

Civic education and the Orava Project in Slovakia

Concept notes for a G/DG impact study

Scope of the study. The principal focus of this study will be on project impact, with the main query directed to asking how democratic attitudes, values and behavior changed as a result of the program activities at various levels over the course of the project. The study's methodology centers around the sample survey, using the classical approach of a "treatment group" (those impacted by the project intervention) and a "control group" (comparable people not a part of the project). The Orava Project has involved more constituencies than those studied to date in the Dominican Republic, Poland and South Africa, but the same basic approach can be modified to suit project conditions in Slovakia. But in another sense, Orava involves fewer program aspects than the earlier studies in that it concerns the formal education system and does not have an element focusing specifically on the adult population (component IV, discussed below does include adult citizens, but does so in their role as parents of schoolchildren, not as political participants or actors in their own right). In the end, the central question remains basically the same as with the previous studies: how has the project affected the attitudes, values and behavior of participants?

Project background. Begun in 1992 and then both extended and expanded in 1996, the Orava Project will wind up in June 1999. The project's overall goal has been to employ the primary educational system to help indigenize the "ethic of democracy" in Slovakia. This term comprises a number of behaviors (Orava Project Addendum, December 1993, pages 2-3), including:

- demonstrating independent thinking skills;
- formulating independently held opinions and beliefs;
- respecting alternative perspectives and the rights of others to disagree;
- taking responsibility for independent thinking and decisions;
- demonstrating effective problem-solving and decision-making skills; and
- working collaboratively.

These behaviors (except perhaps for the last two) compare quite closely to those we've been endeavoring to assess in the formal education components of our earlier DG studies, so we should be able to engage in fruitful comparative analysis, even though the target groups in the other settings were high schoolers rather than primary students as is the case with Oravs. The cognitive knowledge part of the earlier studies wouldn't match up here, but I don't think that would be a big loss.

Project setup and participants. The project is administered through a series of grants to the University of Northern Iowa, which has assigned several long-term and short-term advisors to it. On the ground in Slovakia, it has three locations: the Orava region in the northern part of the country, the national capital of Bratislava in the southwest, and the Nitra region also in the

southwest, more or less in between the first two locales. Project participants can be considered in two groups. First, on the professional side there are the teachers (both the Core Teacher Leaders CTLs and the general faculty in the target schools who receive in-service training from the CTLs), school administrators, and the teaching staff at the pedagogical universities. Secondly, there are the students (in two cohorts: grades 1-4 and 5-8) and their parents, who are also part of the project.

Components. The project has four major components:

- I. Democratizing the primary school program. This involves mainly in-service training for primary school teachers through CTLs who receive training from the project implementors. Numbers here are large. CTLs must run into the hundreds and the teachers trained by them perhaps in the thousands by now; in turn, the students taught by these teachers would presumably be in the tens of thousands (although there are few specific data given on these matters in the material I've read so far).
- II. The pedagogical universities curriculum. New courses have been developed and taught at Comenius University in Bratislava and Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. More recently, these approaches have been spread to the three other pedagogical universities in Slovakia, which raises the question of whether a control group would be feasible, were we to study this project component.
- III. Democratizing school administration. This is another in-service program, being implemented by Comenius University in Bratislava and aimed at school administrators throughout the country (or is it only in the three target locales? This is unclear, and would affect feasibility of control groups).
- IV. Establishing school/community linkages. This apparently began as a community outreach effort involving local libraries, but then changed to concentrate more on parents of school children. The indicators and measures specified in 1993 point to the library approach, while the progress reported in 1998 refers basically to parents, at least as I read it.

A tentative study design. The several constituencies involved in the project are laid out in terms of project components in Table 1. The key components for us would be (I) and (IV), where our respondents would be students, parents and teachers. It might make good sense for us to include component (III) as well, as it would enable us to analyze several levels of program impact: on students, on parents, and on teachers. Component (II) appears less relevant to our concerns, in that it relates more to program implementation than to democratic impact on the population.

Respondents. For the three key groups (students, parents and teachers), we should be able to do matched samples of treatment and control groups. Perhaps we could include school administrators also (if we take on component III). The design would be a bit complex, but not much more so than in the earlier studies (which did include school administrators as well as teachers). And the survey process itself should be a good deal more straightforward, since here we would face virtually no trouble in finding our respondents, whereas in earlier assessments there

was considerable difficulty in tracking down program participants (especially in the informal adult civic education programs, which would not be a part of the Slovakia picture at all). Nor would we have trouble in deciding which USAID-supported activities to study (which was a problem with previous country assessments, where we had to choose only a few among a much larger number of initiatives assisted by USAID); in this case there is only one program involved.

Sample size in the first three studies has ranged around 2,000, with about 1,000 each in treatment and control groups. This relatively large number allowed for an in-depth analysis of participants (and controls) for each of the project activities studied. It might be possible to analyze the Orava project with fewer respondents (since there is only one project rather than several), but the various constituencies in Orava would nonetheless mean including a fairly large number overall, perhaps approaching the 2,000 included in the earlier studies.

Timetable. We should be able to send our reconnaissance team to Slovakia in early May, as Kurt Meredith would very much like. Their principal duties will be to flesh out our understanding of the program, recruit local collaborators, launch the selection process to choose a survey firm (bids will have to be vetted through USAID's contracting officers in Washington), begin chalking out a questionnaire format, and develop a methodology for delineating our sample.

A second trip could be undertaken in the summer to perfect the questionnaire schedules through focus groups and pre-tests (this assumes that we can find enough students/parents, teachers and administrators, etc., in the summer, which should be feasible). The interviews can then be conducted by our Slovak survey organization with our various constituencies after school starts in September. After the survey is complete, a third trip will be needed in mid-fall to debrief the USAID mission and Orava project implementors (or their successors, assuming that the project itself has ended by then), and to conduct post-survey focus groups in order to explain and account for whatever anomalies or unexpected patterns appear in the survey results. Final write-up will follow later in the fall.

What the study is and is not. At this point we are thinking of an effort paralleling what we have done so far in the first three countries—assessing the impact of civic education programs on democratic attitudes, values and beliefs. In the Orava case this will mean looking at some aspects of the pedagogical model (and we will be taking on an educational specialist to help us with this), but we are not at present planning an analysis of the model itself; instead we will be looking at the results or impact of implementing the model. Nor are we contemplating a more traditional project evaluation in the sense of analyzing project management, sustainability, replicability, and the like. To put it another way, we will be asking, "To what extent does the Orava model work in changing democratic attitudes, values and beliefs?" We will not be asking, "How does it work?" or "How is it managed?" or "How can it be duplicated?"

Questions and constraints:

- Classes and cohorts. It is logical that teachers would continue with their new approaches in successive years once they had learned them through the CTL

instruction and in-service training, so one thing to look at through the survey would be how many years a teacher has been using the new methods. But for students, it is less clear, at least from what I've read so far. Are particular classes selected for the new approaches (e.g., all first and fourth grade classes each year), or are cohorts selected and then the new approaches employed with them in successive years (e.g., all students entering the first grade in 1995), or are particular schools selected so that all teachers and all students would come under the new methods (this last would make things easier on our end)?

- Earlier evaluations. At several points in what I've read, evaluations are mentioned. Apparently there was one in 1993 (the Mershon group), and then another took place in 1995, with possibly one again in 1998. We have a copy of the 1995 evaluation, which looked mainly at project implementation, but for the other one (or two?) it's not clear from context what was being evaluated. These would be useful as part of our design. Can we get copies?
- Sample "tainting." Some aspects of the program may have spread sufficiently by now that it is no longer possible to find respondents unaffected by it. The pedagogical universities are an obvious instance, but could the same be true of school administrators? Presumably it would be possible to find teachers and students in other regions who have had no relationship to the project, so there should be no problem on that account.

Table 1

Orava project constituencies

Program component	Potential survey respondents				
	Students*	Parents	Teachers	Adminis- trators	Pedagogi- cal univ. faculty
I. Teaching democracy & Core Teacher Leaders	X		X		
II. Teaching teachers at pedagogical universities			X		X
III. School administration			X	X	
IV. Community involve- ment especially parents	X	X			

* There are two groups of students here grades 1-4 and 5-8. Accordingly, there would be two student sample groups and two parent sample groups.