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Teaching Politics in a Globalized World

European Integration and Globalization as Cross-cutting Issues in the Classroom

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Introduction

The world has changed. The way politics is taught at school and in adult education hasn't. Starting from this basic problem the following chapters will outline a *new approach to teaching politics*.

This approach tries to introduce multi-level governance to classrooms by taking *policies* (and *not* polities) as starting points.

If globalization is about dismantling of borders, the “Policy Approach” - as it might be labelled - tries to find a way to teach politics in a globalized world.

Its aim is to *bridge the gap* between political science and politics in the classroom. While the world has changed rapidly since the end of the Cold War and political science did its best to adjust to the new situation, politics in the classroom wasn't able to keep pace.

Scope of the approach

Civic education and democracy education and EDC (Education for Democratic Citizenship) and ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) and HRE (Human Rights Education) and numerous other approaches in this field all share crucial elements (that is why the differences between them are not always easy to tell).

And all these approaches deal with a *great variety* of important topics ranging from community-oriented social learning to national political participation.

The Policy Approach to be introduced here focuses on a relatively *small part* of civic education: on teaching politics in schools and adult education. Basic knowledge about politics is (still) part of the core curriculum in all European countries. It belongs to the things educated people (should) know and it is a precondition for some more ambitious goals of civic education.

Focusing on teaching politics as part of the cognitive dimension of civic education nevertheless does not mean that this is considered to be more important than other topics, objectives or dimensions.

The *limited scope* of the new approach also means that nothing will be said about tasks and objectives of civic or democracy education such as social skills, media or intercultural competencies - to name but a few.

Basic problem

Democracy education developed (once upon a time in the West) *in* and *for nation-states*, when nation-states were the unrivalled centres of politics.

Since then the world of politics has changed: other *actors* (international organizations, NGOs, transnational corporations) and *levels* (European, transatlantic, global) have become more and more important.

But democracy education is still largely bound to nation-states and their political systems. Teaching is still based on the *national model of democracy*, although political scientists point out that - at least for European countries - a national political system cannot be understood or analyzed without taking the EU into account.

More than two thirds of “national” decision-making is shaped by Brussels. This doesn't mean that all these laws are made by Brussels exclusively but it means that they are made by the multi-level system of the EU.

Functional differentiation in the EU multi-level system means for example that institutions and levels of the system work together completely differently depending on the issue at stake.

Multi-level system of the European Union

= supranational level (Commission, Council of the EU, EP, European Council, ECJ etc.)

= national level (government, parliament, interest groups, parties etc. in 27 member states)

= subnational level (regions, Bundesländer, local authorities, départements etc.)

And it is the EU bargaining at the WTO meetings where regulations for international trade are issued - to give only one example for politics on the *global* level.

So what is the use of telling students that democracy means that we elect a parliament which elects a government which makes binding decisions for us all *without* telling them that there is much more to the picture than meets the (national) eye?

And what is the use of having *separate* teaching units for the political system of one's own country, for God's own country, for the European Union and the United Nations when in fact they work together in decision-making. This leads to polity-centred teaching informing students and adult learners about *the* (single) institutional system of the EU which is misleading in the best case and simply wrong in most others.

Two of the most important features of politics in the 21st century are complexity and functional differentiation. And both are striking features of the EU being considered as a laboratory and model for politics in the 21st century.

So the European Parliament by now plays a major role in a lot of EU policies but its influence in the Common Foreign and Security Policy is limited. And there are more examples to illustrate the point that there is no single and simple model for EU decisions.[1]

Dealing with globalization in the classroom leads to similar problems. There is no single “globalization” but functional differentiation with regard to dimensions or areas of society, culture, politics, economy etc.

So how can we deal with complex topics like EU or globalization in the classroom in a more appropriate way? It is exactly this question the Policy Approach tries to answer.[2]

Basic idea of the approach

Taking policies instead of polities as starting points for teaching politics is the basic idea of the Policy Approach. Up to now, typical curricula throughout Europe look like the one shown in the graph. Different polities are treated separately.

Typical curriculum for teaching politics

Political system of [own country]	Political system of USA	European Union	United Nations	etc.

This traditional approach makes it difficult to get an appropriate picture of politics in the globalized world where foreign and domestic policy are intermingled, traditionally important categories won't fit any more and borders are dismantled.[3]

It's next to impossible to teach the EU system *as a whole* given the fact that decision-making varies greatly between different policy areas. And there is simply no way to teach the "Political system of [Germany]" successfully without referring to the European level in every other sentence. So why teach them separately? Why not forget about polities and systems for a while and think of policies first?

While the guiding question of traditional approaches is: how does the EU system work?, the Policy Approach asks: how does policy-making in a policy area look like?

3 Dimensions: Polity - Politics - Policy

"A distinction is drawn between the three following political dimensions: Polity, politics and policy. **Polity** is taken to mean the formal dimension of politics, that is, the structure of norms, the way in which procedures are regulated and the institutions in which politics takes place.

Politics means the procedural dimension, or rather the decision-making processes, the settling of conflicts and the enforcing of goals and interests. This dimension encompasses several of the classic issues associated with political science (who is able to enforce their interests?; what mechanisms are in place for regulating conflict?; etc.).

And finally **policy** is the substance-based dimension of politics and refers to solving problems and fulfilling tasks by the administrative system drawing on decisions that are binding for all."

[Ragnar Müller/Wolfgang Schumann (2003), Teaching Politics, D@dalos Online Textbook: www.dadalos.org/politik_int/politik.htm, 17.04.2008]

Policy Approach curriculum for teaching politics

global	Environmental Policy e.g. "How can we save the climate?"	Social Policy	Education Policy	etc.
european				
national				
local / regional				
individual				

Implementing the approach

Let us take environmental policy as a starting point and look for a *didactical perspective* to deal with environmental policy which meets your crucial *learning target*: understanding politics in the 21st century. Therefore,

- you want learners to see that different levels are involved;
- you want learners to get an impression of exemplary political processes on each of the different levels;
- you want learners to get a glimpse of the interaction and interdependence of these levels in the political process, which also includes networks consisting of actors on different levels;
- you want learners to get acquainted with new actors like NGOs, transnational corporations or foundations.

Climate change / global warming

"Global warming is the increase in the average temperature of the Earth's near-surface air and oceans since the mid-twentieth century and its projected continuation. The average global air temperature near the Earth's surface increased 0.74 ± 0.18 °C during the hundred years ending in 2005. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes 'most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-twentieth century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations' via the greenhouse effect. (…)

Over the past several years, increased awareness of the scientific findings surrounding global warming has resulted in political and economic debate. Poor regions, particularly Africa, appear at greatest risk from the suggested effects of global warming, while their actual emissions have been small compared to the developed world."

[taken from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_warming, 19.04.2008]

Firstly, on your way to find a didactical perspective you will have to choose an *example* because it is impossible to deal with as broad a field as environmental policy. You may decide to bring *climate change* to the centre of the stage. There are a lot of good reasons for this, as climate change

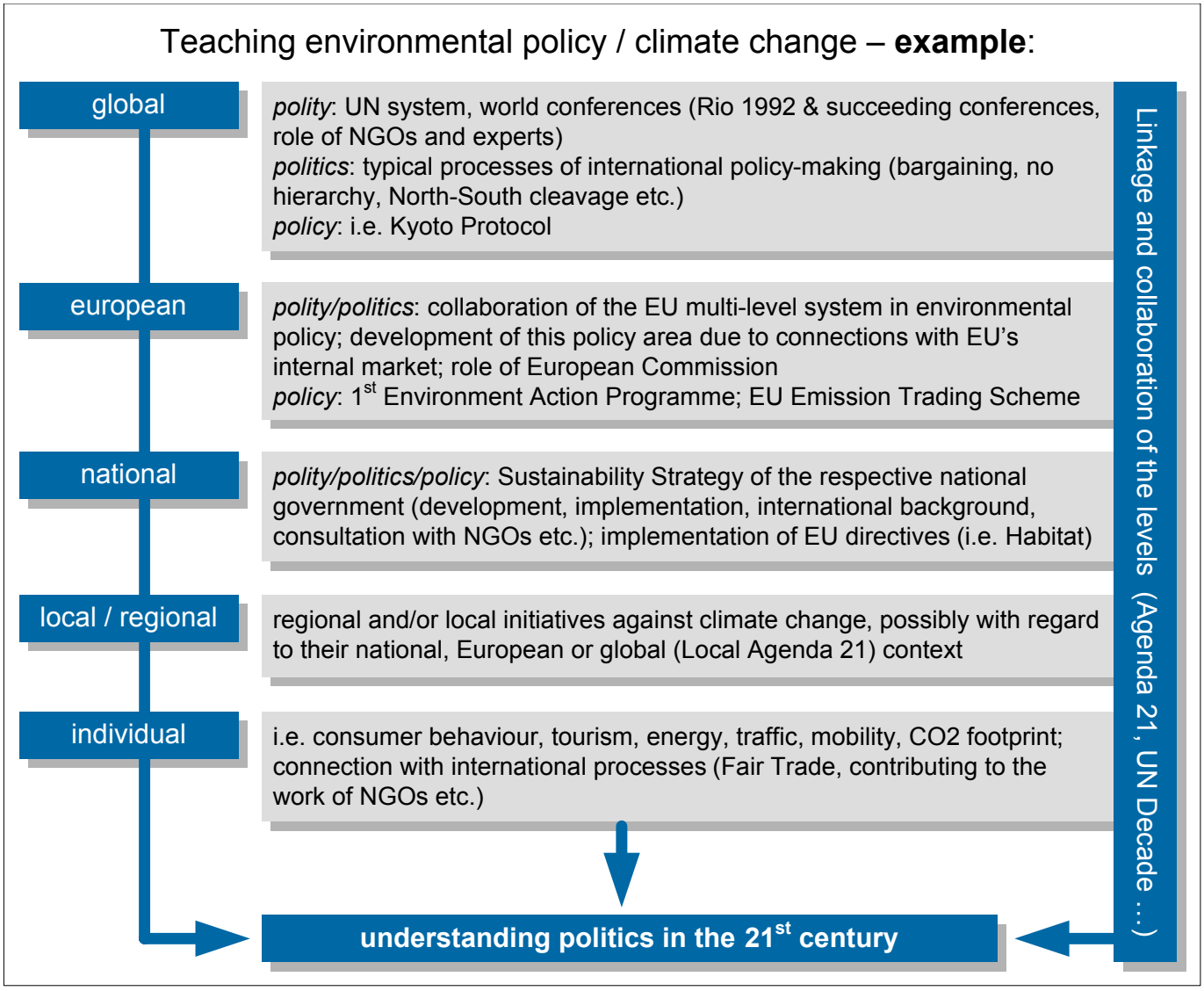
- is something the learners might be interested in,
- is very important,
- is in the news,
- is dealt with on all levels,
- is a major playground for NGOs,
- etc.

Having chosen climate change as example there are still many possibilities for a didactical perspective.

You might, for example, want to focus on the particularities of global problems and global governance. Your guiding question might be to challenge the incongruity of high pressure to cope with the problem and insufficient solutions. Characteristics of international politics, crucial conflicts (North-South, economy-ecology) and common pathologies (tragedy of the commons, prisoners' dilemma) would play a prominent role. In this case a possible title for your unit would be: "Why is climate change not stopped?"

Taking into account that climate change calls for action on all levels including the individual level you might want to choose a different option and build your teaching unit around the guiding question: how can we save the climate? This might also be the title of your unit and would call for an interdisciplinary approach (politics, economy, geography, biology, physics).

The following graph shows possible contents for a teaching unit and gives some examples for inter-level and trans-level topics to be dealt with so that the crucial learning target can be met: understanding politics in the 21st



century which means coming to terms with multi-level policy-making, with networks and new actors.

Such a teaching unit, of course, will take a whole term. So there would be one policy area per term. Learners would get to know multi-level decision-making in four to six different areas during their school life. This would sum up to a picture of, for example, EU policy-making which is by no means comprehensive but maybe more adequate than the one learners have after having been told how *the* EU institutional system works.

In the framework of the Policy Approach, globalization and European integration are not treated as topics but as *cross-cutting issues*. Maybe this is the most important difference to traditional approaches.

References

1) See for example SIMON HIX (2005[2]), The Political System of the European Union, Palgrave Macmillan.

2) "How to teach complex topics like EU and globalization" is the (translated) title of the Ph. D. thesis of the author this paper builds upon. It is available in German language on the Internet: www.online-dissertation.de.

3) Among countless publications making this point see ULRICH BECK (2000), What is Globalization?, Blackwell Publishers.

Teaching environmental policy / climate change – **possible structure**:

getting in	global	confrontation of climate scientists' future scenario with **Rio's** Framework Convention on Climate Change; elaborating the guiding question of the teaching unit (incongruity of urgent global problems and insufficient solutions)
section 1	global	**Rio** Earth Summit: preliminary events, way to results, bargaining, conference process, conflicts, role of NGOs); **Agenda 21** as the most important result of the conference
section 2	local	Local **Agenda 21** (basic idea, priorities, structure and problems of an **on-site** Local Agenda 21 project)
section 3	individual	How do **I** act sustainably? (consumer behaviour, traffic, CO2 footprint etc.); what does **sustainability** mean?
section 4	national	**Sustainability** Strategy Report of the respective government (which includes cross-links to the global and **European** level)
section 5	european	**EU** environmental policy (decision-making, development of this policy due to interdependence with EU's internal market); CO2 **emission trading** scheme
conclusion	across levels	CO2 **emission trading** in the respective country (origin of the idea in the Kyoto Protocol, common determining of total volume on the European level, national agency for emission trade, consequences for a local company)

Summary

The paper outlines a new approach to teaching politics in a globalized world. Instead of starting with institutions and systems (polity), the Policy Approach starts with decisions and outcomes (policy). European integration and globalization are not treated as topics but as cross-cutting issues. As a result, politics in the classroom gets closer to the reality of multi-level governance. Environmental policy was chosen as an example to show what this approach might look like in practice. Main learning target is to understand (multi-level) politics in the 21st century.

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