. They try to become attractive by adding foreign languages and computing. Democracy and citizenship are seen as good and desirable behaviors, but are not necessarily promoted. The curriculum in these schools is imported from the home country of the donor.

One hidden agenda that came to light in the specialists' discussions was moral education issues. Democracy cannot live alone in the character of young people. They need to possess certain moral characteristics. Neither can it be hoped that democracy can exist outside of the moral dimension of teaching. In an environment where corruption and lack of values is a preliminary basic cause of the low rhythm of development and of failure in the country, moral education and value based education is a priority. New curriculum design gives an opportunity to reflect healthy morals.

12. Accountability

When it comes to accountability of the system, the question was put bluntly: concerning public education costs, to whom are the education actors responsible? To whom do they remain accountable for the effectiveness of their spending? This question was put to the ministry representative in terms of administrative responsibility, public responsibility and professional responsibility.

It should first be stated that the Ministry of Education and local education departments do not have a regular practice of organizing hearings and of leading public discussions and campaigns. Their style is more sectarian in type. The Mesuesi newspaper, which was to an extent the publicity mechanism of the ministry, was shut down because of being state owned and expensive. The teachers' trade unions and syndicates are weak. The present government is proud of setting criteria for recruiting public officers and servants, but the system seems to provide a guaranteed ticket for permanent public position. The status of the civil servant does not allow for the employee being held responsible for his actions and their after-effects in terms of development and financial expenditure

The ministry tries to avoid professional mistakes by setting up boards, some of them permanent, to minimize faulty decision-making and thus provide accountability for faulty decisions. It is believed that the professional guarantee is provided by the part time advisors who consult mainly, it was reported, in terms of curriculum change and revision approval, textbooks endorsement, etc. Both the Pedagogical Research Institute and the Ministry practice board consultancy. This is a defensive mechanism in terms of assuring quality in the system. On the other hand, this mechanism acts as a shield in terms of professional responsibility and accountability. Board consultancy largely avoids a grass root input for changes and quality on education. Teachers and other education system actors are not involved in decision making, are not assigned the responsibility of selecting the best changes and solutions for themselves. Professionalism looks like a very high apple to reach for the common teacher. This view in the air makes teachers humble and puts local administrators in a unfavourable position. On the

other hand, this view might implant resistance on the part of the implementers of change and actors in the field of quality assurance. It makes them feel recipients of change.

Not everything is depressing in terms of the ministry seeking professional advice. Lately the Ministry Council is reported to have done a good job in participating in discussions related to crucial reforming acts in the field of scientific research, higher education reform, fiscal reform as management, restructuring and administration of the education system in general, as well as legal amendments. Its contribution is seen as effective in terms of forward planning for developmental, strategic issues as well as a shield against accusations of personalizing and nepotism.

As for administrative accountability, the channels there are functioning very well in terms of bottom up accountability. Within the ministry, the impression is that these channels function very well. Moving out of the institution, into the district, we find a reluctance to report. Regional administrators of education say that it is useless to report up, because they get almost no support in resolving the difficult situations they are facing daily. They just try to pass statistics to the ministry department of statistics, but are hesitant about the rest. They get almost no response concerning the issues they raise.

As for public accountability, the accountability to the taxpayers, to parents and families, what little is done is mainly through the media. There is no system of public accountability for changes and decisions that affect education consumers, let alone transparency concerning the use of taxpayers' money. This practice seems unknown. Public accountability might help certain communities in taking over a role in school improvement issues. The business sphere, a potential helper in education, the sphere of NGOs that might become potential actors in taking over responsibilities in educational change, the sphere of international donors - all are left uninformed on a regular basis. Episodes of extreme needs and difficult situations are left untold, their potential not being used to involve other potentially strong actors. This is hard to explain, as it is reported that the ministry produces data banks regularly. A system of using them is missing.

This lack of accountability (public, professional and administrative) makes the system isolated and apathetic, the education administrators miniature demons, lays more stress on the heads of the leadership, makes decision making and monitoring practices more subjective and vulnerable. The ministry is aware of this situation, so, in the last restructuring act, the decision was made to have a public information office. This was seen as a way of having ministry decisions and acts disseminated as well as of having the public make requests and demands. It is an easier way of communicating with the public that otherwise might have poured into ministry offices during working hours. This system is being computerized, making it more effective in terms of time and accuracy of the information.

Public governance in the country remains highly politicized. Local government, municipalities and communes, as well as the education units as part of it, are highly dependent on the central government. The state budget assigned to local government is so small compared to the grave needs of the districts. The OECD team in the country found that public services are far too politicized. Despite the fact that education is not so strongly politicized, the way it is run is still affected. This results in the fragmentary uncoordinated character of reform, leaving the professional potential of hundreds of school headmasters suppressed and unused and keeping the system unaccountable.

13. The way forward

As mentioned in the preamble of this stocktaking research, the phrase “quality assurance” is overused in Albanian educational rhetoric. It started years ago within the Albanian Education Development Program as one of the main targets of Soros program in Albania. Soon it was widely adopted, but there is no ‘stop and think and commit yourself’ attitude and no document that might clearly explain the concept and the way educational actors are committed to it. Nevertheless, the present leadership of the Ministry of Education has developed a consensual concept for the development of education. It is clearly described in the commitment of the authorities to democratic citizenship education as the way to assure the desired quality in education. This was declared in the introduction to the six-month report on the work of the Ministry of Education and Science in the first half of this year. Because of the lack of a professional development of the concept, as well as the lack of modern managerial schemas, the ministry has adopted its own attitude on quality assurance techniques that are not necessarily the recommended theoretical ones, and may not be the most effective. What is important in the recent movement for change in education in Albania is the transition from the rhetoric of reform into the rhetoric of restructuring and quality assurance.

There is a clear understanding that educational quality assurance cannot be achieved without proper structural changes, a radical change from the old style of working, new visions of new structures. People cannot do new things in old ways. This has proved to be a difficult turn in Albanian educational thinking, and daily continues to prove very difficult to handle.

The World Bank project boldly aimed at the restructuring of education in the country. It took a long time to reach the point of having people change their old ways of doing things. Restructuring, unlike reforming, made them feel threatened. Resistance mounted to a critical point. It took a very wise moderation on the part of the leaders in the ministry to handle the restructuring period. The ministry preserved almost all the then employed staff to fit them into the new structures. This is probably the way of doing things in a small country; probably the leadership of the ministry followed a strict contractual process based on the present WORK LEGAL CODE. Despite the question of whether people are ready or whether they have the skills to do the job in new ways, the fact that the ministry has a new design, probably more fashionable, more workable, more comparable to the experienced systems of education is a fact worthy of compliment and creates hope for better quality in education.

A restructuring of the subsidiary institutions and the local administrative level of education are following the restructuring of the ministry of education. The Pedagogical Research Institute is going to be restructured to better meet the needs of the system, the publishing house is being transformed from a state owned enterprise into a company, the state owned book disbursement enterprise status is also being changed. They are becoming more flexible in an emerging market economy society. New conceptual schemas are being put into practice. There must be a trial or probationary period for the structure to mature and be assessed for effectiveness. The happy news for now is that restructuring is seen as one of the ways to assure that society is going to be provided with quality education.

Restructuring takes a long time to begin to work. It needs further reflection and learning in the process. Nevertheless, it is worth giving credit to the system for clearly stating the strategic objective of the development of education in Albania. All changes, reforms and restructuring

aim at this consensual long term objective: *The education system in Albania, manifesting and developing the national values and virtues, tolerance and human solidarity, based on the values and principles of democracy, in defense and respect for human rights and freedom aims towards development of real individual and community social values, towards consensus and practices deriving from it, towards the future European citizen with life and other necessary skills.*

14. Conclusions and next steps

As the report argues, the top leadership and structure of education is clearly involved in transformation processes, but for the people down there in the districts - the local education leadership staff, the school headmasters and teachers, for parents and students, education is facing extreme difficulties and chaos. This leads to the conclusion that educational change in search of quality assurance should be a national, all-inclusive action, and the speed of the change should be fast and full of dynamism and determination. It is the responsibility of all the actors to make it happen.