

A Portal for Preventive System and Human Rights

by Gianmarco Schiesaro¹

Introduction

The portal www.donbosco-humanrights.org has been conceived as a tool accessible to everybody (before, during and even after the Congress), aimed at:

- encouraging an *active participation* of all the educators of the Salesian Family in the preparation and development of the International Congress;
- sharing *best practices* among all the organisations and experts, Salesians and lay, throughout the world, working for the promotion and protection of Human Rights;
- providing a better knowledge and tools for personal education about the Preventive System and Human Rights.

The purpose of the portal, therefore, is not just supporting the works of the Congress, but offering something more: a space for participation, sharing and education. In the Letter of the Rector Major about the new frontiers of the social communication (ACG 390) it is stated that “*the net can be an instrument of education and training*” (p.12) and that “*the culture of media is a culture of participation, interaction, construction of reality and life*” (p. 13).

A Salesian initiative

The portal Don Bosco Human Rights is one of the many initiatives of the Salesian world aiming at making use of the tools and services of the net: web sites, blogs, newsletters, electronic bulletins, discussion forums... In recent years a real blossoming of such initiatives has been noted.

VIS, for example, has been intensively and critically using, for at least ten years, new media in human development projects, either for increasing participation and improving the educational impact of the interventions in the poorest countries, and for educating to development in the Italian context, by making use of tools closest to the habits of the new generations.

The initiative Don Bosco Human Rights, nevertheless, offers elements of innovation:

- the theme is peculiar: Preventive System and Human Rights. There are many sites dedicated to the first or to the second issue, but none including both of them and collecting documentation and experiences related to both of them;
- the portal is not meant to be a complete work, but an “in fieri” tool, to be built in collaboration with all the Salesian components and portal users;

¹ Gianmarco Schiesaro, VIS Online Representative, Training Centre for the Human Development.

- the portal was entirely born in the Salesian environment, even from the technological point of view: the process of planning was conducted by VIS, the technical implementation by Edulife, while contents have been developed by many subjects, such as VIS Human Rights Department and CNOS FAP.

Portal contents

The core of the portal is a vast virtual documentation area. All the materials have been classified according to some definite categories:

1. Preventive System at the time of Don Bosco
2. Preventive System today
3. Human Rights Education
4. Human Rights and Human Development
5. Children's and Adolescents' Rights.

According to the already cited document ACG 390, the tools of the net may well have “*complex structures, but must empower individuals and communities to act, communicate, build. It is much more important the involvement of people in the process than the results of the process itself*” (p. 13). And more: “*net technology generates a culture of interchange not simply a centre – periphery flux of information*” (p. 14).

Very noticeable, as a consequence, is the contribution of the users of the portal who, after registration, have the opportunity of participating in the production of new documents.

Thank to the help of new users, new collaborative areas have been built, such as:

- *Initiatives*: it is a collection of all the initiatives taking place in all the world about the themes of Preventive System and Human Rights; since they are inserted by the users of the portal they can be considered really relevant;
- *Experiences*: it is a collection of Salesian “best practices”, coming from all over the Salesian world. The Congress has precisely the purpose of presenting such experiences but, as it is obvious, only a small portion of them can be adequately presented during the short time of the Congress;
- *Mediatheque*: it is a huge archive of multimedia resources, enriched by the users themselves. It is possible to add documents, audio and video files, photos and other.

The great quantity of material in the portal is easily accessible thanks to a search engine which indexes all the files according to category, theme, geographic area or key words.

The portal as a place for education

The portal is not a simple container of precious and ordered contents. It is also a tool of learning.

As stated by the Rector Major in the already cited document: “*the net itself can be an instrument of education and training. The new techniques of electronic learning offer even to remote areas the possibility to be reached by educational programmes and initiatives not easily possible without the net*” (ACG 390, p. 12).

There is an area of the portal called *E-learning*, where learning courses are delivered following distance education modalities. There is the possibility of accessing a series of online lessons from whatever part of the world, having no more than a simple internet connection. The portal allows the use of many tools that make virtual education very similar to the traditional one:

- every lesson contains a multiple response test, allowing each student to test his learning level and preventing him from accessing subsequent lessons without having successfully passed the previous tests;
- every lesson is linked to a discussion forum where it is possible to virtually meet other students and discuss subjects with them, by expressing reflections, doubts, curiosities...
- a chat service allows a minimal form of synchronous communication, provided that there are students available and a favourable time zone.

In the period October – December 2008 an online course “Educating to Human Rights” has been delivered, in three different editions, corresponding to Italian, English and Spanish language. In this particular occasion a proper tutoring service has been activated, involving some experts who have followed the participants; a final diploma has been assigned to those who successfully concluded the course.

In the next weeks the delivery of other courses has been planned, such as the Preventive System of Don Bosco and Immigration, Interculture and the Preventive System. It is interesting to note that, in the future, it will be possible to add more courses, by developing new contents.

How will it be possible, in the future, to make a reasonable use of the E-Learning area? Educators from the Salesian world are invited to make a creative use of this section. For example:

- they can invite students and educators to autonomously attend training courses, providing them with external support;
- they can organise learning experiences, with a definite schedule, by using the learning material already available on the site or the evaluation tools;
- they can plan more complex online learning experiences, by providing a tutor who accompanies students in their learning paths and interacting with them in the virtual spaces of the portal.

The portal as a Community

As stated by the Rector Major in the already cited document: *“the culture of media is a culture of meeting. (...) It is therefore urgent to think not only of the places of the educational meeting, but firstly of the communication modalities of the meeting and the reasons why people should meet”* (ACG 390, p. 14)

As a consequence, in the portal there is a real meeting place, called *Community*. It has been divided so far into four distinct discussion forums, three dedicated to Human Rights Education and Preventive System (in three different versions corresponding to the three languages) and the remaining one to “Human Rights and New Technologies” (in English). The purpose was to create rooms where people can share about specific themes, by producing ideas, elaborating contents and even having the opportunity to know each other.

This section is, at present, not much frequented: the history of net technologies teaches us that it is necessary to have a critical mass of users in order for an initiative to take off. If the community spaces will be adequately promoted, there is no doubt that they can represent a precious resource. Furthermore, it is evident that in the future, in a very simple way, new forums could easily be added.

The portal as a development of the Congress

If many participants in the Congress have already started to know each other or if they have already acquired familiarity with the themes of the Congress, much is due to the portal Don

Bosco Human Rights. Since May 2008 it has constantly promoted dialogue and sharing among all the experts, and not only them.

Furthermore, the portal has offered many tools necessary to the development of the Congress: it is enough to think of the registration form or other related tools.

During the works of the Congress we will try to offer, inside the portal, some useful instruments allowing all the Salesian world to follow all the works in as real as possible time: we will publish all the documentation produced in the Congress; video streaming of all the contributions, interviews to participants. The final aim is the one of re-creating, for the non – participants, the atmosphere and the emotions that will characterise these days.

Finally, thanks to the portal, the Congress will not end on January 6th. After this date we will try to provide a space of meeting and collaboration for all the people who have lived this experience. So, we ask you to continue visiting the portal and, above all, to contribute with more proposals and experiences.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude with the words of Rector Major E. Vecchi who, in the letter “Communication in the Salesian mission” (ACG 370) stated, talking about new means of social communication: *“this is not a task for experts, it is a task for everybody; experts are welcome, because they help in the collaborative work, but everybody has a role to play. If we talk of means and new technologies, this is because we are concerned in culture and quality of life, in the construction of a more equal and brotherly society”* (cited in ACG 390, pp. 19-20).