

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF DECENTRALIZATION

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Abstract: *The decentralization means in its essence a management option of the social institutions, the transfer of decision and responsibility from the central institutions and authorities level to the local ones.*

Decentralization does not represent an universal antidote as the analysis of the management ways of the social institutions from many countries show to us that there is no country where the institutions function completely autonomous; on an axis centralization-decentralization, the states are either closer to centralization and the decision's concentration at a central level or closer to decentralization and local autonomy.

The analysis of the legal rules and the regulations adopted in the reform process at the level of the social system from Romania, shows us the fact that, at least formally the decentralization is the chosen solution.

The preuniversitary teaching decentralization represents the authority, responsibility and resources transfer as concerning the decisions' taking and of the general and financial management towards the teaching units and the local community

The work below talks about the teaching system decentralization's problem analyzing the decentralization's objectives, principles, advantages but also the risks and the stops that may appear in the decentralization's process at the level of the school and of the local community.

Key words: *decentralization, school, local community partnership, principles, advantages of the decentralization.*

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Introduction

The school is an institution that functions in a community that is formed of many educational factors: family, authorities, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, economical agents, church, police, sanitary units etc. For the adequate functioning of the school-local community partnership, the decentralization is absolutely necessary and unavoidable. The experience of the last years proved that the decisions that were taken at the central level can't take into account all the situations and especially all the real needs and interests of the different institutions and persons. A democratic society supposes the getting closer of the decision process by the application place, the citizens having the possibility to participate in decision taking that affect them directly or indirectly.

In all, the preuniversity teaching decentralization represent the authority transfer, responsibility and resources as concerning the decision making and of the financial and general management towards the teaching units and the local community.

To be able to solve the new regulations and the social pressures, the school has to enrich its activities and performances, to adopt multiple changes in the options for a certain educational policy in its structures, in the instructive-educational process in the scholar management system etc.

The modern theories concerning the teaching's coordination pledge for the adoption of the decentralization measures and of the participative strategies. Plenty of countries that have educational problems adopted these strategies. The reforming projects initiated the application of some different and nuanced decentralization models depending on the social and educational situation that characterized that area. The adopted solutions situate the educational systems on a continuous line from the moderated centralism to the wide decentralization. These projects that were initiated in the last two decades by countless countries have as a common objective the arrangement of the educational systems on the efficiency-efficacy-quality axis and the social relevance by the real joining of the school to the community and by the effective involvement of the beneficiaries of the educational effort in the support of the teaching system (Fiszbein, A., 2001).

The chosen direction for the educational policy from the Romanian system is the one of the decentralization. The analysis of the legal regulations and of the measures adopted inside the reform process shows to us that at least formally, the decentralization is the chosen form.

The educational decentralization supposes:

- The redistribution of the responsibilities, of the decision authorities and of the public obligations for the specifically educational functions, from the central level to the local one;

- The participation of the non-administrative factors, of the representatives of the civil society to the process for taking decisions (parents, ONGs, business areas, professional associations, social partners, etc.)
- The transfer of the decisional competencies from the central levels to the local ones and/or organizational nests, just to get closer the decision to the beneficiaries of the public educational system.

The decentralization isn't a purpose itself, it is actually an option of educational policy that subscribes itself in the national method of decentralization.

The clear, equilibrated and well limited dividing of the decision power between the representative organisms and institutions of the regional and local communities on one side and the ones at the national level (The Educational Ministry, The Public Finances Ministry, The Administrative and Internal Ministry) on the other side will contribute to the avoiding of the disorders and distortions in the organization, leading and supporting at the national level of the teaching system. The decentralization's success is based mainly on the equilibrium between the authority and responsibility on the other side as well as the capacity of the human resources and the informational streams on the other hand (Paun, E., 1999).

In the managerial field, the decision's decentralization involves ***the evolving of the monitoring system, control and evaluation***, altogether from the local community but also of the institutions and special governmental organisms.

There is taking place a transfer from the school's model as "consumer" of resources at the national level, to the representative school for the community, where the latter invest local resources but also has responsibilities of control and evaluation.

The decentralization offers the school the part of a ***main decision factor*** assuring the participation and the audition of all the social actors that are interested from the perspective of a long term evolution of the community it activates into, on one side and on the other side from the perspective of the education's globalization.

The decentralization is an interdistrictual policy that takes into account the other components of the social part (political, economical, cultural and administrative).

We have to mention the fact that none of the two policy types (centralization/descentralization) do not represent main values. The centralization and the decentralization are means of enriching the managerial activity based on a general social conception of a philosophical, political, cultural, economical type. The decentralization began to be perceived as a value itself, as a democratic condition. Actually it is a type of coordination, a way of deliberating.

The establishment of an optimum of decentralization in a national particular context, supposes the adoption of an equilibrated attitude in report with some essential

coordinates such as: the report tradition-innovation, past-future, stability-change, national-global (Frege, X., 1991)

The option for a management system and for an educational policy is counting on a values system socially accepted, on the cultural traditions, it takes into account the existing managerial type. The management is a thinking wave, based on a certain philosophy and on a certain culture. This is why there is to be applied the accountability between the managerial conception and the basis culture of the society where it is to be applied. There are cultural premises of the managerial models that if they are ignored may constitute a problem in the way of all kinds of changes. So, the managerial changes can not be asked this way only by theoretical models and elaborated strategies, but there has to be analyzed the cultural models and the mentalities and then they have to be adopted depending on these.

From this perspective, in the Romanian teaching there is taken into account the problem of the relationship between centralization and decentralization.

The Romanian school that applied for years the centralized managerial model with obvious roots in our culture and mentality can't be changed over night. This is why the Romanian teaching has to keep equilibrium between the centralized managerial system and the decentralization measures. The step by step introduction of the decentralization's measures is taking into account the functional equilibrium of the system. The decentralization process is for a long term and takes into account the changing and the replacing of the previous practices.

The decentralization's objectives

The decentralization is a way by which there can be accomplished **objectives** of a nature:

1. *Political* – the democratization of the teaching system, the raising number of the participation to the education of different social actors;
2. *Economic – financial* – the more efficient distribution of the resources, the evolution of the economical efficiency, the new material and financial resources gathering;
3. *Pedagogical* – a better quality of teaching by promoting the innovation inside the teaching system, the motivation by participation of all the active factors in the training-educational process;
4. *Organizational-administrative* – a better coordination and a better administration of the teaching, etc.

In the National Strategy concerning the Preuniversity Teaching System's Decentralization for the 2007-2010 period, there are mentioned the following **objectives** that take into account the realization of the school-community partnership:

a. The enriching of the activity and the rising of the performances of the educational institutions

- At the central level – by depriving the central institutions by the current administrative choirs and the concentration on the elaboration and monitoring on the implementing of the educational policies;
- At the local level – by the rise of the responsibility degree of the local community and of the school;
- At the level of the teaching unit – by the consolidation of the autonomy and of the capacity of coordinating the financial and human resources.

b. The democratization of the educational system by consulting/implying the community and the other beneficiaries of the educational act in taking decisions and the support of the quality that is based on auto evaluation, external evaluation and public responsibility. The decision and consulting mechanisms will involve both the educational system's structures and the external partners or the beneficiaries of the educational services (parents, pupils, patronages, syndicates, local public authorities, the non-profit sector, professional associations).

c. The support of the transparency in taking decisions and in the coordination of the public funds for the education by: the support of the public access at the data concerning the teaching units' budgets, the statistics concerning the pupils' results, the decisions of the administrative councils of the schools, the periodical reports of the schools.

d. The support of the access and equity in education on one side by giving the basis funds for each pupil spending and on the other side, by financing the oriented schedules towards the covering of the different educational needs of the pupils determined by the cultural and ethnical diversity, a bigger level of participation, the inclusive actions, the socio-economical differences. The new financing system will allow equal funds for the pupils with the same needs no matter the geographical area or the financial possibility of the localities the pupils are learning in.

e. The raise of the relevance of the offer of educational services for all the pupils categories, by supporting a better suitability with the local needs, with the different situations and problems of the community with the needs and the individual interests of the pupils. The support of the access and the equity in the education system will be realized by relevant educational offers for the vulnerable segments of the

population – the Roma children and population from social and economical environments that are disadvantaged, children and pupils with special needs – taking account especially by a bigger participation of themselves to education.

f. The support of innovation and professional responsibility and of the public responsibility too at the level of the teaching offices, of the teaching managers and of the pupils, by the transfer at school level of the decision power as concerning the budgetary execution and the personnel policies but also by a bigger power of the curriculum as concerning the school's decision. The gathering of the financial, administrative, educational (curricular) decisions, as well as the ones concerning the human resources, by the needs and the interests of the beneficiaries that will lead to a better dividing of the resources, to the support of the partnership in education and to a bigger variety of the school's educational positions.

The principles of the decentralization process

a. The public responsibility

All the institutions and organizations that take part at the accomplishment of the educational services, no matter their judicial status, will be responsible in a public way for the quality of the offered educational services in comparison with the functions and responsibilities that are for each of them.

b. The institutional autonomy

The decentralization will have as a central point the development of the school's institutional autonomy, of its capacity of taking responsibly coherent decisions.

c. The gathering of the educational centre close to the educational act just to offer consistency to the decision and to make the local active persons more responsible.

d. The transparency of the decisional act that is based both on the citizens' access to the public information and also on their participation on taking decisions.

The value of the human resource

The human resource and especially the didactical profession have to be recognized as essential factor of the communitarian evolution, a reason why there will be granted a special attention to the initial and continuous training as well as to the continuous developing of the teaching staff. The educational management at the level of the school's institution has to be professionalized in a progressive way just to be able to undertake and efficiently apply the functions that are its own.

a. The subsidiarity that suggests complementarity and the assumption of the decision responsibility at the local level just to get closer the decision by the ones that are directly influenced/interested by this. According to this principle at the decision level, there are taken only those decisions that can't be taken at its inferior levels.

b. The cultural and ethnical diversity

At the level of the educational institutions, there will be expressed the identity elements of the different socio-cultural groups that are part of that community.

c. The ethical approach of the educational service by adopting and applying the deontological codes for the teaching staff as well as for the ones from the control systems, the support of the quality and management.

The decentralization - a chance or a risk

The analysis of the advantages and the disadvantages offered by the teaching system's decentralization lowers the arrow towards this one an answer to its needs of assuring the functional equilibrium of the system. The support of the equilibrium between the centralization and decentralization inside the Romanian teaching has to be maintained, the changes of the practices and of the centralized conceptions needing a vast and long term process. The decentralization's practices have to be adopted only in the measure that they produce qualitative changes and optimize the scholar activities on all the areas.

Advantages of the decentralization:

1. The teaching will be a more democratic one by a bigger number in participating to the decisions concerning the education of many factors;
2. The responsibilities of different educational actors offer the schools a strong communitarian support; the transforming of the schools in a communitarian link and a better social relevance of the education;
3. The enrichment of the resources' utility inside the teaching system and the economical efficiency of the school;
4. A better management of the teaching system by:
 - The exclusion from the central level by a series of routine choirs (it allows the concentration on the general strategies in the educational field);
 - A better mobility, flexibility and the capacity to adapt to changes;

- The participative planning that involves the effective support of all the educational agents to the decisive process rises the degree of motivation for them, etc.
- 5. A better quality of the teaching by individualizing the training and by supporting the creativity and the capacity of self evolving of the educational agents;
- 6. The flexibility to the change supported by projecting and applying the evolution measurements that were emitted and coordinated from and to the basis of the teaching system;
- 7. It gives the possibility of matching the central, regional, local initiatives. Each of these levels may evolve the specifically objective from inside a coherent strategy
- 8. It reacts simultaneously and correlated to the global, particular and individual demands. So the school may become a pillar of the civil society, a communitarian link, a reason of the mutual understanding inside the pluralist society;
- 9. A more important part of the main “clients” of the school, pupils and children, as taking decisions for the education;
- 10. The restructuring of the cooperation on the horizontal between the school that are in a certain geographical area, etc.

The autonomy, the participation, the initiative, the motivation, the pluralism are on short the most important advantages offered by decentralization in the capacity estate that can be activated by a coherent managerial strategy.

The risks of the decentralization may be identified in:

1. A bigger number of the decision centers, the bureaucratization of the decentralized structures and the useless and continuous doubling of the centralized structures that manage to preserve themselves
2. The unsuitability of the decisions, the contradictions and incoherence's interdiction inside the teaching system;
3. Incompatibilities between the existent resources and the measures suggested for the decentralization;
4. The maintaining of the mentalities, of the thinking type, of the attitudes and behaviors by the persons that are kept in the decisional centers;
5. The underlining of the differences between the regions, between the “central” areas and the “peripheral” ones;

6. In the conditions of some wronged options, the decentralization may create differences between the general strategies and the particular objectives;
7. Under the reason of decentralization, the central level may pass to the inferior level choirs that it can't or doesn't want to accomplish;
8. There may appear contradictions between the levels, incoherence between he strategies, tensions, difficulties in evaluating, situations of promoting the particular interests, artificiality;
9. The maintaining of the centers helps to the stopping of the autonomy and fairness tendencies of the teaching systems (the case of the national minorities);
10. There is the risk of giving up to some functioning fields such as: the research, the evolution and the enriching of the teaching staff, etc;
11. The appearance of the recentralization phenomenon as a pervert phenomenon that represent actually the descentralizaton.

The teaching managers that insufficiently oriented and motivated to adopt the decisions that they have to take account of in an decentralized system, will have the tendency to appeal to the superior structures to solve a local problem. (to provide schools means of transportation for the pupils that live in remote areas from school – a lot of directors and mayors are waiting for money for the fuel and the driver's payment from the Districtual Council and the Districtual Scholar Inspectorate. This is a local problem that from our point of view they have to find a solution for also in the local area by the collaboration of the school with the Mairy and the local Council). The decision also supposes the assumption of the responsibility for the taken decisions. The recentralization decision may be looked at also as a way of avoiding responsibility from the part of the ones that have attributions in the decision area. Anyway, we just can't make it look as something general. There are local communities that can't afford some social services without any help and this is why there is necessary a new strategy for the way in which there will be coordinated the resources towards the support of some local needs.

The adoption of a contextual and situational management, the keeping of an equilibrium between the measures of decentralization and centralization also, the adequate preparing and the responsiveness of the school managers are measures that reduce the decentralization's risks (Iosifescu, S., 2006).

Blockings of the decentralization in the Romanian teaching

The decentralization's blockings may appear from three directions:

1. The lack of the institutional capacity;

2. The lack of training of the implied ones, cultural barriers – individual, group and community;
3. The non suiting of the policies and strategies to the situations and the real needs.

We may this way mention the following *stops*:

1. The persistence of the centralized and paternal mentalities manifested by the will of keeping the decisional power and the refuse of the local administrative centers to sum their responsibility;
2. The absence of some adequate constitutional and legislative regulations;
3. The Romanian teaching tradition. The history show to us that the orientation of the teaching system is a centralized one along the time. The Romanian teaching till the end of the Second World War (1948) characterized itself by a moderated centralism; the local communities were implied especially in the primary and the secondary teaching. After 1948 there was produced an elimination of the autonomous decision centers and the concentration of the decisional competencies to the level of the central organisms (ministry);
4. The involvement in the decisional process from the educational sector, of the factors of the local community that was weakly represented. The structures of the civil society are still weak, there isn't any solidarity between the communities members, the underlining of some common interests;
5. The strict rules of the activities from inside the schools;
6. The power resources at the local level are insufficiently developed;
7. There is also the possibility of giving up the incompetent schools to project and coordinate their autonomy and their own evolution. The school has to be prepared for autonomy by granting a certain level of financial independence, the rise of the managerial competences, the schools' responsibility for the obtained results, etc;
8. The lack of interest of the people for the represented institution's progress;
9. The insufficient training and the explanation of the measurements and the decentralization so as to be understood and applied by the supposed main educational agents (informational and cognitive stop);
10. The strategic importance that the public opinion and the political decision factors grant for the decentralization;

11. The financial stop, the acute lack of resources goes to the postponing or inappropriate appliance of the decentralized measures, the incoherence of their application, etc.

Conclusions

To provide a good school – local community partnership, the decentralization in the educational management field and its democratization are absolutely necessary.

But, no matter the number of the legislative regulations (the law decentralization), the real decentralization will be produced in time. There is needed time for the changes to take place, to explain and realize the advantages and disadvantages of such a system. The adequate training of the school managers and of the teachers, the initial and continuous training is demanding.

Also, there will be needed a correlation of all the social system's competences, at the macro social level and an efficient partnership between the school and the local community's representatives at the micro social level.

The school may become this way the educational and cultural centre of the community that may offer to it educational offers based on local real needs.

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