

# Crossing Boundaries in an Educating City: A Case Study of City Human Rights Education at the Open University of Kaohsiung

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**D**O PHENOMENA associated with globalization, such as the cross-border movement of people, the development and reproduction of living space, and the rapid development of media and communication technology point the way towards a more open society or a retreat into a gated society? In response to the challenges of globalization, the city must provide residents with lifelong learning opportunities, enabling them to develop modern civic skills. These skills have far-reaching significance for the construction of an open and inclusive society and development of a sustainable city. This paper explores how city governments use cross-border open long-distance learning resources and the principles of lifelong learning to direct teachers and students to consider the issues surrounding the “gated societies” produced by globalization. It is hoped that students will participate in the development of the civic literacy and human rights values needed to realize an open society. This paper also explores the achievements and challenges associated with using long-distance educational resources and lifelong learning to develop the knowledge, emotional cognition, and behaviors associated with modern civic society. The paper uses the case of multidisciplinary courses on core civic skills taught by the Open University of Kaohsiung (OUK), exploring how Kaohsiung is reinventing itself as an “educating city” using the public space available in its city mass transit systems to establish the Human Rights Studio. These efforts have provided citizens with access to open learning, giving individuals the opportunity to expand their thinking and exchange ideas, increasing their problem-solving capabilities, and helping the city achieve its human rights objectives.

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## Development of a Globalized Open Society and Human Rights Education

Urbanization and globalization continue to present challenge to the provision of civic rights and social protection. From struggles over housing, transportation, educations, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights and cultural rights, it is clear that there are practical limitations in the ability of government policy to guarantee certain rights. This also presents a challenge to the open society. We can review the potential threats presented by globalization to the open society on at least three dimensions.

First, the creation of social vulnerability created by cross-border population flows and responses to human rights issues. Should the national government take responsibility for human rights protection within its political borders, or are human rights protections in an open society something that city residents with different cultural identities must strive for? Are residents in multi-cultural societies more tolerant, or do such societies tend to produce a “gated” human rights environment? Is the development of media and communication technology under globalization a form of processed information and a cold-blooded invisible hand, or a filter on the truth and a guarantee of rational decision-making? Does the explosion of globalized information bring benefits for city residents or simply provide even more information that cannot be absorbed? In addition, is the reengineering of public space and its associated aesthetic discourse an elite bureaucratic project under a capitalist cultural hegemony, or a form of joint decision-making involving the general public to widen access to open public spaces? Is the image of the city where the cultures of the world collide rendered as an aesthetic environment of public sharing or further alienation and exclusion?

Capitalist economic globalization has produced paradoxical phenomena of what Zygmunt Bauman labels “global wealth” and “local poverty,” producing a powerful reaction against globalization.<sup>1</sup> In order to secure their livelihood, increasing numbers of people from all corners of the world are struggling for economic and social rights. These basic human rights deserve protection, yet in an increasingly competitive world, the traditional state security apparatus has struggled to remove the burden of risk from its citizens. For a long time, there has been a structural tension in international society caused by the unequal attention to political and economic human rights, meaning that when faced with issues related to globalization, the state is often unable to respond to democratic demands for human rights protection.

This also highlights that in a harmonious society, the autonomy and independence of each individual should be acknowledged as the basis of a globalized open society. Therefore, it is necessary to provide global social insurance mechanisms that address the coexistence of poverty and affluence, find solutions to the differences that exist between the Northern and Southern hemispheres as well as the cultures of East and West, and identify a greater diversity of approaches to deal with a multiplicity of different issues.

Facing social developments associated with urbanization and globalization, the development of key civic skills and human rights education must include civic literacy in areas such as democracy, ethics, the media, technology, and aesthetics, in order to prevent formation of a gated society and promote the development of an open society. Democratic literacy can be conceptualized as understanding and participation, consideration and consultation, and respect and inclusiveness. Ethical literacy can be conceptualized as morality, justice, and responsibility. Media literacy can be conceptualized as self-discipline and rational judgment, and finding consensus. Finally, aesthetic literacy can be conceptualized as aesthetic appreciation and open intellect.

### **Open University of Kaohsiung and Human Rights Education**

The Open University of Kaohsiung was established in 1996 and has six departments and one center. The OUK is located in the industrial area with the highest revenue in Taiwan, Hsiao-Kang Linhai Industrial Park, in Kaohsiung City, a beautiful harbor city with 1.5 million citizens in the South. Therefore, the OUK will act as the catalyst of industrial area reformation and beautification of urban districts, as well as a city learning resource center of conservation and sustainability. Located in southern Kaohsiung, Siaogang District is gateway to the world for the city through transportation and business. Kaohsiung International Airport handles dozens of flights heading to major cities outside of Taiwan, while MRT and high speed rail link the rest of the island to it. Situated in the center of this district, the OUK is well connected and will utilize this advantage to create novel opportunities as a conference and learning center.

The vision and mission of the OUK feature the core values of a city university, since it was established by Kaohsiung City Government, and a social education institute. The OUK has the advantage in vitalizing the adult edu-

cation market as a social education institute. It is essential that it develops tight partnership with urban human resources revitalization and cultivation in Kaohsiung. As part of all ongoing plans the OUK is engaged in, enhancing the quality of human resources development and international cooperation are the two major missions. In establishing a human right city, the OUK implements two projects, Human Rights Learning Studio as well as the Empowering Center of New Immigrants located in the Kaohsiung MRT. The OUK, the most competent social education university, will not just facilitate the building and enriching of city education network, but also provide infinite possibilities for development in metro Kaohsiung with global opportunities and diversities in the future.

### **“Open Society and Civic Literacy” Courses**

This paper uses a series of courses on “Open Society and Civil Literacy” run by OUK to explore the possibility of establishing teaching focused on core civic skills at an open university to carry out human rights education. This group of courses has obtained funding from the Ministry of Education, and works with the Kaohsiung City government Human Rights Studio project to deliver innovative human rights education.

### **Course Framework and Objectives**

The course framework is largely constructed around four main dimensions: public rights, gender culture, media information, and living space. The skills necessary for an open society, including awareness of human rights, understanding and acceptance of diverse gender cultures, ability to read and evaluate information contained in the media, and the building of harmonious public space, are taught in multidisciplinary courses on City and Human Rights, Readings on Diverse Genders, Media Literacy, and City Aesthetics. These course designs incorporate learning through service and provide a diverse space for deliberative democracy, incorporating four core civic skills (democratic, ethical, media, and aesthetic literacy) into the course design (see Figure 1).

From the perspective of building an open society, general education is used to develop core civic skills. And key learning goals on the dimensions of knowledge, technical abilities, and interpersonal skills are identified:

1. Knowledge goals: Students should be able to articulate the human rights, cultural, information, and public space requirements for an open society, as well as the problem of the gated society under globalization.
2. Skills goals: Students should be able to apply relevant knowledge and skills to respond to and resolve problems of alienation, exclusion, and conflict caused by globalization.
3. Interpersonal goals: Students should have actual interactions outside class to internalize the values and virtues needed for an open society, including human rights, democracy, ethics, rule of law, justice, truth, knowledge, aesthetic appreciation, and friendliness into everyday social life.

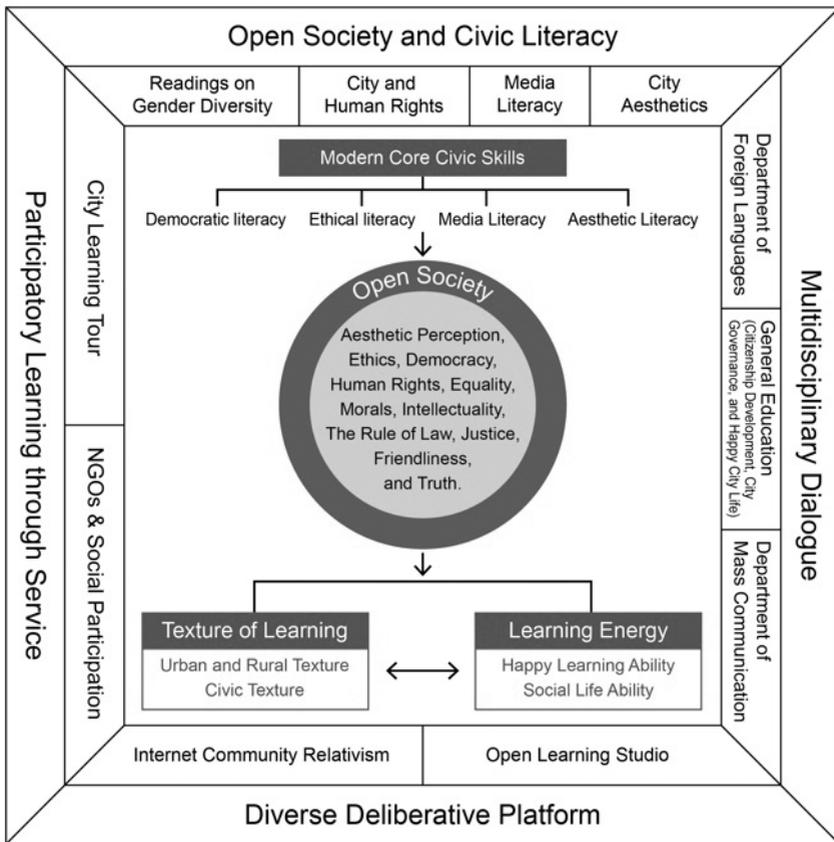


Figure 1: “Open Society and Civic Literacy” Course Framework

The teaching objectives of the course “City and Human Rights” are as follows:

1. Knowledge goals: Students should be able to articulate basic human rights concepts, the development of city human rights, and the development of international mechanisms for the protection of city human rights. Students should also be able to describe Taiwan’s current human rights mechanisms and challenges to human rights. Students should possess attributes of democratic and ethical literacy, including democratic deliberation, justice and responsibility, and respect and inclusiveness. They should also have basic knowledge of urban multiculturalism, urban public affairs, and urban public aesthetics.
2. Skills goals: Students should be able to resolve cases related to city human rights issues, and offer knowledge and technical skills to help build protection mechanisms for city human rights issues, to put in place core democratic and ethical civic skills such as consultative deliberation and rational participation. At the same time, students should possess the ability to apply basic civic skills such as evaluating the information they read and aesthetic appreciation in urban public affairs.
3. Affective / interpersonal goals: Students can apply democratic, ethical, and other basic civic literacy acquired in class to interpersonal relations and interaction after class, demonstrating democratic and ethical literacy, including respect and inclusiveness, the spirit of democracy and the rule of law, justice and ethical values, and consultative deliberation in everyday social life. At the same time, skills such as self-discipline, rational judgment, and approachable intellect are incorporated into the everyday urban life.

### **Class Dialogue and Cooperation Mechanisms**

The series of courses is responsible for teaching primary and secondary core civic skills, as a basis for a complementary dialogue between teaching and learning. In order to achieve a cross-boundary dialogue between and the horizontal and linear integration of teaching goals for core civic skills, a division of labor and cooperation mechanism operates as follows:

1. The overall spirit of the series of courses: Each course is responsible for teaching its primary core civic skill, and forming horizontal

- links and dialogue with other core civic skills to achieve the overall teaching aims of the course series.
2. **Group teaching workshop:** Teachers and teaching assistants organize a group-teaching workshop held at the beginning and middle of the semester, regularly reviewing the division of labor and cooperation between courses, and carrying out necessary adjustments and supplementary measures.
  3. **Team teaching:** Aside from invited lecturers from outside the university, each course teacher also acts as a team teacher for other courses, helping to integrate core civic skills taught in each course.
  4. **Internet dialogue platform:** To encourage exchange of ideas between different courses, the course series also incorporates an internet dialogue platform. An online teacher-student feedback mechanism provides a space to link each week's teaching themes and teaching reference for each course.
  5. **Open learning studio:** The course series incorporates common lecture times, breaking free from the standardized class timetable. Creating an open learning space allows staff and students on all courses to engage in open learning, and enables lively exchange of perspectives between students and teachers on each course.

The features of the "City and Human Rights" teaching activities are as follows:

1. **Let the people decide:** The class is divided into small groups to discuss human rights issues and produce policy appraisal reports for submission to city and county governments and assemblies.
2. **Electronic deliberative democracy:** Encourage students to deliberate and debate human rights issues on internet message boards, building links for community action among city residents.
3. **Community human rights promotion programs:** Organize student participation in community human rights service provision or learning activities, collaborating on community human rights projects (for example, participation in the Kaohsiung City Human Rights Learning Studio and other group human rights service provision or learning projects).
4. **Creative human rights work:** Provide guidance and encouragement for students to use the knowledge obtained from study of human

rights issues to participate in various human rights creative activities (for example, the 2012 Kaohsiung City Human Rights Press Prize or human rights reporting, essay writing, or photography activities related to human rights issues).

5. Training of human rights volunteer guides: Organize training for city human rights volunteer guides, encourage students to study the city's human rights legacies, and develop human resources skills base to effectively utilize the city's human rights culture and tourism assets.

### **Cross-Border and Cross-Domain: The Educating City and the Development of Citizens' Human Rights Literacy**

The purposes of civic education are to nurture the political capabilities and knowledge of citizens (including human rights, democracy, and the political system), develop critical thinking, instill certain values and attitudes (for example, respect for others, peaceful coexistence), and encourage active participation (school and community).<sup>2</sup> Regardless of differences between countries in civic education curriculums, the development of participation-oriented civic education has become an increasing priority in many countries. However, most countries recognize that there is still no objective and standardized measure of the effectiveness of non-theoretical learning delivered by civic education programs. Establishing universal principles for civic education is a major challenge, which some countries have tried to address through new civic education programs or methods.<sup>3</sup>

This paper uses educational courses on human rights at the OUK, a social education university in Taiwan, as its case study. It explores ways to develop the educating city and use open public space in the mass transit system to create a framework of interdisciplinary courses on human rights that build the modern core civic skills and literacy required for an open society. The series of courses is centered on lifelong learning, using an experimental curriculum design to explore new possibilities for human rights education. Regarding the implications of innovative human rights education based on the principles of the open society for the development of core civic skills and literacy, this paper proposes the following conclusions:

The Power Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Learning Spaces: The possibility of the power deconstruction and reconstruction of urban learn-

ing spaces in an open society is dependent on the activation of the potentials of the educating city.<sup>4</sup> An example of such reconstruction of space is the innovative transformation of space on public space on the Kaohsiung metro system into a space for education and the transfer of knowledge. This paper explores the practice of human rights education, transcending the traditional ideas of institution-based education and current approaches to outdoor education, using open public space linked to the Kaohsiung MRT Formosa Boulevard Station Human Rights Learning Studio to create the possibility of a new cross-border and cross-domain learning space. The use of public open space enables learners (including registered students, non-registered city residents, and passing commuters) to freely join and leave an imagined community based on different themes and conversations. In order to implement the concept of the “Human Rights City,” the Kaohsiung City Government Human Rights Commission authorized the OUK to establish a “Human Rights Learning Studio” at the Kaohsiung MRT Formosa Boulevard Station, providing information on human rights history and assimilating human rights ideals into the everyday lives of the people. The “Human Rights Learning Studio” is committed to transforming Formosa Boulevard MRT station into a “transfer station for human rights knowledge and values,” and producing a harmonious society that ensures human dignity and mutual tolerance, protecting and advancing human rights. A human rights city, where everyone lives in a sustainable open society, learning human rights and human rights innovation, and where people show mutual understanding and care for each other, ensures that people can enjoy human rights. The Human Rights Studio is located in city public space, making full use of a mass transit transfer station, providing unlimited open human rights learning, creating a “Human Rights Knowledge Depot,” a “Human Rights Energy Center,” and “Praise of Human Rights” installations. Educational services include a human rights book and video archive, dissemination of information on human rights activities, a human rights salon, lectures, creative works, reading groups, seminars, film appreciation events, Human Rights Monopoly game, human rights tours, human rights vows, and famous human rights quotations. This place offers a space for reading, learning, dialogue, and presentation of diverse human rights creative works (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Kaohsiung City Human Rights Learning Studio



Human Rights Salon Lectures for Disadvantaged City Residents



LGBT Rights – The Rainbow Taiwan Relay – Kaohsiung Start of the Race Press Conference



Human Rights Studio – Human Rights Energy Center



Human Rights Studio – Praise of Human Rights



Human Rights Studio - Human Rights Knowledge Depot



Concert for the 2012 Kaohsiung City Human Rights Press Prize Ceremony

The Creation of a Model of Dialogue and Voluntary Consensus Based on Human Rights Understanding: Amartya Sen points out that the relationship between globalization and choice need not be conflicted. This means

that as more opportunities are opened up, the choices of each individual should be accepted by the community. From this perspective, it becomes easier to understand the complex relationship between local and national culture on the one hand, and globalization on the other.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the homogenized system based on enrollment according to test scores found in traditional universities, this course makes use of the unique character of the student body at a social education university.<sup>6</sup> For instance, in the classroom, students can be divided into different groups, enabling learning between students from different generations and socioeconomic background, with varying educational attainments and workplace experience to engage in dynamic discussion on various human rights topics, enabling students to gain a new understanding of the open society and learn from the ideas of others. This method of teaching enables links to be drawn between human rights dialogues in each generation and individual attitudes towards human rights issues.

The Building of New Citizenship Rights for the Open Society and Learning Core Civic Skills: Different understandings of human rights form the basis of harmonious social interactions based on healthy civil society values and attitudes.<sup>7</sup> A culture of human rights is an expression of human rights awareness at the individual level. It reflects an awareness of the rights of citizens that transcends the political gated society and an acceptance of all human rights and respect for human dignity of all and without discrimination (rather than something bequeathed). An acceptance of the rights of citizens in an open society forms the very foundation of the universal human rights values. The course explores emerging human rights issues through a program of blended learning, combining class and online teaching through a digital platform for wide ranging discussion. The course uses a constant process of “contact - collision - deconstruction - construction - collision - deconstruction – reconstruction” to explore students’ existing beliefs, and looks out whether and how beliefs and actions change in the human rights learning process.

## **Conclusion**

The formation of a harmonious, tolerant, and vibrant global multicultural society involves both the way residents view their own identity and the extent to which residents are accepted by their families, other local resi-

dents, business and labor organizations, government agencies and other stakeholders. This paper explores the application of progressive thinking on social education policy as the basis for policy innovation on new open educational resources. It uses the example of the Open University of Kaohsiung course on "Open Society and Civic Literacy" to analyze how open educational resources and strategy from across different fields and disciplines are integrated to achieve this purpose. The analysis shows that creative deconstruction and reconstruction of educational learning space helped develop civic literacy among students while an educating-city could facilitate open education resources for open global immigrant societies. In conclusion, this paper advocates a creative collaborative integration of central and local government systems to construct a multi-dimensional and multicultural free learning zone educational support system, with the aim of increasing the actual learning effectiveness of long-distance education for the realization of an open and tolerant society.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ulrich Beck, *What Is Globalization?* (Wiley, 2000), page 31.

<sup>2</sup> Eurydice European Unit, *Citizenship Education at school in Europe*, 2005, page 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 28, 35-36, 40, 43-44.

<sup>4</sup> IAEC, *International Charter for Educating Cities* (International Association of Educating Cities, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> "Masters of the Century Interview: 1998 Nobel Laureate in Economics Amartya Sen," *China Times*, 26 December 1999, page 3; "Profile: Amartya Sen," *China Times*, 26 December 1999, page 3.

<sup>6</sup> In accordance with Taiwan's law, citizens at least 18 years of age shall have access to open universities regardless of educational qualifications and without any admissions test requirements.

<sup>7</sup> Navanethem Pillay, "Opening Remarks to the Seminar on Articles 19th and 20th," October 2, 2008, Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.