

DRAFT POLICY FOR INTEGRATED EDUCATION

DIALOGUES FOR VISION

EUROPEAN POLICY INSTITUTE

FIELD: SOCIAL COHESION

**SUBJECT: THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN (INTEGRATED) EDUCATION IN
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**

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Vision

Creating conditions for inclusive education based on self-organizing principles, stimulating initiative attitude among the pupils and their parents as active social actors. Stimulating civic consciousness that will surpass the boundaries of ethnic divisions. Substantial socialization and educational/upbringing process that create socially ecologically awoken individuals that understand that the social community is not confined to ethnic/confessional/linguistic group. Micro level activism enabled through inclusive extracurricular activities stimulates the self-awareness of empowered individuals who are not dependent of the state and the institutions, but are rather proactive agents of positive changes in their immediate surrounding. Creation of functional civic community as a basis for development of democratic social relations, as democracy is not only voting for political representatives.

Analysis

For the purposes of this study we analysed the legal framework and the structure of the educational system, the existing practices for integrated education, as they are officially called, and a fieldwork research with interviewing teachers, as actors who implement all activities of the upbringing and educational institutions. The teachers who were interviewed were from schools in mixed communities. Four cities were part of this research: Tetovo, Kumanovo, Veles, and Dojran. We premised the designing of our suggested policies on the possibilities in the existing system and therefore we offer acting in the area of extracurricular activities. Our approach is based on *contact theory*, which demonstrates that increased exposure to diversity decreases the social barriers and minimises the previously held stereotypes and prejudices.

- Centralised education

The existing political system and the highly emphasised centralised is reflected in the structure of the educational system. The control and distribution of the responsibilities in the primary and secondary education is structured as pyramid with the Ministry of Education and Science. The minister approves the teaching plan and program, upon

proposal made by the Bureau for development of the education. The main control over the overall functioning of the schools is done through the Bureau while the State educational inspectorate is responsible for control of the conditions for teaching. The financing is regulated through block donations from the state budget according to the density of population, the number of citizens and the number of pupils in a given municipality. Schools are dependent on these donations as they are the main source of finances, which are separate from the salaries for the teaching staff in the schools. Parents participate in the functioning of the schools through participation in the School Board and in the Parents Council, but their influence is limited to the voting for food procurement, working materials, school trips and in giving suggestions in these areas.

The analysis of the legal framework shows that the educational system, especially in the part of the primary education is highly centralised regarding the decisions for activities outside the planned program. Greater decentralisation is more than needed, with greater freedom for the teachers for implementation of the activities proposed by the parents, the pupils or by themselves, alongside greater financial freedom for the schools to manage their resources, the space, facilities, like sport hall etc. Such financial freedom would allow for implementation of extracurricular activities independently from the budget donations and financing from projects.

-Integrative policies that reinforce the divisions

With aim to increase the integration of the multiethnic Macedonian society, in 2010 has been adopted Strategy in which are represented several principles for creation of cohesion in the society, and they are: promotion of integration, adaptation of the teaching programs and textbooks, increasing the knowledge, awareness and access of the teachers and coordinated actions from central level to local together with municipality competences in the process of decentralization. However, the clear and rigid compliance to these principles will not contribute much to cohesion because still big obstacle is partization of the key positions in the schools. The Strategy beside that fact that does not stand on serious and comprehensive researches and analyses, it is based also on a wrong premises that the citizens in Macedonia are fixed in the ethnic groups and that affiliation is primary and inviolable. Our approach is over ethnic and completely rejects these separations,

insisting on shared universal values who has far bigger unifying character than current integrative approach who tries to glue separate parts.

The implementation of this Strategy is realized as well with foreign assistance through three projects: The Project for multi ethnic integration in the education (PMEIE), Nansen Model for integrated integration (NMIE) and the Fund “Building bridges”. The first project, PMEIE is implemented from 2011 to 2015 by the Ministry of education and target groups are primary and secondary schools, students, teachers, members of the school boards, parents and local communities. However, this project have detected the problems of the students in a bigger part, but less the problems of the parents, teachers and lesser of the municipality. That is a problem because the normal function of the school in a bigger part depends on the work of the municipality and it is inseparably connected. The results have shown that still in the media on local level puts big accent on ethnic differences and conflict, and much less on the integration. Here big influence has the expressed resentment by the teachers who have experienced pressure from the institutions for more successful implementation of this project. It has been noted mistrust from the parents toward school and the school staff, lack of their inclusion in the projects in the school and in the decision making process.

The second project is Nansen model of integrated education in which the Nansen dialogue centre has been implementing from 2007 in 12 primary schools. The principle of functioning of this model is based on following of the classes on mother language of students of different ethnicities in the same school, in the same time. The programs are adapted on the interests of students and they are created together with the parents and teachers, the approach is bilingual and the game method is included.

The third project is realized through the Fund “Building bridges” which has been realized by a principle of direct inclusion of the stakeholders on local level, together with the students, teachers and schools in mutual activities who are encouraged by the fund. The activities are realized between two different multilingual schools or through two twinned monolingual schools.

However, the key problems in implementation of the abovementioned programs is lack of motivation among actors in those programs (students, teachers, parents), excessive centralization and formalization in each part of the making and realization of

the decisions, together with the ethnic segregation which contributes more in the problems.

Unused cohesive potential

This study have continued in direction of interviews with several teachers from primary schools in Tetovo, Kumanovo, Veles and Dojran who are working in ethnically mixed environments and schools. The sublimed picture that have been derived based on the asked questions who were covering the parts of interaction among children, existing conflicts or their absence, interest and inclusion of the parents in the work of school and education of their child, as well as the role of the municipality in the whole educational and integrative process, have given the following picture. It all mentioned cities, specifically in the schools, children does not have problems in mutual communication, does not have conflicts, besides the schools of mixed ethnicities, there are schools who are only Macedonian and only Albanian in which children does not have contacts with each other. The programs for integration partially have helped for children to integrate and to destroy the barrier among them, mostly in activities that includes learning of a third language and sport activities, but there is a lot of space for work on that field. It have been noticed big deficiency towards inclusion of the parents in the children's education specially in the part of suggesting of extracurricular activities, pack of finances for realization of the activities as well as freedom for suggesting of activities. The wish of the children to learn and perform activities who are going out of the teaching programs is big, that's why the support of the parents and teachers is crucial as well as from the municipality in the field of finances.

Future possibilities

Because the system is extremely centralized, we suggest to act there where is more possibly to achieve more free space and to realize the policies who will overcome the ethnic gap through fastest and more efficient manner, without interventions in the changes in existing placement in the relations in the educational system in which the schools are extremely financially and administratively dependent from the central government. The fact beside all publicly defied efforts for integrated education, we have extremely segregated educational system, shows the lack of true willingness or

knowledge for decreasing the gap. Therefore, we suggest minimizing of the role of existing institutional mechanisms and activity in micro environments who will self initially will suggest and implement extracurricular activities who beside the goal to come closer to the students and wider community, they will contribute in bigger awareness towards several questions who will overcome ethno political segregations. The liberation of dependency of program activities and their financing and overtaking of the initiative on micro level, guaranties the sustainability of extracurricular activities based on the principles of self-organizing.

Policy possibilities

The implementation of suggested activities is moreover big because covers a part who is already under control, it is not strictly regulated in accordance with the content. The suggested areas of activity additionally are based on universal human values and needs. Primarily, selection of waste, private production of vegetables or help for debilitated and lonely persons, access ramps in the school and the municipality and other possible activities which we do not want to prejudge and impose, but to leave them by choice for the students/teachers/parents, certainly they are areas who oblige the local government for help and support. The opening of a wider frame for educational process as a key segment In the creation of citizens in this society as responsible, individuals in solidarity certainly will acquire necessary support of the wider community.

The process of conducting decisions itself for activities for organizing students, implements practice of direct participative democracy. It is offered active participation of parents and students in process in which teachers are mediators, but included side as well. The cooperation on this level, with direct participation and direct exposure to each other and searching for compromises and solutions for concrete questions, like the process itself of implementation, readjust the students for democratic principles and procedures and it demystifies the alienated representative democracy and encourages a creation of cohesive local community.

Creation of change

For realization of these extracurricular activities in which students themselves will be direct nominators and implementators of the activities, it is necessary to be modulated

and adapted to current system conditions. For that purpose we point out following recommendations:

Recommendations:

- The highly centralized educational system and control of the schools must allow for greater degree of freedom and support from the bottom-up initiatives in extracurricular activities. This will allow for the development of inclusive and coherent community, rather than mere reflection of ethno-political divisions present in the society.
- The bureaucratic and administrative procedure regulating the matters of organizing extracurricular activities must be simplified. The Rulebook on the method of conducting of field trips and other free activities of pupils in primary school conducted from school depends heavily on the Ministry of Education and Science. This procedure should be made easier to open the way for less formalized communication while maintaining the security concerns as primary.
- Supra-ethnic and supra-national approach in extracurricular activities to be encouraged by engaging with themes and topics that reach beyond divisions based on ethnic belonging. Activities in fields of universal concern, like environment, social inclusion that emphasize solidarity and empathy must take place of the current “integrative” approach that essentializes the ethnic divisions.
- There should be more openness for ideas that are not presently stimulated within the ethno-political framework that shapes the Macedonian society.
- There should be more space to include cooperation with other actors from the Civil Society in the Municipality, stimulated by the Municipalities itself, like scouts associations, sport professionals associations, artists associations, environmental associations. The decision making process however, should be creatively stimulated through discussions within the schools/parents boards that should generate and decide with minimal moderation of the school within that process.
- Municipalities must assume greater responsibility in the educational process and to engage more seriously in the extracurricular activities as the single most viable path towards development of more inclusive community at local level.
- Municipalities must abandon the accepted role of distributor of block dotation from the central government and to become proactive in financing and encouraging inclusive extracurricular activities. A certain amount of the budget must be devoted to the inclusive bottom-up extracurricular activities and certain number of actions must be implemented in each school.

- Overall, we recommend completely different approach towards the democratic decision-making units at the school level. The triangle of teachers-parents-pupils is structurally present, but ineffective and unsubstantial in practice. Especially, Parents Boards should gain more freedom in generation of ideas related to free extracurricular activities with minimal guiding in the ideas provided by the professional school staff, i.e. teachers. In these processes, the pupils must be included from the beginning and in all phases.
- Serious efforts should be implemented to make meaningful the existence of the Parents Boards. They should be seen as democratic tools for participative decision making in the education system, thus not be treated only as step to be respected for commercial endeavors related to the catering and the security of the schools within the tendering procedures.
- To that end, in order to overcome the lack of trust of the parents in the matters related to interethnic activities there should be progressive inclusion of the parents in the decision making process that will be enforced through legislative changes within the Rulebook on the method of conducting of field trips and other free activities of pupils in primary school and implemented with more vigilance by the relevant Municipal staff for monitoring and the director of the school.
- Within the Rulebook on the method of conducting of field trips and other free activities of pupils in primary school more space should be given to initiatives coming from the students, the parents and the teachers instead of readymade approved choice coming from top to bottom.
- Revision of the list of approved places and monuments to be visited. The choice on approved places and monuments to be visited within the organized extracurricular activities and trips/excursions should be critically revised and balanced with the secular approach that should be respected within the education process.
- Better define the roles of the assistant directors and directors in the primary schools. They should be warrantor of the autonomy in decision-making process within the school boards. Define more precisely their roles and responsibilities in the matters of the interethnic relations in the community at municipal level.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the level of social cohesion and inter-ethnic cooperation are decently subjective categories, liable on direct external influences. However, still can be conducted proper evaluation.

First, the evaluation can take place on system level, or to recognize the facilitated conditions for realization of extracurricular activities in which municipalities and schools will be evaluated. The evaluation can control working, administrative and financial investments in the realization of extracurricular activities, as well as on school level, and on level on local self-government, or creation of encouraging environment for development of these activities. The evaluation further can take place on level of analyzing the processes, or inclusivity of the process, democratic participation of all involved actors teachers/parents/students. The evaluation has to conduct criteria for inclusion and representation of students and parents in the decision making processes, as well as in implementation of the chosen activities.

The evaluation can measure realized projects and the sort of those by nature inclusive projects. Decently easy is accessible the insight of the number of activities, there type and eventual effects of acts in extracurricular activities.