NEPC@10

NEPC HISTORY* *is about* Multi-*perspectivity*

* HISTORY

1. *The study of past events, particularly in human affairs*

The first chapter of this *libretto* presents the perspectives on the NEPC growth-path from the point of view of 4 different actors and witnesses of the first decade of one Network with a remarkable number of histories.

Alexandru Crisan, as the first NEPC president, gave to the organization an outstanding content-wise contribution, determining the attention to quality and the evidence-based approach that constitute an integral part of NEPC's work ethic.

Lana Jurko, as the NEPC executive director, supported NEPC becoming an independent young organization, balancing the commitment to results-oriented work and the care for the intra-personal relations within the Network, creating the perception of NEPC as a welcoming and open family.

The OSF financial support enhanced the development of a strong and stable Network while the dialogue established with Aleesha Taylor and Hugh McLean enriched it, due to their supportive and constructive attitude.

History is about multi-perspectivity and interpretation, their perspectives and interpretations are precious in understanding where NEPC comes from and how it could invest its forthcoming teen years.

Alexandru Crisan and Lana Jurko

2006 — 2016 *History and Heritage*

NEPC, founded in 2006 as a formal international network of education policy centres, was actually born long before the organization became official. Although still rather young, NEPC has had a challenging, yet dynamic, evolution. Its pre-history began during the symbolic shift to a new millennium, amidst new and challenging realities and paradigm shifts affecting systems of education throughout the world. From an informal group of individuals from different countries whose educational departments had formerly partnered with the Open Society Institute, the idea emerged of founding an education policy network. These education sector actors felt the need to maintain and further develop strong links with other similar entities. For various reasons, these diverse stakeholders shared a powerful desire to participate proactively in the process of educational transformation.

NEPC was born from this informal group of people sharing common values grounded in the belief that educational change is the key to societal change and a better future. From the collective belief that together they could make a difference, strengthened by shared enthusiasm, stamina, hope, worry, certainty and uncertainty, and maybe even some of the stereotypical romanticism ascribed to those who imagine new realities, NEPC became an official institution in 2006. Since then, sustained by dedicated collective and individual efforts and a lot of hard work, NEPC has achieved visible impacts in many of the educational systems of its members. NEPC has evolved through a number of development phases that encompass processes of reflection, debate, communication, action, success and sometimes failure. The following phases outline NEPC's path to becoming a strong and effective network in the past decade:

Establishing a unique organizational identity with a solid institutional vision and mission (2006 — 2008)

NEPC is a complex organization; conceptual, institutional and strategic foundations had to be carefully thought through, shared and reflected upon, discussed and agreed to, and then translated into concrete action. This process was not at all an easy one, but the end result has been an institutional profile with clear vision and mission, aims and priorities, and institutional structures and procedures, as well as a long term strategy and action plan.

Implementing the mission (2008–2010) → NEPC's focus shifted toward creating a clearly defined professional niche and earning the type of prestige and recognition that only substantive educational projects and their results can bring. Projects were designed and implemented, new priorities and financing opportunities were identified, and the range of financing sources was enlarged. During this phase, NEPC created its brands — the Summer School and the Policy Lab. NEPC put into place internal and external mechanisms and competent experts who effectively engaged in a high quality project management cycle from needs analysis to project implementation and dissemination of best practices. Gradually, as the quality of its projects and results improved, NEPC became well-known for its unique project topics and research approaches, not only in the region covered by its membership, but also in much broader professional and geographic spheres.

Engaging in reflection and growing from experience (2010–2012) → With its foundations established and experience to learn from, NEPC began a reflective process of questioning the strength of the organization's underlying philosophy, established processes, structures, and procedures. Lessons learnt fed back into NEPC's every day practices. Valuable concepts, such as the nature of unity in a network and how truly to turn an abstract institutional concept into a grassroots reality, were explored and clarified. Self-assessment and external evaluation were carried out in order to support reflection. From a supply-driven network that decided on its steps according to the dynamics of external financing bodies, NEPC became a network driven by its own demands and priorities.

Future thinking & tradition keeping (2013–2016) → In 2013, NEPC's initially elected Executive Board was refreshed and tasked with finalizing and operationalizing effective responses to the findings of the organization's previous reflective phase. A stronger and more dynamic NEPC emerged with a solid five year strategy (2016–2020) ensuring that the organization can successfully navigate the ever evolving challenges of achieving its mission in the years to come. New members have joined and new topics have emerged while the tradition of our learning events (Summer School & Policy Lab) and the culture of an open-minded and welcoming organization culture continues. The NEPC everlasting need for rethinking, reimagining, reflecting and regrouping ensures that we stay on target and continue to support our members in their quest — and ours — for improving education policy and practices.

Organizations are often evaluated by their impact. The impact of NEPC can be measured by the impact the network has on its members but also by the role NEPC members play in policy, research and advocacy in their given countries, and the impact this has on their educational systems. The organization's work has helped to highlight several unexplored or under-recognized trends in the education sector, such as the extent of hidden or

informal private payments for public education, the subtle ways in which history and social studies teaching and learning materials promote tolerance or intolerance, the lack of effective school policies for inclusion and the importance of critical thinking and curricular revisions to promote education for sustainability. NEPC research on the prevalence of private tutoring brought that previously unrecognized issue to the fore and highlighted the equity and legal dimensions inherent in public sector teachers restricting the teaching of core subject content to private tutoring sessions. Further, NEPC research has initiated policy debates at the national and international level as well as changes to curriculum and textbooks at the national level. When discussing impact of NEPC and its members, an important area is professional teacher development; many of NEPC's members work with teachers on a daily basis, which inevitably influences the education practice and, indirectly, education policy. From the Network analyses conducted in 2014 and 2015, members highlight the impact NEPC had on their organizations, mainly in opening new topics for them and enabling learning from each other. Finally, but not least important is the impact NEPC has had on individual lives of those associated with it. The NEPC viewpoint on impact is that it is woven by some measurable indicators and numerous immeasurable factors, moments, actions and feelings which we hope this publication will reveal to its reader

Aleesha Taylor →
Deputy Director, Education Support Program, Open Society Foundations

Reflection on the first decade

Striving towards independence →

'When I joined OSF in 2007 as a senior programme manager, NEPC was one of my first responsibilities. Before meeting them, I saw them as a way to remain in touch with and understand the OSF network. The lines between NEPC, ESP and OSF were very blurred. We were still their main funder, at that time they did not have grants from the Council of Europe or the EU as they have now. As a result, in 2007–2009 NEPC had not developed an independent perspective from the OSF, which is understandable — they were a new organisation and we were their main funder. A lot of attention was directed at understanding the priorities of ESP and OSF to make sure that they fitted.

Establishing a partnership →

However, after a few years, things started to change: conversations became more independent. From the beginning, our vision was for NEPC to be a partner organization, to which we have now evolved. There is a lot of collaboration and we still provide an institutional grant, but it is less than half of what it was seven years ago. The growing financial independence helped to encourage the more independent positioning of the Network. Initially many of the NEPC members were dependent on ESP for funding — it took a while for us to highlight the importance of the fact that NEPC members have to be beholden to NEPC, and not to ESP and our priorities. It also took a while for us to recognize and appreciate the conflict of interest that we sometimes created. If you have an institutional grant for NEPC, while having different relationships and partnerships with some of the members, it makes things a bit confusing. Things are clearer now; I removed myself from their Board, as we wanted to make sure that what was coming up was authentically the NEPC perspective, and not just a reflection of ESP priorities through NEPC. I still attend board meetings, but not in the strategic guidance or direction capacity — my role is more in the spirit of assisting on an issue or helping with clarification.

Independent and capable →

For me that moment was when they went for the Education for Sustainability (ENjoined) project. It was a strategic direction that had nothing to do with ESP and my initial reaction was quite negative. I thought to myself 'Why would you do that? This is outside your area of expertise and opening up this entirely new, random

area could be a distraction for the Network'. The fact that they didn't seek our approval and decided to go forward with it in spite of our reservations pleased me. It showed that our opinions and objections were taken into account, but didn't influence the decision. It was a sign of their strategic and institutional independence: we were functioning as equal partners. To see how the Education for Sustainability programme had developed and opened up new policy spaces and partnership models between CSOs in different sectors, which rarely happens, was great.

We value the partnership → The value of NEPC partnership with OSF, from our perspective, is seeing NEPC as a resource, as an example of how we are able to maintain connections to the fields in which they're working with in a different way than we do with our foundations. We have been able to call on NEPC when we needed specific regional expertise regarding mapping or influencing funding decisions from our end.

And now... → I can't believe it's been 10 years. In many ways I feel as though we've grown up together and to see NEPC now, the way that they engage with Council of Europe projects, it's just great. They are becoming a locus around which things are evolving. Look at the work of the SIRIUS network, for example, where NEPC engagement helped SIRIUS stay on track. The type of leadership that NEPC provides, not just for us but for policy networks and policy actors in the region that work on the issues of discrimination and marginalization in education is invaluable.

Birthday presents → One of the things I'm always impressed by is the common sense of understanding of the purpose and the essence of education that is always present at NEPC gatherings and events such as Summer Schools. That quality is so rare it's almost like a gift.

Hugh McLean
Director, Education Support Program, Open Society Foundations

From puppy to watchdog

There were high expectations that NEPC would take forward a lot of the mission that the Foundation has had initially. There was a huge enthusiasm for this. It took a while for NEPC to find its focus and its teeth... I remember always saying initially we wanted a watch dog for education issues, but, at first, NEPC was bit of a puppy. Now I think it has developed into a more robust watchdog, with real teeth and real paws. I think some of the promise we've seen there, in that first meeting is, in fact, something that we've been able to realize today. It's been fantastic to see that.

Strength and value →

The real strength of NEPC can be seen in the values and the actual mechanism that it represents. We value their engagement with proper research centres at the universities because a lot of the Foundation work was quite disconnected from the research capacity that exists in the universities. They were able to pull in a range of young researchers and renew the sense of membership a lot more quickly than we were able to in the Foundation. Another key thing, from my point of view, is that NEPC represents an independent, critical take on policy developments within countries. It's not only an independent voice, but it is also a national, local voice — so not a critique coming from the outside, from the EU and other organizations, but from local independent organizations. Therefore, it is not only the quality of its work and its analysis that is important, but also its willingness to take an independent stance and to adopt and stand for national perspectives.

Towards independence →

We realized, very early on, that the educational expertise that we thought was in the Foundation initially, started emerging through NEPC after a very short period of time. From our point of view NEPC became an essential way of continuing a tradition of the Foundation that we just couldn't do through the Foundations themselves.

Earlier on we shared ideas that we'd be doing similar things, but recently they've been branching out, pursuing things that are of interest to them such as the environment or sustainable development issues... that's really crucial, it's good to see that.

They're special because... →

For me it's about process, not so much a specific project. A network of independent think tanks does not have to be special by definition. But when they are connected with a view of

transforming education that is pro social justice, that is pro open society, looking for a world that is more able to engage everyone in the education system and build a more equitable education system...then it's a mechanism that is quite special. If we were able to extend that across other sectors, it would be enormously valuable.

Future collaboration →

NEPC has shown that it's been able to sustain itself — we no longer feel that we are carrying the whole burden of funding NEPC — NEPC is able to generate quite a bit of its own income. I do believe we will continue our support, both through financial support and active collaboration.

I wish for you... →

In the next ten years I would like to see a bigger NEPC with bigger teeth, able to make more bold moves. But the key thing is for it to be able to renew and generate a young leadership that is able to take on education policy. Finding new people with the old people remaining, resulting in a network that is deepened and strengthened over twenty years, that would be enough for me.

NEPC *is about its* MEMBERS*

Institutional members

ALBANIA — Children Are the Future (CAF),
AZERBAIJAN — Center for Innovations in Education (CIE),
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA — promente Social Research,
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA — Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step,
CROATIA — Forum for Freedom in Education (FFE),
CROATIA — Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD),
CZECH REPUBLIC — Open Society Fund Prague,
ESTONIA — PRAXIS Center for Public Studies,
GEORGIA — International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management (EPPM),
KOSOVO — Kosova Education Center (KEC),
KYRGYZSTAN — Foundation Education Initiatives Support (FEIS),
LATVIA — Center for Public Policy PROVIDUS,
LITHUANIA — Vilnius University, Education Policy Center (EPC),
MACEDONIA — Macedonian Civic Education Centre (MCEC),
MACEDONIA — Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives Step by Step,
MOLDOVA — Association Educational Centre PRO DIDACTICA,
MONGOLIA — Mongolian Education Alliance (MEA),
MONTENEGRO — Pedagogical Center of Montenegro,
RUSSIA — Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSSES),
SERBIA — Centre for Education Policy (CEP),
SLOVENIA — CPZ International Centre for Knowledge Promotion (CPZ),
SLOVENIA — Educational Research Institute (ERI),
TURKEY — Education Reform Initiative (ERI)

* MEMBER

1. *A person, animal, or plant belonging to a particular group*

1.1. *A person, country, or organization that has joined a group, society, or team*

NEPC members are not only part of the NEPC group; they belong to a particular group of people and organizations that believe in education and are committed to the cause of quality education for all. All NEPC members (current and former) have contributed to creating the cohesive network that NEPC is, enriched the platform of knowledge sharing, and empowered NEPC to achieve the results we can present today.

This chapter includes the interviews and stories of the representatives of NEPC current members. It presents their views on and experiences with NEPC, it highlights the importance of the learning dimension in this Network, tracks the history of NEPC projects and offers the Secretariat's impressions of their organizations.

Children Are the Future

ALBANIA

Joined NEPC in 2014. A reliable partner and when it comes to an integral (whole) school approach CAF is the ideal interlocutor! Their commitment to work, positive attitude and optimistic communication make CAF the partner NEPC would always like to have in a project!

Professionalism, commitment and dedication as our motivation

Rozeta Hoxhallari

'Regional Support for Inclusive Education' was an entrance ticket to NEPC for Rozeta's organization but also an opportunity to deal with inclusion on a more professional level in their own country. It did not take much time to see that joining the project was a great decision.

Q: *How important was this co-operation for you and your country?*

A: Very important. After a number of our organisation's initiatives to support various schools and communities in Albania for a better and more inclusive education and society, the Inclusion project was considered a very important and comprehensive intervention. Working through a partnership of highly professional and experienced organizations, it has helped us strengthen our capacity and extend our co-operation at the national and international level.

Q: *What are the concrete results at the national level?*

A: It has enhanced understanding of Inclusive Education among different stakeholders and has ensured development of various inclusive school-based policies and practices. More specifically, seven schools in Albania have developed for the first time through a participatory approach a three-year School Development Plan and have also designed and implemented their school-based projects that have been leading towards policies that are more inclusive practices and a more welcoming school atmosphere.

Q: *Could you use the word 'welcoming'when you decided to become a NEPC member?*

A: Of course, it was Lana's kind invitation that encouraged us to apply for NEPC membership after almost a year of partnership. It was exactly this successful co-operation, through which we had identified common areas of interest, shared values and aspirations that increased our motivation and interest in becoming a NEPC member. In addition, the high level of professionalism, commitment and dedication of the NEPC core team, its board and other member organizations strengthened our motivation to establish a long-term co-operation and partnership.

Q: *In which position do you see yourself in this partnership? What would you like in the future?*

A: I see myself actively participating in various NEPC meetings, project events, conferences and even training, making my contribution and further developing my skills and knowledge, as well as promoting CAF and NEPC values, principles and goals. As for our organization, I see it as a very close and highly dedicated partner of NEPC in various future projects and initiatives aiming at better quality, more democratic and inclusive education and highly promoted Education for Sustainability at local, national and international levels. My CAF colleagues and I wish NEPC Many Happy Returns of the Day and a Bright and Prosperous Future! Happy birthday!

REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, SUPPORT TO PILOT SCHOOLS FOR IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES · *Partners* FFE (HR), proMENTE (BA), SBS (BA), CAF (AL), MCEC (MK), KEC (XK), Forum MNE (MNE), CEP (SRB) · *NEPC role* Project leader · *Duration* 2014–2015 · *Funded by* Council of Europe, European Commission · The project aimed at breaking barriers for all vulnerable groups in the education sector and promoting the concept of inclusive education as a reform principle that respects and caters for diversity among all learners. It has been implemented in seven countries: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, the Republic of Macedonia and Serbia. The project was focused on supporting mechanisms and resources for 49 pilot inclusive schools, raising awareness on benefits of inclusive education, enhancing capacities of policy makers, improving teacher competencies and making progress on the removal of tangible barriers for vulnerable groups through stronger partnerships. The Project had a 'bottom-up' approach that helps policy-makers move from experience in the field to mainstream education reforms. NEPC experts developed methodology for the qualitative part of the research (focus groups) and produced a comparative report on the findings. Activities of partner organisations were focused on continually assisting the schools in implementing the Index for Inclusion methodology. This consisted of setting up focus groups in order to conduct participatory action research, which was used to help the schools establish priorities. Each school prepared a project according to those priorities and individual school development plans were then made according to those projects. The development and implementation of those plans was tracked in brief progress reports to CoE. The final phase of the project was the production of an inclusive education sustainability plan for each school along with recommendations on how to sustain support at national and regional levels.

Center for Innovations in Education

AZERBAIJAN

One of the NEPC founding members. CIE brought to NEPC vast experience in direct work with schools as well as the understanding of NEPC as a network of people. Wonderful hosts of several NEPC events. Their faith in education, despite the challenging context they work in, represents an inspiring life lesson for the Network!

It was my discovery

Elmina Kazimzade

Not being in the list of countries that are part of the Private Tutoring project did not discourage Elmina from joining the research team when her colleague invited her: *'That project was for more policy-oriented NGOs and at the time maybe they thought that we still weren't ready. But private tutoring was a big issue in Azerbaijan so I didn't want to miss a chance to learn something new. It was also the right time for me to move from a coordinating and managing line of work towards research'.* Very soon she realized that she had made a good decision: *'I was really inspired by all the creativity related to freedom in research. Unfortunately, I didn't manage to attend the Zagreb meeting but my colleague represented our country and I was so surprised with the feedback. You could see and feel personal commitment and emotions but at the same time a high level of professionalism within all those people'.* For Elmina and her organization, the Zagreb meeting was a turning point — Baku was elected to host the next GA and Elmina became a board member: *'First of all there was this professional motivation to be a part of a professional community. Second, before NEPC, our membership was mostly related to OSI networks or programme networks and this was a chance to feel a spirit of new networking, to be part of a diverse group of people from whom you can learn a lot and exchange ideas, as opposed to being isolated in your own country. I think that is the true highlight about NEPC — it is a space for people from different countries to be together and discuss issues that are very important for education'.* Elmina admits that this unique experience the Network offers can sometimes be hard and challenging, especially during research projects: *'There were some technical mistakes on The Parental Informal Payment Study → and negative reactions from members. It was a great lesson for me on research ethics'.* But, as always, the NEPC secretariat was very supportive and prepared to solve problems in the best possible way, because the mistakes were minor compared to all the good products of the Network. With that in mind, Elmina is very proud of some decisions they made while she was president of the board and also while she was a board member: *'We supported and included Summer School activities, considering it an important strategy dimension because it became a NEPC product. We are now recognized through our Summer Schools — creativity, topics and an inspiring environment. Also, I am more than proud of my professional development that happened during all that time'.* She became more than a teacher and the best opportunity to show that progress was during the Summer

Schools: *'I am lecturing at the local university that I am accustomed to, but teaching at international summer schools is more challenging. You have to teach in English, decide about topics and projects, work on the comparative international curriculum...it is an entire process. But it's not only about schooling, it's also about connecting. For example, there is Roussel, a Brazilian teacher from the UK, who tries to be at every summer school and because of that networking he is now going to work with our teachers in Baku. That is NEPC sustainability'.* But the most important thing Elmina gained was the ability to be a mediator and teach values, the ones that she had before NEPC and the ones that came with the network*: 'I learned how to think about education cross regionally and not to be stuck just in my own country, projects, donors...NEPC was my discovery'.*

PARENTAL INFORMAL PAYMENTS IN EDUCATION STUDY — PIPES · *Partners* CIE (AZ), EPPM (GEO), CED BILIM (KZ), SKDS (LV), IPP (MD), Orava (SK), SGI (SK), CREC (SK), Panorama (TJK) · *NEPC role* Project coordinator · *Duration* 2007–2010 · *Funded by* Open Society Foundations · In most Post-Soviet bloc countries public education is free of charge. Nevertheless, schools are frequently asking parents to contribute money for various purposes. At the same time, the system of accountability and transparency of funds collected is under question. There is no clarity on which fees contributed to schools are allowed and should be encouraged and which are illegal. Without clear understanding of these processes, parents are not likely to hold teachers and administrators accountable for the provision of an equitable, quality education. Consequently, a general lack of transparency is likely to lead to a variety of corrupt practices in the education system — from the paying of informal (and in some cases, illegal) fees to outright bribing of the school officials. The goal of this project was to evaluate the transparency of informal parental payments to public schools in seven countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Slovakia, and Latvia. To this end, country reports were prepared after the collection and analysis of data, and the project was finalized by publishing a comparative report.

proMENTE, Social Research

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

A founding member of NEPC. A team of excellent researchers, their inspiring approach in designing methodologies and projects make the NEPC Secretariat prouder each time we co-operate to have them in the Network. Talented storytellers and perfect hosts, the expression 'dream team' was certainly coined thinking of them!

Networking is priceless

Ivona Čelebičić

'Networking is nowadays one of the most treasured values, so from my point of view I think that's the biggest benefit I got from NEPC, because all those acquaintances are priceless. Besides networking, there is the knowledge we gained at every event that NEPC organized, especially in Summer Schools, where we had the chance for complete introduction into specific topics and learning about them, which often became our point of interest later. For example, that happened with Sustainability in Education, but I must say that all the projects we did together were great from the first one (APREME) ↓ to the last one was about inclusion and I am going to be proud if just two of those seven schools in our country that were involved become inclusive. We are all aware of the fact that we cannot achieve inclusive education overnight but this project gave us all a great foundation for future change in our schools, enabling us to continue with good practice. That is what is so special about NEPC: this network is always supportive in both material and non-material ways because the people are there for you. Of course, we are all members because we want to improve education systems in our countries but we also have mutual interests, we help each other out. It's like a family. I wish that we all continue respecting the rules and our responsibilities even when we become bigger and more global so that this special family never falls apart'.

ADVANCING PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS IN EDUCATION — APREME · *Partners* KEC (XK) Project leader, OSFA (AL), CEDU (RO), MOST (SRB), proMENTE (BA) · *NEPC role* Project partner · *Duration* 2009–2011 · *Funded by* European Commission, Open Society Foundations · The Balkans, as a multi-ethnic region, still has the issue of children from ethnic minority backgrounds attending mainstream schools being faced with negative attitudes and prejudices. There is a clear need for sustained effort at expanding the access to quality inclusive education. The objectives of this project were to establish a functional regional network to advance inclusion in education and make relevant information on the participation and representation of ethnic minorities available at the school level. It was also our aim to collect and disseminate examples of good practices concerning the issue and to encourage local initiatives for improving participation and representation of ethnic minorities. To that end, national surveys for participation and representation of ethnic minorities in school based decision making were undertaken and a regional report with recommendations for improvement was produced. We also organized a regional discussion workshop and collected and published good practices for combating inequality and advancing quality through stakeholders' participation. The activities within this project also included support for local initiatives for improving participation and representation of ethnic minorities at school level.

Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Joined NEPC in 2012. There is only one word which describes Step B&H, its staff, the activities they implement, and the contribution they give to a project and events — and the word is: AMAZING! (Sometimes) you will need to change the meeting room disposition if they participate in an NEPC event, but a NEPC event without them is unimaginable!

Changes do not come overnight

Radmila Rangelov-Jusović

'It was that moment when you feel that you've known each other your entire lives' — this is how Radmila describes her first contact with Lana. It sounds like the beginning of a great love story but it was in fact the beginning of a great friendship and co-operation. She felt the need for professional development so she was looking around for opportunities and found out on the Internet about the NEPC Summer School. Additionally, her friends from OSF confirmed that it was a very interesting event, especially because the subject was sustainable development. Radmila did not regret going to Primošten: *'I realized that the philosophy of NEPC and the way they work was so much in line with my own values and the values of my organization. There was almost no need for introduction or for a long getting to know each other. I liked the interaction of professionals in different fields, the way they combined a small vacation with a lot of discussion and work., I got some new perspectives on education and had to rethink my opinions in that field...it was a big challenge but also a real opportunity'.* Radmila decided after the Summer School that it was a great moment to join NEPC: *'Working in the field of education in one specific network for a long time, especially when most of that work is in your own country, you become kind of isolated. We needed partners who had similar perspective as we do but also who could provide us with new insight and opportunities. Becoming part of the Network was a strategic decision for us because we wanted to open up, meet people and organizations and learn more about education policies'.* One of the opportunities to have an impact on practices in education, but also in education policies, was in the project about inclusive education: *'I'm so happy that I met people with knowledge and experience from the region because we have to count on each other and help each other. This project gives us all space and a chance to start other initiatives and to change something in our countries. I hope we will do a good job'.* As all NEPC members are, Radmila is also aware of the fact that in educational systems you cannot expect changes overnight so mutual support between NEPC people is one of the biggest NEPC values: *'You have a feeling that you belong somewhere, that there are people who struggle for education the same as you. This is a network of people who are all dedicated and passionate and willing to contribute'.* In the birthday wish, Radmila is being positive and supportive, which is not a surprise, considering that support is something you cannot avoid in NEPC: *'I would really wish for all of them to feel proud of themselves because we rarely celebrate accomplishments. It's not*

about writing a monograph or writing a report or listing all the things you do... Only the people from NEPC and around it understand how much effort was needed to accomplish all those things. We are maybe raised to be modest, or not to be, but we should be celebrating ourselves more and the people around us and be proud of ourselves because of the courage we have to carry on and to do what we do. So I wish them that, I wish them courage, I wish them a bigger network, but the same quality. I wish that other people recognize what they do, but I also wish that they have that feeling of satisfaction, that they have accomplished something, and that together we are moving the educational field forward'.

Forum for Freedom in Education →

CROATIA

Joined NEPC in 2009. The experience FSO gained in teacher trainings and in direct work with schools in combination with their strategic thinking and creativity make them a precious and valuable partner! The Forum team is hard working, dedicated, passionate and multi-talented!

Education is the only way to change the world

Mario Bajkuša

When he came to Bucharest to meet all the members for the first time and present his organization, Mario could not have imagined that he was going to be a board president in the future: *'I remember I was very nervous. The reason was my English and the fact they are all so smart and educated so in a way I felt 'small' in front all of them, but I suppose I did my job very well because Forum became a member at that GA. I was fascinated by Alecu who was the president at the time because I realized he knew everything about every educational system of the countries he worked in. I got the impression that he´s so capable but doing it all so easily and with a smile on his face. When you see how exceptional people are at the head of the organization you can´t imagine, even in your dreams, that you are going to take their place eight years later'.* Although he could not believe it, the position of president is just one of the results of the successful co-operation between Forum and NEPC. Together they opened up very important issues like corruption and sustainability in the educational systems which were, from Mario's perspective, a step forward for his organization: *'When we applied for membership our motivation was to co-operate on international projects, to be a part of that community and, through NEPC, we made it. I believe our partnership brought us mutual benefits. We included NEPC in some of our projects → but also, because of ENjoinED, our organization now has its own education for sustainability programme'.* Apart from that organizational growth, Mario has developed professionally and personally: *'First of all I´m much better in English now because that was a big obstacle for me. Secondly, I think NEPC gave me the chance to get out from the bubble as I became aware how big the diversity of the educational systems is. On one side you see how hard it is in some countries, how many problems they have that we had twenty years ago, and you feel happy because your country isn´t in that position any more. But on the other side, when you get back home from that west side of the world, you get an urge to cry but also to work harder to solve the problems of your own country. In NEPC you are constantly getting the motivation to persist in the stance that education is the only way to change the world'.* In addition to the common goals he shares with NEPC and the values such

as transparency, openness and sustainability that he appreciates most about the Network, Mario enjoys a lot of Network activities and events like the Summer School: *'My first one was in Slovenia and I was very surprised by the homework we were given there. I remember I was typing it for the whole night but I still got a C! But those schools are great because you travel to really special places and you learn a lot, but in an informal atmosphere. I´m not so much into social activities but in Primošten I decided to perform as Frank Sinatra'. The future will almost certainly be whatever you want it to be*, said Sinatra in his song 'Future' and regarding the future of the Network, Mario expects and believes in great things:*"I would like NEPC to become an organization that will have a flagship event or report that governments will dread. It has to be in all three fields — sustainability, inclusion and transparency in education. We have to establish ourselves more so we could be equal partners to institutions like Council of Europe or UNESCO. Besides, at the organization level I see more space for closer co-operation and support between each other because when one of us is endangered we have to feel that we all are. We are all gathered around the same mission — to prove that education spending is an investment in our future and we have to continue building a democratic society'.*

LEADERSHIP FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY: EMPOWERING TEACHERS AND YOUTH FOR ACTIVE ROLE IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES · *Partners* FFE (HR), Vukovar Srijem County (HR) · *NEPC role* Project partner · *Funded by* European Commission · *Duration* 2011–2013 · Post-war education in some areas of the country has seen a separate schooling approach for minority and majority students, most notably in the Vukovar-Srijem County. As the National Curricula Framework and other documents and action plans stressed the importance of implementing civic education or education for democratic citizenship and human rights, there was a need for exploring that phenomenon and its practices at the scientific level and for providing some relevant recommendations and training. This project aimed to strengthen the capacities of the educational system and youth in the local community in the field of democratization, human rights, minority integration, and non-violent conflict resolution in Vukovar-Srijem County by mapping the impact that the practice of separate schooling has on the civic attitudes of their student. Its goal was also to support and equip youth for an active role in the local community by providing additional tools and knowledge to teachers and expert staff in the field of civic education and teacher leadership. As part of the project, interviews were conducted with key policy makers on the topic of separate schooling. Data was gathered through focus groups including parents, students and teachers in four different Croatian regions on separation issues. The findings were presented to key stakeholders and a conference with international and domestic experts on separate schooling and its impact on society and civic enculturation was organized.

LOCAL PARTNERSHIP FOR ANTI-CORRUPTION EDUCATION · *Partners* FFE (HR), LDA Osijek (HR), LDA Sisak (HR), IZ Split (HR), proMENTE (BA) · *NEPC role* Project partner · *Duration* 2013–2014 · *Funded by* European Commission · Corruptive and unethical behaviour within the education system in Croatia, especially secondary education, has not been systemically researched or tackled until now. It is something people are aware of, but seldom officially raised as an issue. The goal of this project was to establish a more engaged role of the civil society in the identification, implementation, support and further development of anti-corruption policies and practices in Croatia's education system. The aim was to raise awareness of students on the harmful effects of certain practices and to provide support to local education stakeholders in conducting anti-corruption policies and practices in schools. This was be achieved by using qualitative and quantitative research methods through a survey in which the attitudes of students, parents and principals were studied, followed by awareness-raising workshops and a conference.

Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Center for Educational Research & Development
CROATIA

A *member oriented* Network

Iris Marušić

A founding member of NEPC. CERD was the first home of NEPC as it hosted the Network for the first few years. The co-operation with CERD as a centre of excellence in the field of interdisciplinary scientific and developmental educational research contributed to high quality and recognized research conducted in the Network as well as the introduction of unexplored education topics in the NEPC Region.

As NEPC actually operated for the first few years from the same office she still sits in, Iris remembers well how the Network story began: *'I remember Lana texted me from the meeting they had in Vilnius and she presented me with the idea of forming a network of education policy centres that could be led by our institution. She felt somehow that she could lead this newly-formed organization and I know I was very supportive because at the time we had to make a step forward from the initial phase of the development of the Network'.* She believed in Lana's capabilities to achieve new goals as they had closely collaborated since before NEPC was founded: *'Lana was our very valuable technical support and administration person at the centre so I knew she could make it'*. Iris admits that she did not have any expectations from the Network at the time but she is now very surprised with its capability for managing very large scale projects. She also thinks the Network has outgrown its initial mission and goals: *'They have really become strong and visible, their members are very committed to working on common projects and goals, but NEPC also cares very much about their needs and priorities. This is the secret of their success, they aren't self-but member-oriented'.* As IDIZ opened some very important topics through NEPC which helped their young researchers develop and gain reputations, and considering they have similar goals in the educational field, Iris is assured of their future co-operation: *'NEPC is very flexible in adapting and responding to changes, they recognize opportunities for future development and opening new fields. That's a great foundation for our collaboration, but also for their future, which is very promising. I really couldn't wish them more than they already have for their birthday except — Happy Birthday NEPC'!*

Open Society Fund Prague
CZECH REPUBLIC

A *newcomer*

Lucie Plešková

Joining NEPC in 2015, OSF Prague is the newest member and a welcome addition to our network. Seeing as their work on inclusive education is complementary to that of many other NEPC members, we are looking forward to expanding the co-operation and pooling our efforts in future activities.

The Open Society Fund Prague (OSF Prague) has been supporting the development of an open society and promoting systematic changes that help to strengthen democracy in the Czech Republic for more than 20 years. In OSF Prague we consider good education to be a fundamental factor in building an active, tolerant, and democratic civil society.

Our long-term goal is to support an inclusive education, which provides equal opportunities for all children regardless of their ethnicity, social status or handicaps. We implement our advocacy activities regarding the issues of inclusive education, tackling discrimination and equal opportunities in education. We are engaged in debate on inclusive education with government, ministries, local authorities, non-profit organizations, and other professionals. We support early childhood care and the use of education as an effective tool of inclusion of disadvantaged children, model kindergartens and schools of good inclusive practice, and an Alliance of Parents for Inclusion and young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. For many years, the foundation has provided scholarships to secondary school and university students in order to enable them to attend prestigious foreign schools and acquire an international experience.

As a part of the international Open Society Foundations network, we are aware of the importance and significant role of international partnerships and co-operation in our work. It was an opportunity to exchange experience, examples of best practices and knowledge with other important education policy centres abroad, to gain inspiration and to see current trends and models concerning education policies that then led us to join the Network of Education Policy Centers a year ago. One of our strategic objectives is to explore the situation of inclusive education in the neighbouring countries and their experience with its promotion. We would like to utilize our experience with promotion of inclusive education in the Czech Republic and are exploring if we could support similar initiatives and movements abroad.

PRAXIS Center for Public Studies
ESTONIA

A founding member of NEPC, the active participation of the PRAXIS team as well as their professional approach greatly contributed to the quality of projects in which PRAXIS has participated. Their expertise empowered the NEPC Secretariat in organizational development providing strategic thinking as well as clearer structure and procedures.

Knowledge, partnerships & friendship

Laura Kirss

'*Without Lana and the Secretariat staff, their huge commitment, energy, creativity and hard work, NEPC would not be what it is now; I can't imagine NEPC without Lana, who has been the heart and soul of the organisation'!* — was the message Laura wanted to emphasize in her NEPC story. Like other members of the Network, her organization has also recognized NEPC as an important partner in taking a professional step forward in the field of education as it represented the values and goals that they strived for in Estonia, especially in promoting evidence-based policy-making and equitable access.

Becoming a board member was not only her personal endeavour but also important to PRAXIS in advancing its strategic objectives, since it considers it important to share its think-tank management experience and professional know-how with other NGOs, as well as recognizing the importance of learning from other similar organisations and professionals. Laura sees NEPC as a valuable source of knowledge, partnerships, friendship and of professional and personal learning.

In the first ten years, NEPC has become a strong Network with a proper functioning logic, traditions, vision and strategy and a serious partner and expert on some of the topics in education like private tutoring and sustainable education.

Speaking about future changes, Laura believes' *NEPC should continue developing in the same direction it has done so far, outlining the new objectives for the new strategy. I would not change anything dramatically. One thing that we have not been able to achieve entirely is learning from member organisations (inter-member knowledge sharing) — hopefully we will find a mechanism to make it work. Also, I hope less active members will find an opportunity to co-operate in Network projects'*

International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management

GEORGIA

Going global

Tamar Bregvadze

A founding member of NEPC, the active participation of EPPM staff in the strategic development of NEPC and the Board has brought creativity and vitality to our network. The NEPC events organized by them were the perfect mix of impeccable organization and dining well, and brought the tradition of Georgian TAMADA speeches to major NEPC events.

PRIVATE TUTORING PHENOMENON: DEVELOPING POLICY OPTIONS · *Partners* CERD (HR), CIE (AZ), EPPM (GEO), PRAXIS (EST), proMENTE (BA) · *NEPC role* Project leader · *Duration* 2009–2012 · *Funded by* OSF · Findings from previous projects dealing with private tutoring revealed it to be an omnipresent phenomenon with several positive and many more negative connotations. A lack of substantial change since the original project in the countries studied prompted us to study further this issue and attempt to find solutions and advocate policy changes. Our aim was to explore education stakeholders' perspective on the PT phenomenon. In partnership with participants, it was also our goal to develop tailored educational policy solutions for this phenomenon in participating countries and compare existing solutions from those countries in the context of the overall project. This was accomplished by interviewing the stakeholders and discussing with them appropriate models for regulating private tutoring. Press packs were written and published to disseminate the findings of the project.

'When you are in the position where you have to wait for results for a long period of time, as is the case in the field of education, NEPC is a great motivator to persist in spite of all the political changes or other obstacles that come your way' — this is something that Tamuna recognized in NEPC soon after she became a member. She also realized that a network is the only chance for some countries to communicate with others, as there is often major political influence that separates them and isolates them from donors. In the aspect of her professional development, NEPC provided her with lots of new research opportunities: 'On one hand I was given a chance to 'go out'.

First of all I received data from other countries which I could analyse from different perspectives. I learnt new methods and skills from the researchers I worked with and they all became potential partners for me and my organization. Additionally, as a result of the project on private tutoring, ← I now have additional international publications, which is very important for my academic career'. That particular project was the most challenging one for Tamuna in terms of methodology and content, but she is very proud of the final product.

Over all these years she had developed a sense of belonging to the Network so she decided to contribute more through board membership: 'Working with all these people is interesting and inspiring so I could say that the reasons for joining the board were mostly personal but also filled with my desire to make NEPC even better than it is at the moment. The Network is doing great things on the international level and for its members, but it has to be more global so the products that we all create become more accessible and visible to others, especially to the stakeholders in education'. She believes this is the best moment to start being more proactive: 'We are at the stage when some of the long-term strategy documents at the global level are being reviewed, so, with our experience, we can influence the process of planning for the next ten or twenty years. We could have a big role in the field of education so we just have to be prepared. There are no similar networks to NEPC where the countries can be so united in achieving goals so it's time to use our power'!

Kosova Education Center
KOSOVO

Professionalism, transparency and respect

Ardita Hima

A founding member of NEPC, no NEPC multi-country project without KEC is even imaginable. Their dedication to the schools and teachers they work with goes far beyond the line of duty. KEC team is innovative and open-minded and a gracious host.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE — ENjoinED · *Partners* FFE (HR), ZA (HR), proMENTE (BA), KEC (XK), MAR (XK), MCEC (MK), Planetum (MK), PRAXIS (EST), Focus (SLO), CEDU (RO), EPPM (GEO), CERD (HR), SEI Tallin (EST) · *NEPC role* Project leader · *Duration* 2010–2012 · *Funded by* EC · Education for sustainability is a topic crucial for countries with a difficult heritage of the past (war, social inequalities, pollution, development without a clear vision), where decisions that concern all members of the society and their future successors were (are) often made irrationally and based on particular interests. The ENjoinED organizations decided to strengthen their message through scientific evidence, by finding out what exists in the national education curricula that is relevant for sustainability. Even though evidence based policy making is not a recent invention in global terms, one can claim that evidence is not frequently used to characterise narratives about the present and the future of the states of the ENjoinED region. One might also claim that 'evidence' is often trapped in the circle of academia and scientific institutes. Growing out of such a situation, ENjoinED organizations saw the use of evidence as a part of the political maturity and political culture of a society. They also saw themselves as a legitimate actor for conducting this kind of research, benefiting from their expertise gained through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The objectives of the project were to map the coverage of climate change, environmental protection and sustainable development in pre-secondary national curricula of four IPA, one ENPI and three new EU countries; to forge a sustainable partnership between educational and environmental CSOs at national and regional levels; to develop educational modules for adults, targeted at private enterprises, public authorities and pre-secondary and secondary school teachers; and, to develop and advocate policy recommendations outlining the inclusion of essential environmental protection and sustainable development subjects into national pre-secondary education curricula. These objectives were met through activities such as the development of a research matrix; research on national curricula; presentation of research findings and discussion; conducting comparative research; initiative website development and maintenance; workshops on: climate and energy, school environmental education, EU climate and environmental policies, environmental protection and climate change, reading and writing for critical thinking educational methodology; development of adult educational modules for teachers, public authorities, businesses; Policy Lab seminars; writing and advocacy of 7 national environmental education policy briefs and, finally, a regional conference.

'Sometimes, when you want to write about something that's special, you can't find the right words. But first of all, I would like to say that for me NEPC means Lana. She is the only one who has always been there for me and my organization. I couldn't write these words about NEPC if she hadn't been there. Professionalism, transparency and respect were the key elements in building a good relationship between NEPC and KEC. We cooperate closely on implementing projects, we discuss all activities in detail and we are both always willing to contribute in order to make sure our activities have the best possible outcome. It is hard to say which project was the most important, because they all are. But for me, the ENjoinED ← project was the most interesting one. Thanks to NEPC, I acquired a new mindset and I gained new competences and knowledge in different aspects. We are more than sure that we will continue our co-operation with them, especially in projects that directly or indirectly address human rights, sustainability and inclusiveness, the field where NEPC has developed a high level of expertise. Happy birthday NEPC, I hope you will like my birthday wish: *N-ever stop, even when you are tired. E-very day try to work hard. P-eople envy what you do. C-reative be as much as you can!*

Foundation Education Initiatives Support
KYRGYZSTAN

Connecting the 'knots'

Aleksandr Ivanov

A founding member of NEPC. Their creative and professional approach brings NEPC valuable perspective of the educational challenges they face, approaches they adopt and solutions they provide. Their membership proves that barriers of many kilometres and occasionally language can be overcome when there are shared values.

The Foundation for Education Initiatives Support was presented at the first meetings on the foundation of the NEPC network and, even earlier, at regular meetings of Soros Foundation national representatives on education issues, where the very idea of the network was born.

NEPC membership has played a very important role throughout the process of establishing and developing our foundation. This process represented a journey from a conglomerate of education programmes to the creation of a stable and lasting professional organisation that has become widely known for its expertise.

For us, NEPC membership has represented and still represents our connection to large global processes in education and to the main worldwide trends in educational reform. Access to high-level expertise and the opportunity to exchange information and experience with colleagues from neighbouring countries have served to enhance significantly e the status of our organisation both within the country and beyond its borders.

Structural differences in education systems are growing from year to year among the former USSR countries, and even among the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe. However, despite these differences, the general character of the challenges that arise in our changing world and the common nature of some of the problems that stem from a common past urge us to find shared solutions with our neighbours. This network represents this kind of opportunity.

In our perspective, the NEPC network is like a net that connects the development and learning of its 'knots' — professional organisations interconnected by information channels, shared projects, and publications. This net helps to strengthen each of its knots, letting us hope that, by working together, we might catch many fish.

Center for Public Policy PROVIDUS
LATVIA

We are all here for a reason

Indra Mangule

A founding member of NEPC. PROVIDUS *was always ready to join* NEPC *in its endeavours to explore the sensitive and neglected topics in education. They ensured* NEPC *was future thinking and that it follows global educational trends (not to mention fashion trends ☺).*

MAKING HISTORY WORK FOR TOLERANCE — A RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGY TO REDUCE THE INTOLERANT USAGE OF HISTORY TEACHING · *Partners* Providus (LV), Orava (SK), Euroclio (NL), Danish HTA (DK) · *NEPC role* Project leader · *Duration* 2012–2014 · *Funded by* OSF · History is one of the subjects often identified to be well equipped to foster the values of peace, human rights and inclusion education. However, history education has been traditionally subjected to fierce political interference, indoctrination and propaganda. Moreover, history lessons are often perceived by students as irrelevant or boring. Innovative new approaches based on multi-perspective historical narratives, empowering dialogue in education and culture in democracy are replacing the traditional teaching of history, calling for a culture in education replacing national pride and an exclusionary outlook towards the national past, by more reconciled and inclusive approaches toward human experience. . This project addressed the need to reduce political manipulation with history teaching in order to increase tolerance, support intercultural dialogue and reduce xenophobia between majority and minority populations (including migrants) in four EU countries.. This was achieved by first assessing, through action oriented research, whether political and public discourses about the goals of history teaching support tolerant or intolerant attitudes towards other ethnic groups. Following that, the 'Teaching History for Mutual Understanding' manual was created and capacity building training for history teachers was provided in order to enable them to counter exclusionary and manipulative rhetoric used by far-right groups and actors seeking to monopolise history for divisive political goals. A series of articles in the national media of participating organization countries was published stressing the need for an ethical approach to history in schools and the media, and an event was organised in Brussels for international NGOs, members of the European Parliament and educators about the challenges to intercultural dialogue posed by political agenda in history teaching and about ways to tackle these challenges and to make history teaching work for tolerance..

Although she's quite 'new' in the network, talking to Indra makes you think she has been a part of the NEPC family from its beginnings. That family feeling is the strongest emotion she felt from the first moment she met people from the Network through the History Tolerance project. She did not know what to expect, but she was very surprised at how everyone was friendly and humane to one another. To illustrate NEPC, the word 'family' is often used as Indra explains that *'It's really difficult to put my finger on it, but maybe it has to do with the field we work in, because people are ready to go and fight for what they believe in. It's a characteristic you can't find in everybody. I've been involved with the Network for only a short period of time. You might feel a little bit frustrated at the beginning because you don't know what kind of people you are going to meet, but from the first moment everyone was lovely and supportive, which gave me a big sense of security.'*
After the History Tolerance project, Indra participated at the 2014 Summer School, enjoying this learning experience: *'I gained lots of bits of knowledge that I can use later but also different methods on how to get the message across in a more efficient way'.* Summer school is often mentioned for its fun extracurricular activities and Indra believes *'The fun things we do together are probably the main reason why there is that family feeling that I mentioned earlier. It gives you a sort of support and it reminds you of a network that is there, behind you and that you are not alone in this struggle. We obviously doubt ourselves every now and then because sometimes the progress doesn't happen or it happens slowly and you feel like you are going to give up. But then, with a background like this, you get back faith and inspiration. I definitely think that we inspire each other and I hope we'll continue doing so in the future as well'* She believes that part of the story lies in the fact that they all think that they can make a change in education and believe in what they are doing. Although the level of optimism might differ from person to person she has yet to meet a person from NEPC who is there just for the sake of it. 'We are all here for a reason' she concludes.

Education Policy Center, Vilnius University

LITHUANIA

Re-joined NEPC in 2014. As a story of NEPC somehow started in Vilnius it is fitting to have EPC back in the family. EPC is one of the NEPC members who keeps us in touch with academia and can produce policy analyses without hesitation.

Never too late to continue a good story

Rimantas Želvys

'As our Education policy centre was a spin-off of the Soros Foundation, at one moment we had to get on our own two feet, without their funding. But at that time Vilnius University was not willing to invest resources in our programme so we had to stop with our activities. That's the reason why we renewed our NEPC membership last year, although we were among the founders ten years ago. I could say I am a newcomer! But it's never too late to continue good collaboration because, as a small country, we need their partnership. As in all former socialist countries there was no tradition of developing an educational policy, especially an independent one, so these people that are gathered in the Network have unique experience. So we can rely on each other in making important decisions for education development. I think that we can contribute to NEPC considering that our country, because of its EU membership, had to go through serious transformations in different fields including the field of education. Our experience could also be very useful'.

Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives Step by Step

MACEDONIA

In NEPC since 2014, Step MK and NEPC are yet to explore each other's full potential. The mixture of their work in education and culture makes them unique in our network and opens new horizons to all of us.

Leader in the region

Suzana Kirandžiska

'Joining NEPC was a strategic decision for us because we wanted to expand the areas we work in and the network of professional organizations we collaborate with. From other Step by Step organizations we heard that it's a highly professional network that produces very competent events and publications. From our first contacts with the staff, we realized that they are really open to new people, new members such as we are at the moment. As an organization we prefer the sustainable solutions in education that NEPC offers, the participatory approach and equity. I believe we'll find our place in NEPC as an active member and we would like to participate in the joint projects with NEPC members. For its 10th birthday we wish NEPC becomes an even stronger network organizations, the leader in the region in policy analysis, advocacy for equity and promoting quality in education'.

Macedonian Civic Education Centre
MACEDONIA

Stronger together

Loreta Georgieva

In NEPC since 2010, as soon as it joined, MCEC showed us what high-level participation is. You can count on MCEC to read your e-mails in detail, to send their input on time and to provide expert contributions at all times. MCEC has hosted several NEPC events with efficacy and charm.

'Ability to learn and translate that learning into action' is a quote that encompasses the whole of Loreta's experience with NEPC. Her organization had a great opportunity for action in 2011 when they supported the NEPC Summer School in Ohrid: 'The format of the conference wasn't a challenge for us, it was a great benefit to share experience and best practices with valuable inputs from participants. NEPC and MCEC together succeeded in accomplishing the conference goals and, at the same time. it was an excellent opportunity for participants to learn about Ohrid town's famous cultural and historical heritage'. The funniest memory from Ohrid for Loreta is the NEPC team photo they took on a bicycle built for four. On the other hand, Loreta's team from MCEC always tries to attend Summer Schools when there is a particular topic that could help them with their current work: 'Our staff had an opportunity to learn from the presenters with an educational background and they also always came back with some new professional skills'. But besides the benefits that come with Summer Schools and other NEPC events, MCEC staff considers the partnership on projects very meaningful. In Loreta's organization's case that was the ENjoinED project: 'The topic of this project helped us to understand better the terms 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development'. As a result, we were able to include this topic in discussions, debates, and round tables and explore the future sustainability of activities to improve the current situation in the society'. Loreta also emphasized that networking with organizations in the region creates both personal and professional relationships, which are the true value: 'It encourages you to make joint proposals and decisions that are reflected by operating on a professional set of guidelines. I think that the achievements of NEPC as a network are the results of the combined effort of each individual member'.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: THE CHALLENGES OF DECENTRALIZATION, AUTONOMY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY · 2011 · Ohrid, Macedonia · The Summer School explored the concept of socially responsible decentralization of school governance. Based on the Council of Europe's model of democratic school governance and case studies from the NEPC region (Eastern, Central and South-eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia, Turkey and Mongolia), NEPC members and other participants have engaged in professional and social learning in order to advance participative school governance in the region.
Key words: Democratic school governance I Participation of minority and migrant families and communities I Parents Influence on Education I School Leadership.
Participants will also remember the vision of a perfect Spanish lover waiting for each of them somewhere in Spain!

Association Educational Centre PRO *DIDACTICA*

MOLDOVA

Peer to peer

Rima Bezede

Although they joined NEPC *in 2014, our perception is that* PRO DIDACTICA *has been part of the Network for much longer... Always ready to contribute and share their expertise in educational policy and practice, we very much appreciate their proactive approach and open communication.*

Since Moldova's independence, the educational sector has suffered difficult transition period overall, marked by economic recession, demographic decline and emigration. The investments in education have failed to meet the needs of a sector that aims at educating a workforce for the increasingly competitive global economy. Increasing the access, quality and relevance of the education system are the main priorities for the Moldovan Government, as outlined in the Education Strategy 2020. That is why we decided to join the NEPC community. It enables us to co-operate with peer organizations at the national and international level, to share experience and good practices, to sharpen our skills in strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation of the educational policies, as well as promotion of participatory and evidence-based education policies ... Being a member of the network will help us to learn from good practices, adjust them and implement them in our country. Although I am a young member of the board, I hope that my professional background will be valuable for you. In the position of the Educational Centre PRO DIDACTICA President for more than 5 years, I have coordinated a variety of educational projects that have been focused on raising the quality, increasing the relevance and improving management education. I am looking forward to co-operating in joint projects that will impact the lives of our young generation and will bring hope for a better future. I have chosen a quote of the famous Mahatma Gandhi to describe this network: 'Be the change you wish to see in the world'.

Mongolian Education Alliance

MONGOLIA

A founding member of NEPC, MEA has been an unfailing partner in all NEPC endeavours; always ready to take on new challenges and topics. They are loyal participants and supporters of NEPC Summer Schools. Dedicated, calm, collected and welcoming best describes MEA as an organization.

EDUCATING FOR SUSTAINABILITY: AN ECOLOGICALLY SOUND AND SOCIALLY FAIR FUTURE AS AN EDUCATIONAL AIM · 2012 · Primošten, Croatia · Summer School brought ENjoinED partners and other interested parties together for professional and social learning on the topics of the socio-economic aspects of sustainable development (SD); created the opportunity for EnjoinED partners and other participants to meet in a learning and experience-exchange environment focused on socio-economic sustainability; enhanced knowledge and experiences sharing, discussing, uncovering and comparing different aspects of SD. *Key words*: Psychological and institutional obstacles to educating for sustainability I Green growth and green jobs I Gender aspects of sustainability I Co-operative educational paradigms for different governance. Participants will also remember the charades, word games and a beach party that helped them digest the depressing data...

The welcoming atmosphere

Batjargal Batkhuyag

Although he has to cross lots of miles, Batjargal almost never misses NEPC events, especially the Summer Schools: *'It is a very good learning opportunity; for instance, we had the chance to learn more about education for sustainability and to do something regarding that subject after the summer school. Also, it is fun; it is almost like a tradition to have social activities. In Primošten Summer School 2012 we had 'NEPC's got talent' and mine was singing in Mongolian. Usually summer schools happen in Balkan countries and there is a big time difference for me, about six hours, by the time we get to the fun part it is already early morning for me, but even though my body is telling me to go to sleep there is always something pulling me to stay.'* In addition to returning from Primošten with fun memories, Batjargal's colleague from his organization went back to Mongolia inspired and with a new project idea: *'She started thinking and developed teacher training modules, so thanks to that we have a new partner, a donor who is interested in promoting sustainability in education. So now we have some experience in that subject and new activities'.* Inspiration is one of the three words that Batjargal used to describe NEPC, the other two are family and platform. In Mongolia there is a tendency to criticize a lot, especially within the civil society, but for Batjargal and his organization, NEPC is providing a platform to take a step forward: *'Being part of NEPC and the network activities we have the chance to criticize but also to offer some solutions or options. It gives us a wider perspective; and we are learning what is happening in other regions and parts of the world. All that experience gives us motivation to do the best we can in our countries'.* Although Batjargal's organization does not have an opportunity to participate directly in some projects because Mongolia is not on the list that donors want to do projects with, they have never felt excluded: *'From my first NEPC event in Baku I immediately got a feeling that I was a part of the Network and I think it was because of the people in NEPC. Personal relations, that family atmosphere, is the main reason we have never felt like outsiders all these years'.* And in terms of the years which are in front of him, Batjargal hopes that he will continue giving all the best that he can to contribute for his family — NEPC.

Pedagogical Center of Montenegro

MONTENEGRO

Joined NEPC in 2012.- PCM is a team of enthusiasts and experts. They bring to NEPC their commitment and readiness to share. Professionalism and humour make them an ideal host of NEPC events.

200% *dedication*

Marko Dragaš

'Totally confused' is maybe the best term for describing Marko's first contact with NEPC people. He came to the GA in Zagreb to present his organization without being aware of what they were getting themselves into: *'I didn't realize how serious this network was because I had never been to a network meeting before. Dozens of projects, ideas, strategies... It was all new for me. But from the first moment I felt that this network is something that lasts for a long time. I realized that there are people who act as professionals and friends, who work together on the same mission and give each other strength and support'.* Although he was surprised, after two days in Zagreb Marko was convinced that he wants to be a part of that story. It was a great moment for joining the Network because his organization wanted to learn and do more in inclusive education as it was their major focus: *'Our goal was to network with NEPC people who could help us in integrating the Roma people in Montenegro, we wanted to implement positive experiences from other countries and propose our ideas to them. That was the most important benefit we saw from NEPC at the time'.* As encouragement, Lana suggested they host the Summer School 2013: ↙ *'It was a great idea. We tapped into all the resources at our disposal. It was a very interesting Summer School, we all bonded, my colleague Danilo and I learnt a lot and, besides that, we also managed to present Montenegro as a tourist destination. But the most meaningful was the fact that we, as an organization, gained the trust of Lana and other members'.* Exactly that faith between people is something that thrills him the most: *'I think that Lana and her secretariat have a great influence on good people relations in the NEPC. Things are transparent and clear — they are working for our well-being and there are no secrets. They are honest and open; every time we asked them something we got our answer. That is the largest strength and power of NEPC — people who are two hundred percent dedicated to their mission in using their partners' potential in the best possible way'.*

EMPOWERING TEACHERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY · 2013 · Cetinje, Montenegro · The Summer School explored the challenges of supporting and empowering teachers to enable learners to thrive as skilled and active citizens in their individual and global contexts; presented models for effective teacher policies, competence frameworks, teacher organizations, teacher leadership, and innovative teaching and learning approaches; and stressed the importance of teachers being centrally engaged in planning and implementation of each of these aspects. *Key words*: Challenges of the teaching process I Participatory policy-making I Innovative teaching policies and practices I Teachers professional network I Professional development. Participants will also remember how passionately they fought for the microphone to show their singing talent, as they usually do for quality education.

Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences

RUSSIA

Member since 2006. MSSES is a member that does not often take the lime light but provides precious insight into the network and is crucial in providing an academic approach into NEPC endeavours. MSSES representatives bring to NEPC a pinch of realism and a serving of positive thinking.

Stop being modest

Elena Lenskaya

Years of experience in the field of education made Lena a respectable interlocutor but, more importantly, they made her a precious partner and member of the NEPC family. She used exactly that word at the beginning of our interview because Lena, as many others, feels that NEPC people became her second family from the moment she met them. Lena met NEPC people during her mandate on the OSI board and her organization, *The Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences* became a member later on in 2006.

Lena can clearly see how the quality of their research and publications has significantly improved from its first steps: *'...when I moved into the NEPC family more closely, I started discovering how useful they are for the educational systems of their members. I'm also still impressed with how they manage to deliver results on such a small budget.' Lena says* there are not that many regional networks in education and, considering that Russia is not an EU country, it is difficult for them to participate in EU activities, so NEPC was their chance for extracting themselves from that kind of isolation. There are countries with partially similar histories and traditions in education and it is interesting to see how many of them have progressed significantly since the early 1990s. Even if it is hard to involve Russia in a project due to EU funding rules and restrictions, getting data from research and sharing experiences with countries with similar background is very important. This goes both ways, Lena feels, the school governance is advanced in Russia and that is something the Network could benefit from: *'I was thrilled with the data I got from the Inclusive Education project; it was valuable to learn what teachers, parents and children think about their schools. It is something that I always wanted to do in our bigger international reviews so my wish is that Lana comes to Russia and presents it at our University, so that we can use some of the instruments they have developed in our own research in Russia. Now we actually realize that the best learning comes from countries with similar circumstances rather than from ones with a totally different history. This co-operation is also of great value for me as a teacher trainer because people whom I train have an opportunity to become part of an international network. So the more people I bring into the Network the better it is for them, but also for Russia in the long run. We shouldn't lose our connection with the world despite all the problems.'*

For NEPC 10th birthday *'I wish the Network implements all the ambitious goals that people set, becomes more visible nationally and internationally and stops being modest about its achievements. NEPC deserves to be seen and recognized.'*

Centre for Education Policy
SERBIA

Sense of belonging

Jasminka Čekić-Marković

Joined NEPC in 2009. COP is a professional and committed partner. Mutual respect and esteem best characterize our solid and long-lasting co-operation! COP team is always ready to help, passionate, resolute and attractive.

As the only independent education policy centre in Serbia, the Centre for Education Policy wanted to network with other centres to learn from one another and to collaborate on projects related to education policy and practice, especially those dealing with issues important for a quality, equitable education.

Q: *Was there some specific problem in your country that you wanted to solve by joining the network?*

A: The network was dealing with issues important to our country like dropouts, so we wanted to draw on the experience and results of the others. Also, we wanted to contribute with our work on teachers' attitudes toward their profession, teacher competences and professional development for the 21st century, issues in higher education, inclusion, etc. Teachers' education policies mapping has been very useful for our further work on teacher participation in policy decisions and promotion of changes in teachers' pre- and in-service education and training.

Q: *You were one of the experts at the Summer School in Cetinje, how would you describe that experience?*

A: There was an eagerness to learn and share an opportunity to see different perspectives, people were friendly and collaborative. I really enjoyed the constructive discussions and I am grateful for the feedback I got.

Q: *How important was co-operation in the Regional Support to Education project? What did you learn from it?*

A: Besides improving our work on inclusive education, we have learned a lot from our partners. Furthermore, it was an excellent opportunity for us to get to know each other better and form stronger relations with a promise for partnership in future projects.

Q: *After all these years and experience what would you say are the main values that NEPC develops and supports?*

A: Educational justice, sustainability education, and an open, democratic, pluralistic, inclusive society. In addition, I want to say that there is mutual respect between all members, a sense of belonging to the community and I hope we will continue pursuing common goals and values.

Educational Research Institute — ERI
SLOVENIA

Formalized its membership in the Network in 2015 but our co-operation has a longer history... Their expertise in education research and a comprehensive and holistic approach to education issues makes ERI an important ally in what NEPC strives for!

A *professional network with a human note*

Suzana Geržina

Suzana remembers that her first contacts with 'future' formal NEPC members/people happened much before the formal establishment of NEPC. She is not sure which year it was but probably as early as 2002; that was the time when OSI ESP offices in Ljubljana and Budapest were still running and that was the era of strong OSI 'spin-off policy' with the prevailing aim of OSI fund 'cutting' and 'forcing spin-offs towards independence', but without thinking seriously of wider consequences and losses of these processes regarding knowledge, expertise and networking. However, she tells us there were some initiatives and individuals aware of potential losses, and that the first pre-NEPC meetings were OSI initiated and organised in Vilnius and Bratislava.
She has witnessed significant development of the Network in the past ten years — members and activities have become more diverse, the level of professionalism both in the Secretariat and member organizations has grown and there is more professional independence, expertise and a higher quality of work. Suzana believes that the main contribution of NEPC to its members and, subsequently, their education systems, is the professional support related to networking with partners who share the same or similar vision and values of participation, inclusiveness, multi-culturalism, and respect for diversity and equity. She stresses the benefits in the diversity of the Network's activities and projects and maintains that it is important to deal with 'neglected' topics, concluding that each and every well thought out and implemented project brings its benefits. Her story in NEPC membership is atypical: 'After leaving OSI, I was an NEPC individual member for some years. Since 2015 — ERI, my current employer, has become a formal NEPC institutional member. We realised from the institutional perspective that it makes sense to apply for formal NEPC membership in order to establish new partnerships and improve co-operation with similar organisations at national and international levels.'
In particular, ERI hopes to develop with NEPC new EU projects, exchanging expertise, experiences and good practices related to educational research and policy developments, and mutually to advance expertise in development and analysis of educational policies and research. For its next ten years, Suzana wishes NEPC that it remains a strong professional network with a human note.

CPZ International Centre for Knowledge Promotion

SLOVENIA

Joined NEPC in 2014 — Having an established co-operation even before they became a member, we knew that their presence in our network would be mutually beneficial. We can rely on their expertise in the field of education policy analyses while giving them a wider geographical platform.

ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL TESTING CENTRES IN FOUR COUNTRIES · *Partners* CPZ (SLO), CIE (AZ), EPPM (GEO), UCA (KG), OSF Tajikistan (TJK) · *NEPC role* Project leader · *Duration* 2010–2011 · *Funded by* OSF · National Testing Centres have been established in many countries of the former Soviet Union with similar objectives in many cases as a part of World Bank and other donors' agenda in Educational Reform. The establishment of a National Testing Centre in Tajikistan is supported by the OSI in coordination with the World Bank and Ministry of Education. . Although NTC's in most countries have as their goals improving learning outcomes and providing fair and transparent assessment, in many cases the power that is given to the NTC allows them to manipulate the system from the curriculum. Instead of improving learning outcomes, that pushes the students to learn for tests, increases the need and demand for private tutoring and increases the parental contribution to education, and in that way decreasing equity instead of addressing it. . The project reviewed by NTCs in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine and through comparative analysis (national state studies were conducted and unified in a comparative report) provides information and insight into lessons learnt that can guide the establishment of the NTC and offer concrete recommendations and policy options to Tajikistan.

→ Doživjeti stotu

Sergij Gabrščeк

Q: *You co-operated with NEPC before your organization became a member of the Network — how would you describe that experience?*

A: Co-operation with NEPC was an interesting and rewarding experience. I heard about the network before: our organization was a co-organizer of an OSI seminar for SEE countries in Slovenia and we have been working with a lot of them on different projects. When I was asked to carry out the study for the establishment of the National Testing Centre in Tajikistan I was honoured and glad that I had the opportunity to look into the part of the world I didn't know much about. I had all the support I needed from NEPC and organisations from the countries that participated in the comparative study. The NEPC team is a team with high professionalism combined with joie *de vivre*.

Q: *What did you learn from that and what did that experience mean for you professionally and personally?*

A: It was an opportunity to work with individuals who really care about education. I had the opportunity to meet other experts, to discuss the study both in Tajikistan and at the CES conference in Montreal. Professionally, it allowed me to use my experience in the development of assessment systems in my country and some others to support the establishment of new NTC as part of different mechanisms for fighting corruption. I also built up friendships with some of the experts I was working with.

Q: *What was the main reason for joining the Network as a member organization?*

A: The decision for joining the Network as a member organisation was a logical step in our co-operation with NEPC. We saw that we share common values and that we could learn from NEPC but, on the other hand, we could also contribute to the Network with the experience that we have in education.

Q: *What do you think that NEPC needs to do to be more recognized globally?*

A: NEPC should continue to build up its expertise and experience along its values and find opportunities for co-operation with international organisations providing vast knowledge and experience in member countries. Growth should follow consolidation.

Q: *How do you see co-operation between NEPC and your organization in the future?*

A: We see the future co-operation following the co-operation that has been already established. There are some areas of expertise that might be interesting for the future co-operation.

Q: *What would you wish to NEPC for its 10th birthday?*

A: There is a song of the Yugoslav rock band Bijelo Dugme: Dozivjeti stotu! (live to be a hundred years old). Let' work towards it.

Education Reform Initiative
TURKEY

Time to be brave

Formally joined NEPC in 2008. ERI in Turkey provides timely and on the mark policy analyses and recommendations. An energetic and professional team that always tells it like it is and motivates us to be bold and brave!

Batuhan Aydagül

'*Oh good, there is a crowd, there is a critical mass around the region and that mass can actually change something*' — this was the first thought that came to Batuhan's mind in 2003 when he met the people who later became NEPC. He realized that there were people around who were engaged in the same social struggle as he was and decided to be part of the circle. From the perspective of his organization, spending time with all those people through education coordinators' meetings supported by the Education Support Programme was encouraging, even before the first general assembly. :*"It was definitely supportive. One has to remember that we are all individuals who made the choice to work in this sector, in these organizations, so the motivation comes from within as well as from the institutions, the people and institutions outside your country. NEPC became a supporting and collaborating network, we all decided to do things together that make sense rather than being alone in our own circle'.* Devotion to the Network motivated Batuhan to become a board member in 2010.

'*I wanted to be more actively engaged and contribute to expanding the policy work that was on the table across the region. My mission was to improve its quality, the effectiveness and its outreach, because I believed in NEPC from the beginning and I decided to follow that belief'.* If someone would wake up Batuhan in the middle of the night to describe NEPC in three words his answer would be '*fun, European and demanding'*. The last one deserves a broader explanation*: 'First of all, managing networks, not just NEPC, is demanding in itself. You have a certain number of members who are preoccupied with their own mission and agenda but sometimes you have to ask them to be a part of a bigger goal and to collaborate. In addition, it is demanding because of the way civil society and this sort of policy work is conceptualized. There is not much space that is not funded by a project, so projects run the agenda or other duties and responsibilities. So you need to get more out of every network, give back more to every institution and, at the end of the day, it is not easy to do that. At least, changing education is demanding'.* Although it is demanding, it is also a great satisfaction when you see the final product like the ENjoined final conference to which Batuhan made a major contribution: *'It was a great pleasure being part of that group, speaking with them, thinking with them.... It is solidarity because we often believe in the same values and when you are at the stage, around the table with them, it's always a relief and you feel stronger. I will continue enjoying and doing this in*

the future'. Like many others, Batuhan also emphasized the education for sustainability project as one of the eye-opening projects. He explained that it is hard to talk about concrete changes in Turkey as the result of membership in the Network, but there is much more important value in networking and partnership in projects: *'It is more about sharing, I can't show you direct implications in itself but I think that the ENjoinED project, as I said earlier, and, for example, projects about inclusion in education, was a learning opportunity for us back in Turkey. Education and solidarity is something that my organization got from NEPC'.* The great experiences that he had through all these years and the faith that he has in NEPC gave Batuhan a reason to have great expectations from the Network in the future: *'I want more members to be actively engaged and the Secretariat to create the conditions for this to happen. I expect NEPC to be more self-sustained in its funding and to have a bigger global voice, not just in the region. Happy birthday NEPC, you are already growing up to be a teenager, now comes the time for taking more risks'!*

Individual members

Alexandru Crisan →

Alecu naturally presented the father figure role in NEPC from the very beginning as the first president of NEPC Board and the most senior and experienced of us all when we started. Alecu is someone you can rely on to give sound advice and clear guidance, who generously shares a wealth of knowledge and who is a trusted friend of NEPC.

NEPC — [formal/official/'dictionary' definition] is an international non-governmental membership organization that gathers ....etc. NEPC — [subjective/personal ... 'definition'] ... Interestingly, enough ... for me NEPC — from what it was at the beginning' became over time a common word ... 'NEPC' ... AS you wish, a noun, a verb, an adverb, or an adjective (E.g. 'Let's have a NEPC ...'; ' Let's NEPC a bit first, and then [...]; 'To NEPC or ... not to NEPC'; 'This is a bit too NEPC to be accepted [...]' etc. In a word, 'NEPC' is for me a ... network ... of concepts and feelings ... a network of unique/challenging/surprisingly valuable people ... a network of sharing ... giving and receiving ... a network of creativity ... stamina ... engagement ... sound human relationships ... All dynamically moving in ... around ... beyond an 'amoeba kind' of reality called 'education' ... another concept ... art and science all together ... 'NEPC' has a special place in my personal storehouse of what I love ... Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Nabokov, Pamuk ... Brahms, Stravinsky ... Queen ... Miro, Kandinsky ... Happy to be part of the 'NEPC universe'

Indra Dedze →

Indra observed the forming of NEPC from the perspective of an OSF staff member and joined NEPC as an individual member early on. NEPC can count on Indra to offer her expertise and her time for the benefit of the Network. Her direct approach is very much appreciated within the Network.

Since its establishment ten years ago, NEPC has expanded in terms of number of members and the countries they are coming from. Being part of the NEPC makes each of its members stronger and more visible in their own country and thus permitting to address actual topics in the system of education and influence policy on the national level. For me as an individual member it is important to have an opportunity to follow the newest trends of the changes in the education arena in the member states, as well as to share my experiences and knowledge, and regularly meet with the people from other policy centers who over these years become friends. I wish NEPC to grow larger and become more visible in the international arena, and keeping up with the tradition of the good team working.

Maria Golubeva →

Maria, from her dramatic in-and-out performance in Vilnius, became an integral part of NEPC. Her imagination and vision jump-started numerous NEPC perspectives and projects while her personality, love of 15th century poetry, appreciation of fine dining and a life philosophy brings a note of the Renaissance into NEPC social events.

Commitment was the first word Maria used to describe the Network, which is not that surprising considering she is one of the most loyal NEPC members, from both the Board or individual member perspective. After the meeting in Vilnius she was elected into a non-formal committee, which started thinking about making a real network: 'We all had ideas on what the Network should be like and we spent a lot of time together in 2005 before the real founding meeting of the Network took place. We had meetings in Istanbul, Budapest... we were working from early morning until late in the evening, discussing the same issues, basically 24 hours a day'. Thinking about what NEPC became and is today, Maria admitted that some aspects of NEPC vision they all had at that time still have not been accomplished: 'We saw a more global network; we thought we would easily reach out to education policy stakeholders in other parts of the world,

not just in the traditional Soros region. For example, we tried to reach out to education policy centres in Africa, also had a Board member from OSI there but we didn't succeed'. But on the good side, there are many aspects of the vision that were realized: 'We did help our members build their capacity through participating in this network and its projects, we made it easier to attain a more professional level, a more policy and action relevant level of work. Members managed to make changes in developing and implementing education policies. Education for open society values, education for diversity, later on we added sustainability as a new aspect, which was not included in our vision in the beginning... I think the values and our commitment to values as a core element of this Network have actually been preserved from the moment we started developing the Network until this day'. For Maria, it was hard to choose what the most mind-opening project was but one of the most important was 'Divided Education — Divided Citizens' ← where she was one of the authors. Besides, during the time she was a Board member, new ideas were her strongest weapon: 'I have always been better at proposing and inventing concepts than at helping with improving operations.. I definitely remember the idea of the NEPC policy lab was generated partly by me, I also used to highlight the aspect of minority and majority in education. I was probably the first person on the NEPC Board to raise the issue of education of minorities and migrants, which was later successfully adopted by other participants'. But, of course, there were benefits on both sides: 'NEPC has helped me a lot to develop my individual capacity for leadership. I wouldn't have had this opportunity, especially at the international level'. And after almost seven years, Maria wishes to continue being loyal to the Network: 'I can't detach myself from the future of this organization, from its vision and values. I'm interested in contributing because it engages me not just intellectually but also emotionally'.

DIVIDED CITIZENS — DIVIDED EDUCATION? (DEDC) · *Partners* Providus (LV), CED Bilim (KZ), ProMENTE (BA), Pulse (TJK), Praxis (EST), KEC (XK), CIE (AZ), CEDU (RO), CDE (AL), SGI (SK) · *Duration* 2008–2009 · *Financed by* OSF · *NEPC role* Project leader · Separate schooling of students from different ethnic, linguistic and religious communities is a common practice in state school systems in many countries. Not only does the choice of school often depend on the student's ethnicity, faith, or mother tongue, but also different curriculums for students of different ethnic, religious and linguistic groups are manifest in some cases. This project attempted to assess the impact that the practice of separate schooling has on the civil enculturation of students belonging to different ethnic/linguistic groups, by comparing their attitudes towards a number of issues normally included in the concept of democratic citizenship (e.g. the right of citizens to participate in policy processes and governance, the right to protest, gender equality, equality between citizens of different ethnic groups).. Our aim was to identify the types and extent of segregation existing within the educational systems of selected countries and look at them from a comparative perspective. We wanted to identify the internal (social and historical) mechanisms that generate different segregation patterns and their specific forms of manifestation. Exploring how segregation is experienced by those involved and investigating how it affects the in-built aspects of ethnic and linguistic conflict in cases of different civic enculturation of segregated groups were also objectives of this project. The final comparative report also included a look at the experiences of desegregation practices from a comparative perspective.

Former institutional members

- ALBANIA — Albanian Center for Assistance in Education (ACAE)
- ALBANIA — Centre for Democratic Education (CDE)
- BULGARIA — Centre of Information Society Technology (CIST)
- CZECH REPUBLIC — Institute for Social and Economic Analysis (ISEA)
- HUNGARY — Center for Educational Policy Analysis (CEPA)
- KAZAKHSTAN — BILIM Education Center (BILIM)
- KAZAKHSTAN — Information Research Center for Civic Education (IRCCE)
- KYRGYZSTAN — Institute for Public Policy (IPP)
- MACEDONIA — Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM)
- MOLDOVA — Institute for Public Policy (IPP)
- POLAND — Institute of Public Affairs (IPA)
- ROMANIA — Centre Education 2000+ (CEDU)
- SLOVAKIA — ORAVA Association for Democratic Education (ORAVA)
- SLOVAKIA — Slovak Governance Institute (SGI)
- SLOVENIA — Centre for Educational Policy Studies, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education (CEPS)
- TAJIKISTAN — 'Pulse' Educational Reforms Support Unit (PULSE)
- UKRAINE — Centre for Educational Policy (CEP)

Former Individual members

- Suzana Geržina
- Grace Kaimila Kanjo
- Saule Kalikova

Projects

- NAOS — Professional Capacity Dealing with Diversity 2014–2017 — European Commission — NEPC ROLE: Collaborative partner
- Support to Pilot Schools for Implementing Inclusive Education Policies and Practices 2014–2015 — European Commission and Council of Europe — NEPC Role: Project leader
- Local Partnerships for Anti-Corruption Education Partners 2013–2014 European Commission — NEPC Role: Project partner
- Making History Work for Tolerance: A Research-Based Strategy to Reduce the Intolerant Usage of History Teaching 2012–2014 — Open Society Institute — NEPC Role: Project leader
- Ensuring Wider Access To The Primary Vocational Education And Training In The Kyrgyz Republic 2012–2013 European Commission — NEPC Role: Project partner
- Leadership For Local Community: Empowering Teachers and Youth For Active Roles In Local Communities 2011–2013 European Commission — NEPC Role: Project partner
- ENjoinED Education for Sustainable Development Partnership Initiative 2010–2012 European Commission — NEPC Role: Project leader
- Analysis of National Testing Centres in Four Countries 2010–2011 Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation — NEPC Role: Project leader
- The Development of Wellbeing Indicators for Participatory EU Strategy Planning for Europe 2020 — European Commission 2010–2011 — NEPC Role: Project partner
- SIRIUS — European Policy Network on the Education of Children and Young People with a Migrant Background — NEPC ROLE: Collaborative partner
- Advancing Participation and Representation of Ethnic Minority Groups in Education (APREME) European Commission and Open Society Institute 2009–2011 — NEPC Role Project partner
- Private Tutoring Phenomenon: Developing Policy Options 2009 Open Society Institute (Operational Grant) — NEPC Role: Project leader
- Divided Education — Divided Citizens? (DEDC) 2008–2009 Open Society Institute — Education Support Program — NEPC Role: Project leader
- Parental Informal Payments in Education (PIPES) Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation 2007 — NEPC Role: Project coordinator

NEPC *is about* LEARNING*

* LEARNING

1. *The acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught*

From the stories of members in the previous chapter it is seen how relevant and important the learning process in NEPC is. Summer School(s) and Policy Lab(s) are the trademark NEPC learning and policy events where the acquisition of knowledge is facilitated by high-calibre experts.

Summer School is an annual learning event for the education community (teachers, policy-makers, policy-analysts, practitioners, and researchers). Summer schools in the past have covered wide range of educational topics related to education with the aim of inspiring change in education systems. Summer School gathers faculty from prestigious universities and highly experienced trainers from all over the world and it combines theory, practice and interactive sessions.

Policy Lab is a bi-annual event based on the comparative policy analysis conducted by NEPC members on a burning policy issue. It gathers policy makers, policy analysts and practitioners and consists of learning session, where the results of the comparative policy analysis are presented, and a policy solution-generating session where, through interaction and other thinking methods, participants generate policy solutions and recommendations for their national education systems.

This chapter will present the interviews with two NEPC experts and one participant in Summer School as well as a long-time NEPC friend: The co-operation established with Professor Michael Apple is a source of pride for NEPC — the rare combination of knowledge, passion and dedication in his lectures and speeches inspired, motivated and moved NEPC audiences. Muriel Poisson has been co-operating with NEPC from the early beginnings. Her expertise further inspired NEPC to tackle the underestimated issue of transparency and corruption in education. Dženana Trbić, A NEPC friend and supporter shares her experience about the co-operation with NEPC and participation in the NEPC Summer School.

Michael W. Apple →
John Bascom Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, and Educational Policy Studies, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA

Keep asking questions and provide critical answers

Q: *As a keynote speaker at two of their summer schools, what was the main message you wanted to convey to them about education and their efforts in changing it?*

A: This is a time when education has increasingly been a site of serious crises. Dominant groups have attempted, often more than a little successfully, to limit criticism, to control access to research that documents the negative effects of their policies, and to deny the possibility of critically democratic alternatives. They have pressed forward with an agenda that is claimed to simply guarantee efficiency, effectiveness, and cost savings. For them, only these kinds of policies can deal with the crisis in education — even when they are simply wrong.

Dominant groups are not totally wrong in grounding their 'reforms' in a sense of crisis. Across the political spectrum, it is widely recognized that there is a crisis in education. Nearly everyone agrees that something must be done to make it more responsive and more effective. Of course, a key set of questions is: responsive to what and to whom? Effective at what? And whose voices will be heard in asking and answering these questions? These are among the most crucial questions one can ask about education today. And answers to them can be much more 'thickly' democratic than those which are being offered currently. There are indeed a range of alternatives in a number of countries that are considerably more responsive to the goals, policies, and practices of critical democratic citizenship. Becoming more knowledgeable about them is crucial at a time when the very idea of a truly public education is under attack.

Q: *Have you recognized anything specific about the way the Network tackles the education issues their systems face?*

A: There was and is a refreshing openness to a wider range of issues than is usually the case. All too many discussions of educational policy, practice, and research tend to be largely technocratic, with little discussion of the ethical and political dimensions of decisions and of the latent negative as well as positive effects of the assumptions that underpin these decisions. The fact that these kinds of things are taken very seriously by the Network and that

it is open not only to critical understandings but also to reforms that are more robustly aimed at democratic processes and goals is more than a little significant.

Q: *Since you consider that schools often generate inequalities what do you believe should be the focus of* NEPC *in the next few years to make their efforts worthwhile?*

A: There are many things that need to be done. Among them are the following:

1. It must 'bear witness to negativity.' That is, one of its primary functions is to illuminate the ways in which educational policy and practice are connected to the relations of exploitation and domination — and to struggles against such relations — in the larger society. This is significant since dominant groups often live in what might best be called an *epistemological fog*. To know is to be called upon to act. *Not knowing* is much easier and allows dominant policies and practices to go forward without challenge.

2. In engaging in such critical analyses, it also must point to contradictions and to *spaces of possible action*. Thus, its aim is to critically examine current realities with a conceptual/political framework that emphasizes the spaces in which more progressive and more critically democratic actions can, or do, go on. This is an absolutely crucial step, since otherwise our work can simply lead to cynicism or despair. Thus bearing witness and telling the truth must be balanced by an equal focus on pointing to possibilities.

3. At times, this also requires a broadening of what counts as 'research.' Here I mean acting as critical 'secretaries' to those groups of people, communities, and social movements who are now engaged in challenging existing relations of unequal power or in what I call 'no reformist reforms' in my recent book *Can Education Change Society?*

4. Among the most important things that NEPC can do to engage with the points I just noted is to continue to offer the rich context of debate and deliberation that it has done so well in the past. I want to stress this point. By bringing together educational researchers and policy makers from *multiple* countries to engage with counter-arguments and to have an opportunity to deal with regional similarities and differences — and to consider a wider range of policies than those that are seen as officially acceptable — all of this contributes to the possibility of raising new questions and providing answers that may not have been considered before.

Q: *As you are one of the leading education theorists and* NEPC *is a value-based organization with an aim of influencing education policies in their countries, how was your co-operation mutually beneficial if at all?*

A: The word 'mutually' is significant. There can be no doubt that my work with NEPC has had a substantive impact on my own understanding. While I have had extensive experiences with and in a wide range of nations, my arguments and analysis of the limits and possibilities of educational reforms have been made much

more nuanced through my interactions with the staff and participants in the NEPC programs in which I have participated. This has had a visible effect on my understandings of the ways in which dominant policies are introduced, on how they are used, and on how real people in real communities respond to them — and to how they both open and close the space of educational reforms in complex ways.

It was also very visible to me that the detailed and often lengthy discussions I had with participants in the NEPC programs proved to be influential in creating a considerably more balanced and challenging understanding of the effects of proposed policies that circulate internationally. This has led not only to the raising of important questions that are often ignored, but it has also led to the raising of these more critical questions and to the introduction of more democratic policies once the participants return to their own countries. It has also led to increased ongoing interactions between the participants and me. This is something I value a good deal.

Q: *And do you have any birthday wishes for NEPC as they are celebrating their 10th birthday?*

A: NEPC has played a very valuable role both nationally and internationally. Few organizations are as open to asking the questions that may tend to be ignored and even fewer organizations are as open to critical answers and critical policies as NEPC has been. Congratulations on 10 years. I hope to say all of this again in 10 more years. And 20. And...

Muriel Poisson →
Head of Research and Development Team. International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO

A Young Network with strong experience

Muriel had been involved with the Network even before it was officially a network. The International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO-IIEP) has had over a decade of very fruitful collaboration with NEPC. A study tour in Lithuania on the topic: 'What can we learn from the ten year Lithuanian experience in addressing the challenges of improving transparency in education?' also marks the very first activity that IIEP organized as part of their programme on 'Ethics and Corruption in Education' that is still ongoing. This co-operation continued with a series of workshops with various NEPC members CIE, Azerbaijan (2006), KEC, Kosovo & IIEPMM, Georgia (2007), while more recently on issues related to teacher codes of conduct they co-operated with CIE, Azerbaijan and the FFE, Croatia.

'We realized that a network like NEPC had a very important role to play in putting issues related to transparency, accountability and anti-corruption in education higher on the agenda. These are of course sensitive issues, and education policy centres who are trusted for their research, advocacy and capacity building expertise such as the members of the NEPC network, proved to be very reliable partners for our work.' says Muriel, who had a chance to meet and exchange with all the members of the NEPC Network as a lecturer in a 2011 Summer School on the issue of governance in Ohrid.

The expertise exchange went both ways as several NEPC representatives participated as resource persons in IIEP Summer Schools and workshops on 'Transparency, Accountability and Anti-corruption Measures' in 2007 and in 2008. Muriel emphasises that in the field of ethics and corruption on education NEPC contributed to the research work conducted in this field, for instance on the topics of private tutoring, or of parental informal payments for education. This played an important role in sensitizing government officials to the issue of integrity education, as well as encouraging governments to consider the design and enforcement of tools such as teacher codes of conduct, and promote national discussions based on the recommendations of the reports NEPC produced. Although the issue of ethics in education seems to be underestimated, Muriel feels: *'that people are*

increasingly sensitive to the fact that a number of misbehaviours within the education sector should no longer be tolerated. There are also an increasing number of reports, studies and surveys that are now available which provide evidence on corrupt practices and their detrimental effects on education; these can be used to respond to those arguing that it is not an issue. That said, the integration of integrity concerns into overall education sector diagnosis and planning still has, of course, a long way to go.'

At UNESCO-IIEP, promoting public access to information is seen as an important way forward to combat corruption in education. New technologies offer new possibilities to do so, on a much larger scale than ever before, and they are developing a new project devoted to this issue. They see NEPC as a valuable partner in this agenda *'We very much hope to be able to partner with NEPC and NEPC member institutions again in the future. They have in-depth expertise on the functioning of the education systems from the sub-region, and also privileged relationships with major stakeholders (including government authorities) to help move the agenda along.'*

On the occasion of NEPC's anniversary Muriel says: *'A young age for a Network that has accumulated so much experience in a single decade! I wish them a very happy 10th birthday!'*

Dženana Trbić →
Education Program Coordinator, Open Society Fund, Bosnia & Herzegovina

Professional integrity and equality

'Ten years later it's still impressive that there is a network of professionals from different countries who have the same enthusiasm for education and the same energy for making meaningful changes in that field' — this feeling is Dženana's major motivation in her persistency for a better educational system and she believes that there are visible results: 'I don't think any of the projects need to be singled out — all the projects were meaningful and the fact that they were comparative made them especially relevant. Their international character, with the results showing that the issues we tackled weren't country specific, made advocacy for direct change in particular countries easier.'. Dženana tells us that the main reason she attended the Summer School in Primošten was its topic — education for sustainability: 'It was a challenge for me because it provided some new perspectives on education and it was inspiring for all of us. I think sustainable development was one of the crucial issues that NEPC initiated'. Dženana extracted professional integrity and equality as the most important values among NEPC people, who became her colleagues and friends at the same time. She hopes that in ten years from now the team will still be together: 'First of all I hope that we will celebrate your 20th birthday. In the meantime, I wish the Network will be even more active in advocating changes which are presented in research so one day we can say that there is a group of professionals who were able to make global changes in education'.

Summer Schools

- 2015 — Education — incubator for a sustainable future: how can public education empower citizens for global sustainability?
  Sremski Karlovci, Serbia
- 2014 — Inclusive schools — Foundation of a Socially Just Society
  Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 2013 — Empowering teachers for the 21st Century
  Cetinje, Montenegro
- 2012 — Education for Sustainability: an ecologically sound and socially fair future as an educational aim
  Primošten, Croatia
- 2011 — School governance: the challenges of decentralization, autonomy and social responsibility
  Ohrid, Macedonia
- 2010 — Educational leadership in transitioning societies
  Bazaleti Lake, Georgia
- 2009 — Curriculum Policies: Making Education Respond to Society and the Labour Market
  Sljeme, Croatia
- 2008 — Linking education research policy and practice
  Logarska dolina, Slovenia

Policy Labs

- 2014 — Teaching profession — policies & challenges
  Baku, Azerbaijan
- 2012 — Education for Sustainable Development
  Ljubljana, Slovenia
- 2010 — *Migration and Education*
  Brussels, Belgium

NEPC *is about* ADVOCATE* *(ing) for* CHANGE

* ADVOCATE

1. *Publicly recommend or support*

There are many methods to advocate for change and NEPC is still learning and evolving its tools, in the first decade research, comparative policy analysis, policy briefs and recommendations that NEPC published proved to be a valuable and assertive way to address challenges in education systems through evidence, describe and compare their features proposing policy guidance. The edition series NEPC *Comparative Studies in Education* is valuable and powerful contribution to under-researched topics such as ESD and private tutoring.

This chapter presents the interview with Mladen Domazet, co-author of NEPC Comparative Studies in Education-Book 1, his name in NEPC is rightly associated with Education for Sustainability, and his impressive competence in this field initiated and enhanced a remarkable learning process within the Network cultivating a holistic approach and strategic thinking.

Mladen Domazet →
Research Director,
Institute for Political Ecology,
Zagreb, Croatia

A *real and alive network*

Q: *They say you're the sustainability guy in NEPC. At what moment in your professional career have you decided to research that topic? Has something inspired you or was there an event that stimulated you?*

A: I've been interested in climate change and environmental sustainability since university. Having worked in educational research for over 5 years, by the late 2000's it became increasingly clear to me that education has a role to play in the sustainability shift, and that in our region at the time it was ignoring that role. Everything was about growth, entrepreneurship, individual gain and rise competition and disregard of aggregate global limits. I talked about that with some colleagues in NEPC and we wondered how widespread and systemic that perception really was. The Copenhagen 2009 COP in particular has shown that there will not be a top-down arrangement from the global leadership and that sustainability, and sustainability in education will require many regional and local initiatives. This was a concurrent trend with the rise of UNESCO DESD as well.

Q: *What was the main reason you started to co-operate with NEPC on their biggest project regarding sustainability? What were the values and opportunities you recognized in that project?*

A: The main reason was their agility and specific institutional position. NEPC was an organisation able to engender and implement complex projects in new fields across a wider number of countries and cultures. I though sustainability was such a new field for them. What NEPC already possessed on top of institutional agility was a real and alive network of organisations from an oft-neglected region of the world, from the Baltic, through the Caucasus to Central and East Asia. Despite many people living there and a specific resource base, this region wasn't really included seriously in the global sustainability education discourse.

Q: *Has it also been hard work from your perspective? Introducing almost everyone to a new subject?*

A: Hard, but mostly pleasurable. It often felt really meaningful and led to development of interesting new partnerships.

Q: *You have been completely involved in Summer Schools related to Education for Sustainability, how would you describe that experience?*

A: Summer Schools offer a platform to 'teach the teachers', in this case educational policy organisations and state bodies, to achieve a much greater understanding than conferences and seminars can offer. You can really create an atmosphere of learning in Summers Schools, which goes beyond the curricular content.

More often than not learning goes both ways; I have learnt a lot about people and sustainability from participants and their extra-curricular contributions.

Q: *Do you think you can say now that you, along with NEPC, raised awareness about what sustainability in education really is?*

A: We've been seriously trained not to answer such questions without 'impact assessments' to call upon. I have a feeling things have changed a great deal since we first started the ENjoinED project, but it is hard to tell what role that project played in it.

Q: *On the other side, how has cooperation with NEPC contributed to your professional life? Can you say that you became more recognizable as a researcher because of that co-operation?*

A: I have been given a space to put words into practice, learn new ways of thinking and doing, and most importantly to address topics that interest me, rather than the ones my superiors expect of me. I became a more clearly labelled researcher, it will take a few more decades to assess the worth of that.

Q: *What have you learnt during the past few years?*

A: That people don't have to like you to like the idea, and that there is more than one way to reach a goal.

Q: *Are there any new ideas that you would like develop together with NEPC?*

A: It would be wonderful to wrestle education back from quango policy-makers to truly interested citizen-professionals willing to learn and then share that knowledge in a dynamic loop. I know education policy is a *real-politik* necessity, but would really like to see democratic, benevolent and polycentric learning-initiative replace it. I wonder whether NEPC would like to develop that.

Q: *What is your wish for their birthday? How do you see this organization in the future?*

A: I wish them wisdom and stability in advocacy and institutional set-up, and audacious risk-taking (playfulness, even) in research and investigation of new fields that would make the state education process more meaningful to human cultural flourishing. I expect in the future the organization will branch out into more fields and partner with unexpected global players in its many regions. I am sure that it will retain the recognizable Eurasian image, but may have very specific instantiations on the ground, in Azerbaijan, Kosovo or Latvia.

List of publications

NEPC Edition — Comparative Studies in Education

- *Emerging from the shadow: A Comparative, Qualitative Exploration of Private Tutoring in Eurasia*, 2013, Ed. Jokić, B.
- *Civil rights and obligations are connected to the environmental issues in the curriculum? A comparative analysis of the ESD in 9 European countries*, 2012, Domazet, M., Dumitru D., Jurko, L. & Peterson, K

Comparative Analyses & Studies

- *Teacher Policies in the NEPC region — A comparative study of teacher policies in 10 countries*, 2014, Golubeva, M.
- *Drawing the Line: Parental Informal Payments for Education across Eurasia*, 2010, Kazimzade, E. & Lepisto, E.
- *Comparative Analysis of National Testing Centers in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and recommendations for Tajikistan*, 2010, Gabršček S.
- *Divided Education, Divided Citizens? A comparative study of civil enculturation in separate schools,* 2009, Golubeva, M., Kazimzade, E., Nedelcu, A. & Powell, S
- *Divided Education, Divided Citizens? Citizenship-related Attitudes in Segregated Schools in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania,* 2009, Golubeva, M., Kazimzade, E., Nedelcu, A. & Powell, S.
- *Education in a Hidden Marketplace: Monitoring of Private Tutoring,* 2006, Bray, M., Silova, I., Būdienė V.

Research reports

- *The Perception of Petty Corruption and Unethical Behaviour in Secondary Schools in Croatia*, 2014, Bratović, E.
- *Percepcija sitne korupcije i neetičnoga ponašanja u hrvatskim srednjim školama*, 2014, Bratović, E.
- *Making History Work for Tolerance*, 2014, Golubeva, M.
- *Living Together, Learning Together — Minority Education Issues in Vukovar-Srijem and Istria County* , 2013, Golubeva, M. & Korbar A.
- *The Phenomenon of Private Tutoring — Possible Solutions: The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2011, Soldo, A.& Powell, S.
- *Razvoj modela regulacije pojave privatnih instrukcija u Republici Hrvatskoj*, 2011, Ristić Dedić, Z. & Jokić, B.

- *Education in the Shadows: The Case of Estonia*, 2011, Kirss, L.
- *Parent and pupil involvement in school activities: The perspective of national minorities in Croatia*, 2010, Doolan, K.
- *Case Study on National Testing Centers Azerbaijan* , 2010, Mustafayev, T.
- *Case Study on National Testing Centers Georgia*, 2010, Partskhaladze, N.
- *Case Studies on National Testing Centers Kyrgyzstan*, 2010, Shamatov, D.
- *Case Study on National Testing Centers Ukraine*, 2010, Grynevych, L.
- Azerbaijan: Parental Informal Payments in Schools, 2007, Kazimzade, E. & Rzayev, F.
- *Georgia: Parental Informal Payments in Schools*, 2007, Bregvadze, T., Goglichidze, A. & Machabeli, G.
- *Kazakhstan: Parental informal payments for education,* 2007, Kalikova, S. & Rakhimzhanova, Z.
- *Hiding in the Twilight: Parental Contributions to Public Schools in Latvia*, 2007, Rutkovska, Z. & Strode, I.
- *Parental Informal Payments in Education Study: Slovakia,* 2007, Kubán, J. & Kubánová, M.
- *Tajikistan: Informal payments in formal secondary education*, 2007, Bazidova, Z.

Policy Briefs

- *The Perception of Petty Corruption and Unethical Behaviour in Secondary Schools in Croatia*, 2014, Bratović , E. & Kovačić, M.,
- *Participatory policy-making in education — The NEPC's Point of View*, 2014, Kovačić, M.
- *Percepcija sitne korupcije i neetičnoga ponašanja u hrvatskim srednjim školama*, 2014, Bratović , E. & Kovačić, M.
- *Making History Work for Tolerance*, 2014, Golubeva, M.
- *Living together, learning together*, 2013, Korbar, A.& Golubeva, M.
- *From ABOUT to FOR sustainability in education: Comparative Educational Policy Perspective in 8 European Countries*, 2012, Korbar, A.
- *Parental Involvement in the Life of Schools*, 2010, Miljević-Riđički, R. & Vizek Vidović, V.
- *Structural Inequalities in Access to Higher Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan,* 2009, Golubeva, M.

NEPC *is about* PEOPLE*

* PEOPLE

1. *Persons indefinitely or collectively; persons in general.*

4. *The entire body of persons who constitute a community, tribe, nation, or other group by virtue of a common culture, history, religion, or the like.*

When we say NEPC, we often mean the Network and its members; so far, we have listed projects, events, and publications whose quality and impact would not be the same without the commitment of members' representatives involved, but behind all the activities there is a silent and often invisible driving force — the NEPC Secretariat. Employees and volunteers diligently work to make this rather extensive mechanism work and sometimes run with the precious support of Board members!
This chapter presents some of their views and celebrates the commitment of each and every one of them!

Staff Members

Lana Jurko

Executive Director
since 2006

The story of NEPC is a good story, it is the story of how a group of people and organizations that are committed, bound by values and have a vision, can create a safe and encouraging platform for organizations and individuals who strive for a positive change in education and manage to inspire others to join them on that journey.

As someone who has been a character in all chapters of the NEPC story, I can tell you it has not always been an easy ride — at times it was frustrating as we strived for visibility and financial sustainability; at all times it required a high level of dedication, stamina and hard work; sometimes it seemed impossible to coordinate a large project or meet the strict financial procedures of a donor. However, as we celebrate the tenth NEPC anniversary I am overwhelmed by a feeling of pride! In the first place I am proud of us — the NEPC family: every member organization, Board and staff member for persisting in our vision and making NEPC what it is today. I am proud that we courageously set our own agenda and thus explored and brought unexpected topics to the policy agenda and that we have kept our values. I am proud of all the learning we have supported and knowledge we have acquired and the organizational culture we have created.

Most of all I feel unbelievably honoured to have been given the trust and opportunity to lead NEPC from its inception to its 10th birthday. I have spent the past ten years in a professionally challenging yet incredibly personally gratifying environment. It is impossible to mention every person and situation that make my job so personally satisfying — it ranges from being inspired, moved, intellectually challenged, impressed, made to laugh, cry, shout and sing and most of all being motivated to be the best that I can be!

The story of NEPC is not over, in many ways it is just beginning, there is so much more we should do and so many things we could improve and there is no doubt that we will strive to do so in the years to come. But for now, let us stop for a moment, congratulate ourselves and celebrate NEPC!

Happy Anniversary!

Vesna Kallay

Financial Officer
since 2012

For the last three years, Vesna has had the NEPC moneybox in her hands. Although her area is only finances, she is very welcome at almost all network events: *'They always invite me but often I refuse to go. Sometimes because it is too far, sometimes because I have a lot of work in the office... one of the best trips for me was when we went to Vrbovec. I love being among them and listening about those topics, new ideas, their experiences.* As she learns from their experience, there are lots of situations in the office that prove how her colleagues value her professional and life experience: *'I remember when Raffi*

came to the job interview I felt and estimated very soon that we have to employ her, that she is going to be great for our team. Young people are very smart but sometimes you have to listen to older ones because they have a different perspective, which can have a very positive outcome'. 'Positive' is one of the words that Vesna used to describe the atmosphere in the Secretariat, but also for people from the Network that she has had the opportunity to meet: 'They are a great team, they like to mingle and they really fight for what they believe in'. Her wish is that they continue to respect and help each other because she feels that that is their greatest success. *'I'm very happy that I got the chance to work here. NEPC is the best possible place to finish your professional career and go to retirement with a great smile on your face'!*

Raffaella d'Apolito →

Administrative Officer
since 2013

The summer of 2013 was incredibly hot and not the right time for any long-term decisions, or at least I thought so at the time. Being a replacement for six-month maternity leave in NEPC sounded like an acceptable and interesting challenge!

Before I went to the interview, I did not quite understand what kind of organization NEPC was. The only obvious fact was that NEPC was about education.

In the first month of my trial period Ana spent days and weeks giving me information about projects and current activities. She tried to help me to settle in and to make my life easier after her leaving — in those days, she showed me something I have always appreciated in NEPC — solidarity among staff members and supportive office communication.

In NEPC, I have always felt free to say: *I do not know, I made a mistake, I do not agree.* Soon the six-month-acceptable-challenge became a long-term-adventures-story. After two and half years, what still surprises me about NEPC people is their superb expertise and experience combined with a great enthusiasm and a pinch of realism. The work in the Secretariat is peppered by a handful of old and emerging challenges but the Network Analysis showed that NEPC is strong enough to explore, manage and transform them.

Marwan Zeitoun →

Programme Officer
since 2015

When people say 'I had no idea what I was getting myself into' they usually mean it in a bad way. Luckily, my encounter with NEPC proved quite the opposite because it seems I got myself into something good. And by that I don't just mean the great office atmosphere, or how fast the 'I'm new here' line became obsolete due to how open and welcoming everyone I met had been. The 'good' also refers to being a part of a network that is genuinely dedicated to envisioning, exploring and implementing constructive change in education. I am looking forward to meeting more people from member organizations and working on more projects because, if what I have seen so far is anything to go by, it has all the makings of a wonderful experience.

Former Staff Members

- Petra Vukelić, Administrative Assistant, 2006
- Eli Pijaca Plavšić, Project Coordinator, 2008–2010
- Asja Korbar, Project Coordinator, 2010–2012
- Jeronim Dorotić, Project Coordinator, 2010–2011
- Željka Zorić Bennett, Financial Manager, 2012
- Ana Glasnović, Project Coordinator, 2012–2015
- Marko Kovačić, Programme Officer, 2013–2014

Eli Pijaca Plavšić

Project Coordinator, 2008–2010

→ It was at the beginning of 2008, when I came to NEPC and met Lana, my new boss (we immediately became friends ☺) and all the members of the Governing Board. The biggest challenge for me was that it was an organisation at its early stage, and there were lots of things to do and many new things to learn. Today, when I see the growth of NEPC I am very happy that I participated in the development of NEPC and learnt a lot, since today NEPC is a respected and significant organisation. I am also happy the FFE is continuously collaborating with NEPC and that each project is always a great experience; we usually have to work a lot but the results always produce a real change and leave a mark.

Jeronim Dorotić

Project Coordinator, 2010–2011

→ The year that I spent as a project coordinator at NEPC was a valuable life experience that has enriched my personal and professional development. In that year I have gained a multitude of practical skills on the project cycle (from an idea to implementation), and the experience enhanced my intercultural and communication skills. Working at NEPC required frequent travel, a high level of independence and high working standards, but the approach and atmosphere that were dynamic, flexible and creative allowed for many of the professional relationships to grow into friendships. Congratulations NEPC for the first 10 years!

Marko Kovačić

Programme Officer, 2013–2014

→ A story about 10 years of NEPC is an original, interesting, intriguing and special story in which I had the privilege to participate in. At least in its small part. My wish to NEPC for the next 10 years is to keep having courage, audacity, persistence and vision in identifying relevant educational issues, competently putting them on the social and political agendas and successfully offering sustainable policy solutions for them.

Volunteers

- Josip Galić, 2010–2011
- Ivona Mikjel, 2010–2011
- Ria Bilić, 2011
- Ivan Marković, 2011–2012
- Tina Jurko, 2011, 2013
- Lorena Brkić, 2012–2013
- Ivan Jajić, 2013–2014
- Teuta Mihili, 2013–2014

Josip Galić → Work as a volunteer in NEPC has been a great experience for me. I learnt a lot of useful things from my colleagues and they have always tried to help me! For someone who has no working experience this is a great chance for training and improving their skills, and experiencing work in an international organization.

Ivona Mikjel → Since the day I came I have felt as a part of ˝the family˝. When I didn't know how to do something they were extremely patient and they've never made me feel as if I should be embarrassed because I don't know something.. I hadn't heard so many ˝Thank you's!!!˝ in my whole life as I did in the last couple of months. (...) they believe that what they do counts for something, that it makes a difference. And you know what? It really does ☺!

Tina Jurko → (...) In the time I have spent as a volunteer at NEPC I have learnt so many things in such a short period of time which I hadn't thought was possible. (...) I never thought that your workplace could be as full of supportive and open-minded people as at NEPC.

Board Members

- Batjargal Batkhuyag, Mongolia, *Mongolian Education Alliance*, 2009–
- Mario Bajkuša, Croatia, *Forum for Freedom in Education*, 2012–
- Ivona Čelebičić, Bosnia and Herzegovina, *pro*MENTE *Social Research,* 2012–
- Gordana Miljević, Serbia, *Center for Education Policy,*2012–
- Tamar Bregvadze, Georgia, *International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management*, 2013–
- Rima Bezede, Moldova, *Association Educational Centre* PRO DIDACTICA*,* 2015–
- Işik Tüzün Kurtuluş, Turkey, *Education Reform Initiative*, 2015–

NEPC *Presidents*

- Alexandru Crisan, Romania, *Centre Education 2000+/ Individual,* 2006–2012
- Elmina Kazimzade, Azerbaijan, *Center for Innovation in Education,*2012–2013
- Laura Kirss, Estonia, PRAXIS *Center for Public Studies*, 2013–2015
- Mario Bajkuša, Croatia, *Forum for Freedom in Education,* 2015–

Former Board Members

- Saule Kalikova, Kazakhstan, Education Policy Analysis Center, 2005–2009
- Alexandru Crisan, Romania, *Centre Education 2000+,* 2005–2012
- Maria Golubeva, Latvia, *Center for Public Policy* PROVIDUS*/ Individual,* 2005–2012
- Giorgi Machabeli, Georgia, *International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management*, 2005–2012
- Natalia Yablonskene, Russia, *Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences,*2006
- Grace Kaimila Kanjo, South Africa, OSISA, 2006–2009
- Elmina Kazimzade, Azerbaijan, *Center for Innovation in Education,*2007–2013
- Marcela Maslova, Slovakia, ORAVA *Association for Democratic Education,* 2009–2012
- Batuhan Aydagül, Turkey, *Education Reform Initiative,* 2009–2015
- Laura Kirss, Estonia, PRAXIS *Center for Public Studies*, 2012–2015

Instead of a CONCLUSION

A *glimpse into the future*

Although the future is yet unwritten and hard to predict, it is almost certain that whatever it does bring, the need for evidence-based advocacy organizations in education such as NEPC will not cease.

In order to hold on to this role in the region and have a more influential voice on the global level, besides being vocal and clear in advocacy, NEPC must claim a more important position in the global educational policy arena. It needs to reach out to and partner with global players in education and offer our local/regional expertise and our specific knowledge. Staying a step ahead of the emerging issues in education and tackling the 'difficult' and unexplored ones will also ensure a more significant impact in national, regional and global education policies.

Maintaining the quality of membership is crucial as this, to a large degree, determines the quality of the Network and provides the Network with local/regional expertise and specific knowledge. Although it is inevitable that some members will leave, being flexible in membership policy and staying reactive to membership needs will ensure keeping the core members in the Network while attracting new quality members to join. This will also be supported by promoting local and regional experts through the NEPC trademark events Summer School and Policy Lab, and as researchers in the Network projects.

NEPC, as a provider of learning for the regional educational community, will continue its trademark events. However, its strategy should also focus on widening its audience. On one hand this will be done by starting new learning opportunities, such as bi-annual EPC conferences. At the same time, we need to encourage the development of a new NEPC generation; a Learning event for junior staff of NEPC members and young researchers from the region should provide for a step in this direction.

One of the biggest challenges we still have not managed to tackle appropriately is financial sustainability — it remains our number one challenge. We will continue to struggle since institutional funding for an international network is not easy to acquire. While doing more on diversifying our funding sources and continuing to be thrifty in spending will help, we will need to explore other funding mechanisms and be innovative in funding the operational costs of the Network

Finally, we must remember that it was the values that connected us, and this is what will sustain us in the future.

A *thank you for the past*

In order to have a future we must not forget the past — as an organization we should remember not only the people and organizations that set the foundation for NEPC, but also those who carried it forward.

I would therefore like to extend an earnest thank you to:

- all former and current Member organizations and their staff for participating and sharing the vision of NEPC;
- to the Open Society Foundations /Education Support Program and specifically to Aleesha, Hugh and Tom for supportive 'parenting' and being a reliable partner in advocacy;
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This monograph is another way of honouring all those who are in anyway part of the NEPC family and for keeping us all in the institutional memory of NEPC. I expect we will continue to inspire and motivate each other and the new NEPC generations for many years to come.

Sincerely,
Lana Jurko