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The Tashkent Triangle

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The subject matter of this paper is the main work I carried out at the Chilinzar academic Lyceum, Tashkent Uzbekistan in March –April 2001. I will briefly describe the overall environment we were working within at the academy, already existing related schemes, and the structure of “praxis in economic education”, which was initiated and set up.

My stay was brief and the work intensive, in writing up of the experience I hope to contribute to the development of the economic educational experience particularly in the transitional economies context.

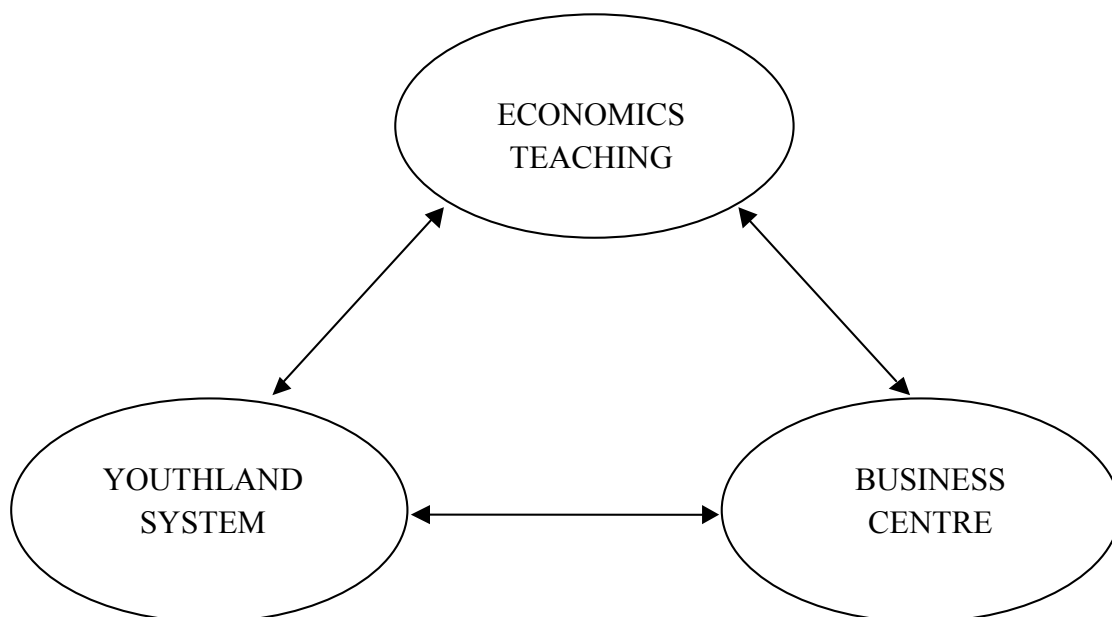
I was invited to go to The Chilinzar Academic Lyceum under the auspices of Tashkent Technical University. The assignment was organised by BESO (British Executive Services Overseas) as part of the Tactis programme. My initial remit was to advise on the running of economics and management courses at the academy. The assignment was for 12 days.

My principal remit was to advise on the provision and delivery of economics and business courses in English. [Ulyana Idolenco being in charge. She was also my main contact at the academy]. I was asked to work on other areas during my stay. Two of these which became central

to the development of the “triangle”, were, The existing Youthland system, headed by Nigora Uldashava and the Business centre, headed by Noila Mindubgwa I worked mainly with Louisa Vildonova in regards with business links.

It is the co-operative integrative forum, which resulted from the bringing of the work of the economics department, the business centre and the Youthland system which, if further developed, will be of practical use and interest.

Figure 1. “Triangle”



The Academy has 763 students and 160 teachers; I was working with the upper two years. It is reputed to be one of the best educational institutions in Uzbekistan. The management of the Academy put emphasis on the development of skills in computing, English language and business, in the upper years.

There was a highly positive attitude towards progress, study and learning among a large number of students. There was an appetite for initiative and independent learning amongst some, however I felt that the appetite for prescribed solutions was strong. Requests for me to present “a solution”, off the peg were a frequent feature of my stay. There was urgency in wishing to develop new solutions, to take account of and be part of the move to a post Soviet system of work, to know and use what is happening in the West and outside world.

The college gave much emphasis to the learning of the English language and also the provision computing facilities. There were stringent resource constraints on access to the Internet. This did not help in providing access to the available information nor using e-mail.

The study of economics is seen as an important part of the college's aim in providing quality, upto date educational experience for its students. Economics is taught in Russian and also in English. Two of the main aims of teaching economics in English were to familiarise the students with post Soviet economic systems and to use western economic literature in English. The level taught is introductory economics.

I worked with Uliyana Idolenco who was in charge of this on the actual curriculum, aspects of teaching methods, use of local resources and the development of a "Triangle" with the Business centre and the College Youthland system.

We developed a programme to cover the main principles of micro and macroeconomics. The taught theory was linked to observation and study of businesses and productive institutions around Tashkent. This linkage is to be organised and co-ordinated by the Business centre. The business centre has already such links in existence and was interested in developing new ones. Further more, manageable investigations and case studies were to be conducted by students as part of their programme.

The business Centre is headed by Noila Mindubgwa, her colleague Louisa Vildonova works part time at the BC and the rest of her time in outside organisations. She has extensive links to industry, which can be used to further the aims of economics education at the college. The philosophy of the BC was conducive for developing and drawing on of practical experiences, for educational purposes. The third element of the triangle was the Youthland system, which had been set up at the college. It is the existence of such a comprehensive system, with so much potential, which made the setting up of the triangle feasible in a short space of time.

The Youthland organisation was set up in 1995. It aims to provide a framework for the students to prepare themselves to understand the operation of market economies and their key structures. It aims to be a forum for student participation in decision making. It is a mini state within the college with its own administrative structure. It uses the basic college forum as the base for its structures. Every class is a firm with its own president, vice-president, etc

There are clubs with their own activities are on par with the firms. is run by a council or "Director's Union", has an elected President, a bank, a labour exchange, a court, police and tax inspectors. The currency is Yuans. The objective of the members is to earn Yuans by undertaking various activities within the structures.

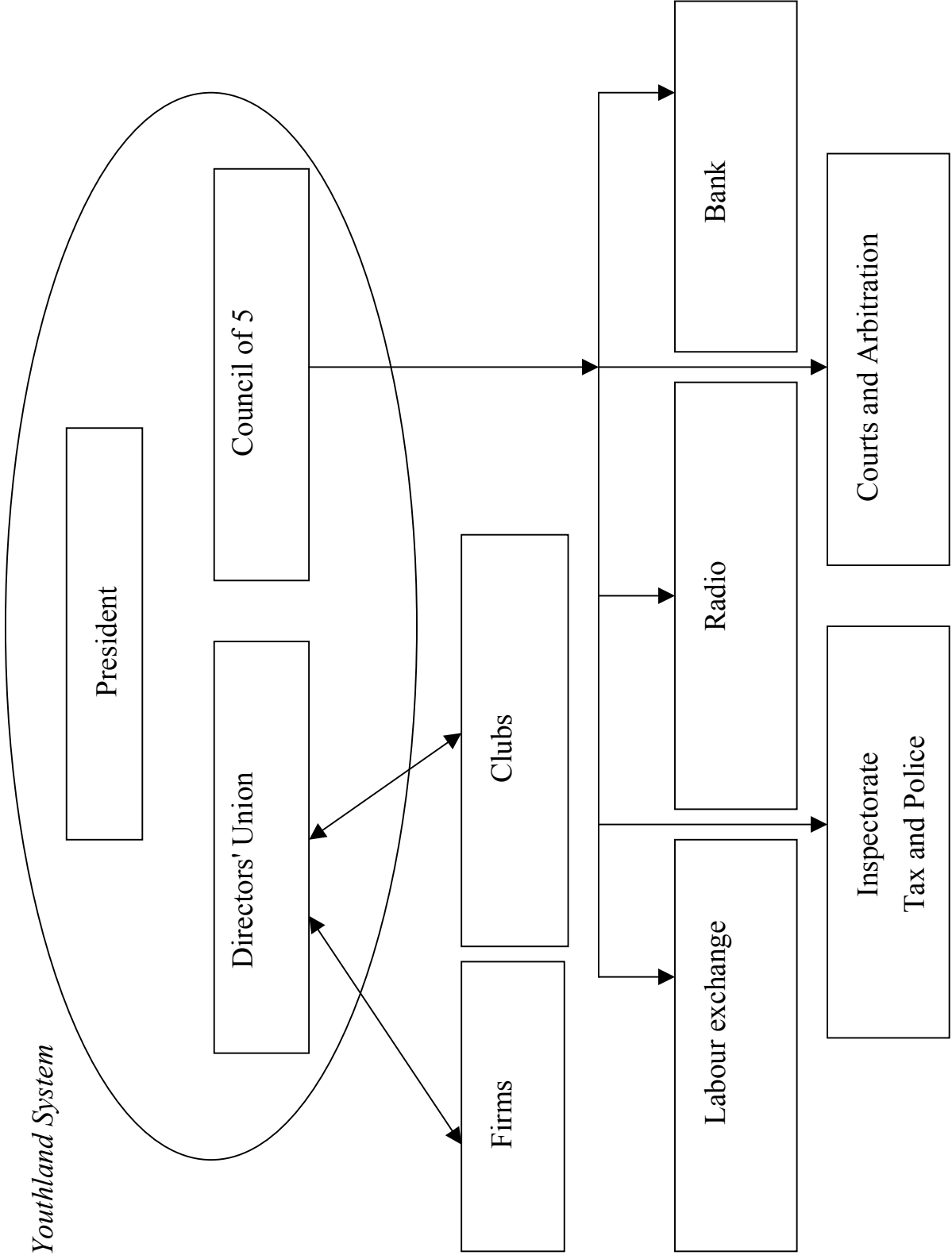


Figure 2. Youthland System

I was asked to advise on ways to improve the workings of the system, as it was not functioning effectively.

The problems manifesting themselves in lack of student involvement, severe run down on the bank's reserves, the Yuan's weakness and insufficient activity carried out by the student body. I became very interested in the operation of this scheme and the immense potential it offered for developing a practical effective economic educational tool with maximum use of local resources.

Several meetings with staff and students and officials of the scheme were held. They ranged from brain storming workshops to sessions on organisational matters. The purpose being to carry out an assessment of the workings of the system, its faults and strengths, review the decision making and executive processes, generate solutions from all involved parties and in particular encourage participation from the students and use them as a main source for solutions and ideas.

Outcomes

A variety of solutions were developed from these meetings with staff and students. They were mainly practical in relation to specific issues at hand.

These are some of the outcomes:

- Holding artistic events, with Yuan priced tickets,
- Holding auctions of desired products, aimed at drawing out of currency from the students, (there were some students who had managed to accumulate relatively vast Yuan holdings),
- Transferring some of the revenues onto the firms
- Using taxation to replenish the bank's holdings,
- Thus giving the currency more credibility,
- Developing new pricing structures for the various tasks carried out by the students.

There were not many suggestions for changing the governing processes or for that matter obvious enthusiasm for participating in them. We tried to raise enthusiasm and support for concrete projects, with the hope that participation in such undertakings would encourage real learning and develop the administrative structures and processes in a manner that would make them functionally more effective. Elaborate structures were already in place. The immediate question at hand was to get a vibrant functioning system.

Our key recommendations on the links between The Youthland system, The Business Centre and the Teaching of Economics at the Chilizar Academic Lyceum were the setting up of a regularly meeting co-ordinating trio to be run

by, Ulyana Idolenko (Economics teaching), Nigora Uldashava (Youthland system) and Louisa Vildonova (Business centre) to run these activities in their respective areas. As a start the following three proposals were to be developed.

1. Students to set prices of traded goods and services in the Youthland system within the college using and testing the economic theory they had learnt in their economics classes. Specifically the theoretic work on supply, demand, pricing and the functioning of markets were to be used.
2. Measures to be introduced to improve the Youthland Bank reserves and widening the circulation of Yuans. These were to be closely observed by the teachers and students and used for the study of topics such as the function of banks, the role of the money supply etc.
3. Cases studies and industrial visits organised by the Business centre, were to be used for several integrated purposes:
 - a. Economics teaching,
 - b. Learning about actual practice in the operation of organisations,
 - c. Practising of what some of their insights in the Youthland system
 - d. Critical evaluation of theory.

The three areas were to be co-ordinated by U.Idolenco, L.Vildonova and N.Uldashava, the 3 teachers with responsibility for running the actual activities.

In developing solutions we applied some primary principles:

1. Simplicity
2. Preference for using local resources
3. Utilise the student body, their energy, enthusiasm and innovativeness.
4. Encouraging self confidence
5. Practicality
6. Maximising direct relevance to experience, using practical structures for experimentation and learning.
7. Maintaining a critical approach to existing theoretic academic frameworks.

I found the experience most rewarding especially seeing the eagerness and enthusiasm for learning at the Chilinzar academic Lyceum. Thanks to everyone at the Chilinzar Academic Lyceum for their hospitality and enthusiasm, BESO and their Tashkent representatives for organising the assignment, Jim Mc Loughlin for covering my work while I was away and for Jens Hölscher for his continuous encouragement to write up my experience.