

IMPLEMENTATION, DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT „EDUCATION THROUGH CHESS IN SCHOOL” IN POLAND

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Written Declaration of the European Parliament (0050/2011) was the major stimulus for the Polish Chess Federation to initiate project „Education through Chess in School” back in 2012. In this article I would like to write not only why we decided to do it, but above all how we solve organizational issues and evaluate the project. To fully understand the magnitude of the issues you should understand that in Poland, a country with the population of 38 million people there are about 13.5 thousand primary schools, and our Project intends ultimately to embrace all of them.

Poland is divided administratively into 16 regions, each of which has its own local chess association. To maintain control of the Project we decided to first implement it in only three regions, in this, with particular emphasis, in the capital city – Warsaw. We have established excellent cooperation with the local authorities responsible for education. The result of our work was accession of 153 schools into the program in the first year. This involved, of course, a lot of trainings for teachers, contracts with sponsors who helped us in the purchase of equipment and acquire beliefs of our own chess environment.

Therefore, the project is growing, in addition to the work of two national coordinators, it was necessary to create a function of the local coordinator in each of the regions involved, so as to be able to closely cooperate with local educational institutions and chess associations. In the meantime, when we implemented the Project in areas where it already operates I carried out the conversation where we saw the ground to the development of the Project.

I would like to emphasized the solution which we adopted in Poland - on the one hand, coordinators are separate Polish Chess Federation partners and we do not work in the office, on the other hand, work closely with both the agency of the Federation which is actively involved in the affairs of the project including accounting, contact with the media or aid in the distribution of books, as also with the management of the Polish Chess Federation which considering the project as a priority appointed two of its members for supporting the project. Moreover each of these two members became later on the coordinator of his own region.

As a result of so widespread organizational activities, since the new year, which is the second year of operation of the Project we signed a contract with the next nine regions which makes the 75% of the country is covered by the Project "Education through Chess in School". With so many new places we were not able to avoid discrepancies in the degree of implementation.

Thus, the regions can be divided into:

- the fully developed provinces where we started the second year of study, however we are still recruiting new units and conduct trainings, both basic and supplementary (3 regions)
- the fully developed provinces where we started the first year of study, after training teachers, and obtaining the favor of local educational governance (4 regions)
- regions which are just getting started with the Project, examine the local environment, conduct preliminary discussions with schools and local authorities (5 regions)

My personal ambition is as far as possible to increase the number of 250 schools (because so many more or less we are currently in the Project). Difficulties that may stand on my way are:

- the need to manage the increasing amount of units, which will force subsequent employment of coordinators
- the need to overcome the reluctance of some local authorities to implement the Project
- the need to obtain new financial resources to meet the need of providing chess equipment for the new schools
- change your outdoor conditions including political and economical

The Project "Education through Chess in School" just like any other project in addition to the efficient planning and organization also requires proper evaluation. Therefore, Polish Chess Federation, established cooperation with the best University of Economy in Poland – Akademia Leona Kozminkskiego. Scientific researchers of the University, by testing in selected schools will check whether, and if so, to what extent, do the results achieved by students participating in the program differs with those who achieve "ordinary" students. They will mainly focus on issues related to science, particularly mathematics. This is the main, of course, in addition to the reputational and economical, external determinant of the effectiveness of our activities.

However, in my opinion, relying only on the external evaluation would create an incomplete picture of the evaluation of the Project. As coordinator I see a lot of positive indicators of internal evaluation of the project such as:

- notification of new schools to the Project after seeing how the Project works in their "neighbor" school
- willingness for further training of additional teachers by schools already participating in the Project
- willingness to co-opt additional classes in schools already studying chess
- positive feedback from teachers who teach in the Project and the students' parents
- increasing acceptance of the Project in Polish chess environment

All this makes that I can be happy with my work, but what is learning to play chess without competition on 64 fields? The cherry on the cake was to organize a big event in the context of a summary of the first year of the Project "Education through Chess in School" in Poland. This tournament was held in Warsaw-Wesola on the 8th of June 2014. The event welcomed over 420 children from across the Poland. It was a great undertaking for both the organizers and arbiters. For 90% of children that was the first chess competition in their life which shows how much the Project promotes chess and how many new students introduces to the game of kings. For us as organizers and coordinators of the Project was essential, that the event was well organized and safe, the kids had a lot of interest and went out of the tournament satisfied. For this to happen we hired a nurse, we have organized many extra curricular activities such as art contest, football, outdoor chess, the ability to play with the chess grandmaster, demonstration of chivalry and many others. Each player received a prize and a personalized diploma. Who knows, maybe among them were future grandmasters? Above the partition, we would like to, thanks to the game of chess, develop young minds.

Bibliography

1. *Written Declaration of the European Union Parliament (0050/2011)*, issued on March 15th 2012
2. Webside of Project Education through Chess in School – www.szachywszkole.pl

Summary

Begins the second year of the project in Poland. In our work we aim to include the greatest possible number of schools. This is closely related to the deepening of relations with the local authorities - both national and chess. Three-quarters of the country is covered by the program at various stages of development. For the evaluation of the project we worked closely with a renowned university. We also conduct an internal evaluation of the project as well as organizing many events for children - participants of the program - including the final tournament for over 400 participants. We would like to share our knowledge and experiences as well as to acquire them from others who undertake similar activities in other countries.

