

Championing human rights close to home and far away: Human rights education in the light of national identity construction and foreign policy in Norway

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Keywords: human rights education, national identity, foreign policy, Norway

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Introduction

Why do states promote human rights education (HRE)? What and who does it serve – the state, its citizens? International educational discourses have identified HRE as a sustainable practice for developing active citizenship and protecting human dignity (Georgi, 2008; Ippoliti, 2009; Mihr, 2009; Suarez, 2007). HRE promotes the empowerment of individuals and vulnerable groups and the development of human rights mechanisms in local, national and international contexts. It also promotes conflict resolution, active democratic citizenship, and rights and obligations (Tibbits, 2002; Vesterdal, 2016). There are a number of factors that may justify the value of citizenship education and HRE in educational policy. Among these are democratic deficit¹, weakening political and civic engagement, terrorism, human rights violations, globalisation, and tensions related to increased migration and diversity (Kerr, 2008; Osler & Starkey, 2010).

The pressure and work of the grassroots and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to put HRE on the international agenda have also been crucial to its recognition (Mihr, 2009; Suarez, 2007). Moreover, international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU) impose a number of obligations on their member states regarding HRE (Decara, 2013). These encourage incentives to conform to global educational standards (Karlsen, 2006; Spring, 2009) and to follow and respect international law and norms

which, if ignored, may lead to sanctions or, at least, a loss of reputation and criticism from ‘the international community’ (Risse, Roppe & Sikkink, 1999).

However, the ideal purposes of HRE and the embracing of the concept as a way to develop human rights-friendly societies and democratic citizenship do not fully explain why it is in the interest of a state to promote it. As Bajaj (2017, p. 8) argues, ‘nation-states and policymakers have diverse reasons to support human rights education — that may or may not include a transformative vision’. It is not a given that education of this nature is in the interests of nation-states, in spite of a rhetorical consensus at the inter-state level.

This is also the case in Norway, where human rights are included and explicitly referred to in different educational steering documents. HRE is included in the Education Act (2010) as well as in the new overarching curriculum and the curricula of different subjects, particularly in social and religious studies (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, 2013, 2010). Are there also other motivations for states such as Norway to promote HRE? Why do states and governments promote HRE, thereby empowering their citizens with human rights consciousness, risking demands for change, loss of support or their very legitimacy? By reformulating the question, we may open other arenas to explore relevant factors: How can Norway as a small state gain influence in international relations? How is its national identity constructed, what are the values that are worth promoting internationally and how is its self-image compatible with state branding efforts abroad and to what purpose? Such questions are raised when it comes to the role of education and educational research and are transferable to international contexts, as a number of countries share several challenges concerning the implementation of HRE despite promoting this educational concept (Decara, 2013; Mahler, Mihr & Toivanen, 2009; Mejias, 2017; Vesterdal, 2016).

The analysis of these questions contributes to understanding why and how the concept is addressed and used on the policy level, for the purpose of understanding how political discourses frame HRE practice in different educational settings. This article will explore and discuss possible relations between national identity construction, foreign policy and HRE in Norway through the following research question: *What interplay occurs between Norwegian foreign policy and national identity in relation to human rights, and, within this context, what is the role of HRE?* The article will argue that in Norway national identity is in several ways intertwined with foreign policy and, within this relationship, HRE is an essential component in constructing the image of a human rights-friendly Norwegian identity. The image of a peace-loving country, a promoter of democracy, human rights and development, has both domestic and ‘state branding’ dimensions; it may be intended not only to develop human rights-friendly communities, but also to produce national identity, as well as to gain access to negotiating tables in international relations.

Using discourse-analytic approaches (Connolly, 1993; Fairclough, 1992; Neumann, 2001), I scrutinise a sample of Norwegian policy documents and reports to explore the constituting elements of HRE discourses in Norway. Investigating how and why social phenomena take the forms they do is an essential purpose of discourse-analytic techniques (Neumann, 2001, p. 14). These techniques rest on the assumptions that meaning is socially constructed, and that discourse consists of representations that are grouped in specific ways (Neumann, 2001, p. 23). The relation between text, language, content and meaning is illustrated by the following comment by Fairclough, which states that discourse contributes to ‘all those

dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape relations, identities and institutions which lie behind them. Discourse is a practice not just representing the world, but signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning' (1992, p. 64). This view that discourse analysis is a fruitful tool to analyse policy documents is comparable to Eriksen's claim in the previous edition of this journal (2018) that 'major curriculum documents hold power and discursive productivity in the Foucauldian sense; they are vital for locating normative cultural discourses about the ideal citizen' (Eriksen, 2018, p. 27).

Studies of the Norwegian context

What do we know about the Norwegian context concerning relations between HRE, national identity construction and foreign policy? Little research has been performed to explore this nexus in the educational field, although studies exist exploring the relation between education and national identity construction.

The role of the school as the main arena for nation-building has been emphasised in the works of Telhaug and Mediås (2003), with a focus on steering documents in Norwegian education from 1739 to the early 2000s. Lorentzen (2005) also emphasises the role of the school as a crucial arena for nation-building, through his study of history textbooks (and more recent social studies textbooks) and how these have presented and reproduced the 'grand narratives' of Norway and Norwegians in different periods. Engen (2010) points to the exclusion of national minorities and indigenous peoples in the development of the comprehensive school system, which has been based on an imagined community of one people - ethnic Norwegians; the cultural heritage of minority groups has been assimilated and excluded in the construction of a Norwegian national identity. Børhaug (2012, p. 71) has discussed the role of social studies in Norway, suggesting that it paradoxically represents a 'national subject in a globalised world'. He describes the focus on national issues and the nation state as the primary unit, and how social studies supports the production of national identity. Børhaug also argues, as Tvedt (2003, 2007) does in his analysis of Norway's national 'do-gooder's regime', that the image of Norway as a promoter of peace and development has become prominent in the textbooks (Børhaug, 2012). Osler and Lybæk (2014) contribute to understandings of the Norwegian context by examining ways in which educational policy supports an inclusive notion of nationhood and promotes an exclusive model of national identity. This analysis of educational policy 'identifies a tension in policy between recognition of diversity and concerns about social cohesion' (Osler & Lybæk, 2014, p. 15). They propose instead a curriculum that genuinely integrates minority perspectives and narratives to develop 'the new Norwegian we', based on Osler and Starkey's concept of education for cosmopolitan citizenship (2003, 2005, 2018). This concept advocates citizenship learning that 'recognises our complex, interconnected world; and draws on young people's experiences of living in communities characterised by diversity, in which they negotiate multiple loyalties and belongings' (Osler & Starkey, 2018, p. 37). This sample of studies on the link between education and national identity construction contributes to this discourse, although none of them have specifically studied HRE.

There has been a growing recognition of education as an essential component of competitiveness in global markets, as human capital and skills are the key contributors to economic growth in the knowledge society (Karlsen, 2006; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017; Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development, 2005; Sandlin & McLaren, 2010; Spring, 2009). The recognition of education as a prerequisite to economic growth and wealth (at least increased GDP) within states is necessarily connected to global competitiveness, and thus a component of not just domestic policy, but also increasingly of foreign policy, as education is related to vital national interests (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016; 2014a; Wojciuk et al., 2015). With these perspectives in mind, let us, for the time being, leave the educational system in order to understand and interpret the purposes of HRE on a societal level.

National identity construction and foreign policy

'Norway has a long tradition of continuity in foreign and security policy, and there is broad consensus on the values that underpin our policy: democracy, human rights, and respect for international law' (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017, p. 6). These values are expressed in the government's 2017 White Paper no. 36, setting the course for Norwegian foreign and security policy. What are the core elements of Norwegian national identity, and how do foreign policies interplay in this process? My aim here is not to evoke all possible elements regarding national identity and key priorities of the foreign policy of Norway, but to introduce some constitutive elements that are relevant for our discussion on the role of HRE and its political framework. In this context the starting point is political concepts. These are understood as socially constructed and there is a recognition of their multiple meanings and dynamic nature (Berenskoetter, 2016). Identity is a multifaceted concept; here I follow Johnston (1999), who defines the term "national identity" as a social category. Johnston refers to some shared notions of community that are thought to be distinct from other nations, where markers of identity represent constitutive elements that distinguish one nation from others, as well as differences between the Self and the Other, imagined or not (Anderson, 2006). On a national level, the need for legitimacy of the nation, the state and regime type have both internal and external purposes and functions. If we recognise the sphere of foreign policy as both the bridge between domestic and international relations and the wall between the secure and the insecure, the predictable and the unpredictable (Leira et al., 2007, p. 8), then this policy sector has a significant impact on how national identity is constructed as well. In this discussion, I combine the purposes and nature of foreign policy with its relations to the school system as a key engineer of national identity construction.

Developing an argument on the interdependency between foreign policy, national identity construction and the role of HRE in Norway rests on some key assumptions. Here, Johnston's arguments on the relations between legitimation, foreign policy and national identity are fruitful. Let us look at what Johnston proposes: 1) regime legitimation involves the construction of a 'national identity' among the members of a society; 2) identity construction rests on establishing and perpetuating differences between the ingroup and outgroups; 3) foreign policy is a process in which differences between a sovereign nation-state ingroup and a sovereign nation-state outgroup are recreated; 4) therefore, foreign policy is critical for identity construction and thus for legitimation (Johnston, 1999, p. 4). When there is some degree of consistency between internal identities and 'the normatively appropriate, pro-group behaviour expected by international audiences', an optimal balance of internal and external legitimation will obtain. These assumptions are somewhat harmonious with global opinion theory (Rusciano 2003), which argues

that '(...) the construction of national identity derives, in part, from a negotiation between a nation's *Selbstbild* (or the nation's national consciousness, or the image its citizens have of their country) and a nation's *Fremdbild* (or the nation's perceived or actual international image in world opinion)' (Rusciano, 2003, p. 361).

Johnston's and Rusciano's arguments on the close relationship between foreign policy and national identity construction are echoed by David Campbell. In *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, he argues that foreign policy in general has to be understood as identity politics that aim to discipline society (Campbell, 1998). He claims that foreign policy is less about defending territorial boundaries than defending the boundaries of American identity and 'our way of life'. Here, the preservation and reproduction of identity are constituted through the construction of an external threat. This external threat is related to the 'Self' and the 'Other'; it is not necessarily external in terms of territorial boundaries, but creates the distinction between what 'we' are or not. Thus, national identity is, according to Campbell, in many ways developed through images of 'foreignness'. This is of interest when we look at how national identity is constructed in Norway through, among other influences, HRE. This is not to argue that foreign policy is limited to producing national identity, as 'hard' power perspectives related to realpolitik are obviously a necessary and vital part of foreign policy. These dimensions, however, do not exclude the nexus of national identity and foreign policy. With this theoretical foundation in mind, we turn to the Norwegian perspectives.

HRE as a component of foreign policy and national identity construction in Norway

Why do states promote HRE? As presented in the introduction, we may point to several factors where HRE seems to play a significant role (Vesterdal, 2016). Cardenas states: 'According to its proponents, HRE should appeal to states because it promises to foster social tolerance, a democratic citizenry, and a climate wherein human rights abuses are less likely to occur' (Cardenas, 2005, p. 364). Thus, it should be in the self-interest of democratic states to embrace the concept. It can also be argued that Norway promotes HRE because doing so is its duty. International obligations form a legal and moral basis for the implementation of this subject in the Norwegian school system, and the state is 'under a duty to enact legislation and to take other measures to bring about human rights education in line with these commitments' (Alfredsson, 2001, p. 282). In this context it is appropriate to emphasise the legally binding conventions with their specific references to HRE manifested through, for instance, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), article 29 (1), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC), article 13 (1) and protocol 1 article 2 to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). In addition, there are declarations, charters and recommendations – international standards that are agreed upon and recognised, but not legally binding (Andenæs & Bjørge, 2012). These also represent global standards that states conform to, a dimension of what Spring (2009) terms the 'globalisation of education'. Global superstructures directly and indirectly influence national school systems through international organisations and multinational educational corporations; states choose to adopt policies from these to be competitive in the global economy (Karlsen, 2006)

On the other hand, the concept can lead the population of the state to an awareness that may undermine the legitimacy of the government. If people are aware

of their rights, are they not more likely to demand that those rights be protected? Following this logic, Cardenas asks an essential question: 'Why would states, most of which violate human rights to one degree or another, encourage dissent and run the risk of undermining their very legitimacy?' (Cardenas, 2005, p. 364). What are the motives of states to comply with and promote international standards concerning human rights, and specifically HRE? If we adopt a classical realist position in the study of international politics, then such education seems inadequate, naïve or even irrational and, consequently, inimical to classical interest-based policies that emphasise constitutive elements such as power, security, regime stability, control of the state and its citizens, economic growth, and geopolitical and military-strategic factors.

An alternative (neo)-realist position would be that states embrace HRE hypocritically, expecting to 'reap the international benefits of doing so' (Cardenas, 2005, p. 364). Moreover, the promotion of HRE may contribute to regime stability through the construction of a set of common values and norms that include both majority and minority groups, resulting in a national and cosmopolitan hybrid, which this author would describe as a 'cosmonational' identity. Such strategies concerning Norwegian identity construction can fit into such a framework, and HRE is one of the aspects of the educational system that plays a role here.

In 2017 the Norwegian government presented White Paper no. 36 on Norwegian foreign and security policy, stating: 'The Government will continue to promote human rights, the rule of law and democracy, in line with the white paper on human rights in Norway's foreign policy and development cooperation. This is a good way of safeguarding Norwegian values' (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017, p. 40). In Norway's follow-up of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals in 2016, the government also recognised human rights education as a priority in foreign policy: 'The Norwegian government has made education a top priority in its foreign and development policy. Consequently, Norway will double its funding to education over a four-year period to promote economic development, democracy and human rights globally' (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). This is also emphasised in White Paper no. 10 (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014b, p. 26) concerning the government's international human rights policy, asserting the government will 'focus on the promotion of human rights education.' These ambitions and elements of Norway's foreign policy are important for our discussion on the role of HRE, if we take this starting point into consideration and relate it to the theories of Johnston, Rusciano and Campbell. Foreign policy is here considered both in terms of the bridge between national and international politics, but also the wall between the two spheres, creating the frontier between the 'us' and the 'them', the secure and the insecure, and as the outer limit for our 'unique' norms, values and system. In both cases it is fruitful to describe foreign policy as identity politics, following Leira in his analysis of Norwegian foreign policy (Leira et al., 2007, p. 8). In a Norwegian context, this view of foreign policy seems to be a useful one for several reasons, which I will come back to in the course of this discussion.

According to Tvedt (2007), discourse analysis is useful when it comes to the Norwegian 'southern political system', the national 'do-gooder regime' and the framing of the Norwegian strategic communicative regime towards the world and itself. In his view, Norway attaches her state branding to development and peace policies in the global arena, and this policy field has also served as an important reservoir for national identity production. In his argument about the exercise of soft

power, Nye (2004) uses Norway as an example of a state that enjoys more political influence internationally than its military and economic weight because it defines its national interest to include legitimate or (morally) attractive causes such as economic aid or peacemaking. The peacemaker image identifies Norway with values shared by other nations, resulting in access to negotiating tables in other, more vital, arenas in world politics (ibid, p. 10) – a *soft power* approach. De Carvalho and Lie (2015) conclude that the image of a ‘humanitarian superpower’ through a *policy of involvement* has contributed to making Norway more visible to great powers and has clearly brought status rewards. Baehr and Castermans-Holleman (2004) find in studies of selected countries (for instance the Netherlands and Norway) that governments of some small states use human rights both as a tool and as an objective of foreign policy.

Hence, there are both external and internal motives for constructing a national identity based on the image of a ‘humanitarian superpower’.² Nonetheless, the construction of this identity cannot be effective or flourish within a society without some kind of consensus, which needs to be based not only within the political system, but in the population as well. The building of self-image and identity needs to be carried out through ongoing processes of production, reproduction and manifestations that constitute and reaffirm the core elements of the framework on which a given national identity is developed. Following this, state branding and public diplomacy to establish a good, positive reputation abroad need credibility. This factor is illustrated by former State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thoril Widvey, in a speech on Norwegian public diplomacy in Ottawa in 2003, where she emphasised that: ‘In order to create an image of a genuine and trustworthy nation we have to practice what we preach. Moreover, the messages we project to the world must reflect the way our citizens view themselves (...)’ (Widvey, 2003). This credibility depends on the compatibility between image-building and political action and between the content of image-building and the national identity. This is similar to what Johnston (1999) refers to as a balance of *internal and external legitimation*. If Norway aims to establish an international image based on high moral standards, advocating peace, democratic rule and human rights, then this is necessarily conditioned by some degree of consensus in the general public.

Following this logic, the role of the education system seems to be significant in order to influence people’s norms, values and attitudes and to establish a common national identity. Consequently, considering the constituting elements of national identity and image-building that are emphasised here, education for democratic citizenship and HRE are subjects of high relevance to this discussion. If we go further and take into account public documents related to HRE in Norway, I will argue that there are recognisable elements that suggest HRE has a role to play in constructing and confirming a modern national identity, as well as being a component of public diplomacy.

Constituting HRE in educational documents and reports in Norway

This section will illustrate how HRE is integrated in the construction of national identity and as a component of public diplomacy through its presence in a sample of policy documents. These are White Paper no. 21, the Core Curriculum (1993) and the Purpose Clause of the Educational Act (2010), as well as extracts from Norwegian reports to international organisations on the topic (Council of Europe, United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO). A

starting point here is the Norwegian Human Rights Act of 1999, which aimed to strengthen the status of human rights in Norwegian jurisdiction. This legislation was followed by Government White Paper no. 21, 1999–2000, a plan of action for human rights called *Focus on Human Dignity*. This included a general plan to ‘provide information, instruction and education with a view to protecting and promoting human rights in Norway’ (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999, p. 243). It further states that ‘the government regards information, instruction and education as important tools to protect and promote human rights in Norway’ (ibid, p. 245). Here the policymakers acknowledge the importance of HRE as a tool for strengthening human rights culture in the country and the school system, as well as establishing a field of research. It states: ‘In the years to come, therefore, the Government will seek to strengthen training in the field of human rights in public educational institutions at all levels, and will intensify research on human rights in Norway’ (ibid). However, in a review prior to the action plan that evaluated how knowledge of human rights was disseminated in the educational system at that time (1999), the government claimed that ‘the human rights aspect appears to be safeguarded satisfactorily in legislation and regulations in the field of education’ (ibid, p. 244). This reaffirms the national (self) image of a promoter of human rights, even before the plan was implemented.

The first argument to justify HRE is that Norway is obliged under international law to do so; through the ratifying of human rights conventions she is obliged to promote knowledge and awareness through education and information. Following the theoretical framework of this article, this is in line with the ambition of the state to be a promoter of international law, which respects universal human rights and works for their protection. This interest-based policy can also be interpreted as a part of international image-building, based on Nye’s concept of soft power, alongside the identity-constructing aspect of following international obligations. This is in addition to the more normative dimension of respecting international human rights norms because doing so leads to peace, tolerance and a political culture that facilitates democratic rule. Presenting the reasons for why Norway needs a plan of action for human rights in general, we may also recognise this topic as a way of drawing the line between the secure and the insecure, the We and the Other in identity construction processes, and confirming the image of Norway as a ‘frontrunner’:

The major challenges in the field of human rights are to be found in the international arena, where human rights situations may be far more complicated and serious than is the case in Norway. The poverty problem is a key factor and is compounded by violent conflicts. Very often, human rights violations are large-scale and extremely grave (...) Norway is one of the first countries in the western world to present a separate national plan of action to promote human rights. The Government has reported on its efforts to draw up the Plan in international fora, and the response has been favourable. The Government hopes that the process behind this plan and the lessons that can be learned from the process will provide inspiration and assistance in efforts to draw up similar plans of action in other countries. (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999, p. 2–4)

Although it is recognised that human rights violations occur in Norway too, the message is that human rights are basically a problem outside Norwegian borders, where the violations are large-scale and extremely grave, similar to what Okafor and Agbakwa (2001) describe as the 'heaven-and-hell binary' in international HRE practice. The dichotomisation constituting the human rights 'heaven' of the West and the human rights 'hell' of the Third World (Okafor and Agbakwa, 2001) reproduces stereotypes and moral superiority, while working effectively to produce images of a human rights-friendly nation. The insecure conditions outside the borders are contrasted to the harmonious nature of Norwegian society, which aims to serve as a role model for other countries that have not reached 'our' level. Hence, the document also constructs a sense of moral superiority that has both domestic and state branding functions. This superiority shares some common elements with Orientalism, where Said (1978) describes Western stereotypical conceptions that over centuries have been established about people and cultures in 'the Orient'. The Western world represents rational, developed, tolerant and harmonious individuals, while the people of the East (and South) are the opposite: irrational, superstitious, primitive, chaotic and intolerant.

If the Action Plan is a relevant starting point for legitimating an explicit HRE agenda in Norway, the Education Act and the curricula are the policy tools for implementing it in the educational system. The Purpose Clause of the Education Act stresses that education is to be based on values rooted in human rights. Its position, however, is shared with other sources of fundamental values:

Education and training shall be based on fundamental values in Christian and humanist heritage and traditions, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs and are rooted in human rights. (Education Act, 2010, sec.1-1)

The preferred values in this passage are connected to Norway's Christian and humanist heritage and tradition, while acknowledging that they are present in different religions and beliefs. These can be seen in the light of the first sentence of the Purpose Clause, which states that education and training shall '(...) open doors to the world and give the pupils and apprentices historical and cultural insight and anchorage' (ibid.). This balance between focusing on the national heritage and, at the same time, opening doors to the world is repeated in section 1-1, which calls for a 'cosmonational' view where citizens' fundamental values should be both anchored in national identity and have a global outlook, as a hybrid of cosmopolitan citizenship (Osler & Starkey, 2005) and national citizenship. The balancing act continues through the next passage where education is to help increase 'the knowledge and understanding of the national cultural heritage and our common international cultural traditions' and further 'provide insight into cultural diversity and show respect for the individual's convictions' and simultaneously 'promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking' (Education Act, 2010, sec.1-1). These different statements point towards an implicit ambition – that of developing social cohesion and avoiding social unrest and division in what educational authorities describe as a

heterogeneous society (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2007, p. 45–48).

In the Core Curriculum document³, which is part of the Quality Framework of the school system, it is stated that human rights are part of the fundamental *values* of the school system because these are part of Norwegian traditions: ‘Our Christian and humanistic tradition places equality, human rights and rationality at the fore’ (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 1993, p. 7).

The statements in this part of the curriculum seem to establish and constitute human rights and democracy as part of a unique ‘Norwegianness’, a cultural heritage that is a foundation of Norwegian national identity. It is important to uphold this heritage and educate future generations to be a part of it. Although there is explicit reference to the term ‘human rights’, this document basically expresses it through a value-based approach. This is a common element of the White Paper, the Educational Act and the Core Curriculum – human rights are basically understood as a set of universal values at the cost of other dimensions, such as juridical, critical and political ones. There is some congruency in *the belief in* human rights as a set of values – sacralisation – rather than political tools and legal mechanisms to empower individuals against violations (Vesterdal, 2016). Human rights are obviously rooted in values, but are at the same time something different; rights claims can be asserted in both national and international courts of justice, whereas values cannot. In addition to values and the philosophical groundwork, the political and juridical dimension of rights makes the concept more than a rhetorical and non-obligatory normative statement - it also provides tools for participation through different channels of political influence (Donnelly, 1999; Landman, 2005; Risse, Roppe & Sikkink, 1999). Additionally, it represents rules, legal tools that regulate the relation between the individual and the state, protecting the individual from state violations (Andenæs & Bjørge, 2012; Høstmælingen, 2007).

Norway has also signed and supported the main international agreements and standards concerning HRE. In light of these, I will illustrate how Norwegian authorities describe and constitute the status of HRE in their reports to the international institutions monitoring these processes. The reports aim to describe the current situation concerning how and to what degree HRE is implemented, and possible challenges related to the implementation of the subject in the country. Following the Council of Europe’s adoption of the EDC (Education for Democratic Citizenship)/HRE Charter in 2010, a questionnaire on the implementation of the Charter was conducted in 2012 to collect information on what was happening in the signatory states. Commenting to the Council of Europe on the extent to which these topics are included, the Norwegian authorities argue that EDC/HRE is to a large degree implemented in the core curriculum and in subject curricula. Moreover, the respondents argue:

ICCS also indicates that Norwegian pupils as competent in knowledge about EDC/HRE, for EDC/HRE and in willingness to put EDC/HRE into practice. The Core Curriculum and the Quality Framework instructs teachers and leaders to promote human equality and equal rights, intellectual freedom, democracy and tolerance. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2012, p. 6)

Concerning the question of whether concrete measures/activities have been taken to promote implementation of the Charter in the country, the answer is negative, since 'the measures in the Charter are already a part of Norwegian education policy in this area. It has therefore not been necessary with specific activities to promote the implementation of the Charter' (Ibid: 8). A similar response can be found in the Norwegian report to UNESCO's Recommendation of 1974 on Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Commenting on the implementation of the Recommendation, the report says that a strategy related specifically to the Recommendation has not been developed, and that 'no decision has been taken on the national implementation of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE)' (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2009, p. 6). It further argues that: 'Norwegian policy and activities generally have been developed independently of the WPHRE. The main reason for this is that themes and activities embedded in the programme are perceived to be well integrated into the Norwegian education system' (ibid). The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, in its responses concerning the questionnaire for governments' UNESCO evaluation of the first phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, also stresses that the human rights aspects are satisfactorily safeguarded in the field of education.

Thus, international statements by the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the reports to intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) concerning HRE illustrate the international branding of Norway as a human rights champion, also in the educational field.

Conclusion: HRE as a component of national identity construction and foreign policy

This article has explored and discussed possible relations between national identity, foreign policy and HRE in Norway. The different policy documents, reports, statements and steering documents give an overview of how human rights and HRE are constituted in Norwegian policy in light of the research questions raised, while a more comprehensive overview of the role of HRE in Norway through its practice, approaches and implementation is discussed elsewhere⁴. The statements from the Norwegian reports to intergovernmental organisations on the status of HRE indicate that the authorities find the implementation of HRE satisfactory and well integrated in the educational system, confirming the image of a state dedicated to human rights. Here the message to the international society is that HRE is sufficiently implemented. The study of relevant theoretical contributions, policy documents and reports contributes to the depiction of HRE as both a component of Norwegian national identity construction and an element of state branding in the international arena.

Nonetheless, in spite of states promoting and adopting the rhetoric of such education, several European countries face common challenges on the practice level, and it is not carved in stone that HRE is sufficiently implemented. These common challenges are particularly visible in terms of sporadic and implicit HRE, as part of a civic education that basically focuses on voter education and there is a compliance with the nation-state and its political institutions at the expense of a holistic approach to HRE (Decara, 2013; Mahler, Mihr & Toivanen, 2009; Matilainen & Kallioniemi, 2012; Mejias, 2017; Osler & Starkey, 2010; Toivanen, 2009). Additionally, the focus on *citizens'* rights rather than *human* rights seems to be an

obstacle in several countries where different minorities are excluded from human rights narratives, or diversity is regarded as an obstacle to rather than a part of the democratic process. These approaches also tend to be disciplining rather than empowering (Mahler, Mihr & Toivanen, 2009; Osler, 2009; Toivanen, 2007; Vesterdal, 2016).

Studies by Vesterdal (2016) and Lile (2011) point towards challenges to the implementation of HRE in Norway that are similar to those in the international context. Moreover, Vesterdal's study (2016) shows that although there is a consensus on its importance among Norwegian teachers, HRE tends to be conceptualized as learning about violations of human rights *outside* national borders, as a self-evident imperative and as a set of values rather than learning *for* human rights. Hence, the role of HRE in national identity construction and foreign policy also raises questions about the substance of the topic in Norwegian schools. Research on Norwegian HRE seems to reveal a gap between rhetoric and practice, between (self)-image, the political will to implement comprehensive HRE, and its purposes (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, 2010; Lile, 2011; Vesterdal, 2016). If this gap is to be closed, human rights principles and mechanisms need to be clarified more explicitly to reduce the possibility of defining human rights along non-critical, complacent and national lines, which is counterproductive to the purpose of HRE.

The new Core Curriculum that will come into effect around 2020 signals that human rights are still basic principles of education. Additionally, the government recommends giving priority to three interdisciplinary topics when renewing the school subjects: democracy and citizenship, sustainable development, and public health and wellbeing (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2016). These topics are closely related to human rights, and could represent a more comprehensive implementation of HRE. However, it remains to be seen if human rights are addressed sufficiently in the renewal of the curricula and in practice, or if the interdisciplinary topics are ornamentations of a school system prioritising other basic skills more 'suitable' to developing human capital for economic growth and global competitiveness. In light of this scenario, there is a need for holistic, explicit, empowering and critical approaches to HRE in Norway as well as in other states promoting human rights.

Notes

¹ Democratic deficit here refers to supranational institutions like the EU, whose decision-making procedures suffer from a lack of democracy and seem inaccessible to the ordinary citizen due to their complexity. Kerr (2008, p. 167) points out that such deficits produce concern about a weakening of political and civic engagement in Europe.

² A concept related to a report by Leonard & Small (2003) (requested by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) on the significance of Norwegian public diplomacy: 'Norway might only be 115th in the world in terms of its size, but it is leading the world as a humanitarian power – outperforming all other countries in terms of its contributions to aid, its role in peace-keeping and peace processes and its commitment to developing new kinds of global governance'

³ The revised Overarching/Core Curriculum ratified in the Parliament in 2017 will take effect in connection with a renewal of the school subjects (<https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/skolens-nye-grunnlov-er-fastsett/id2569170/>).

⁴ See Vesterdal (2016).

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