

DESCENTRALIZATION IN EDUCATION – PREMISE OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION EFFICIENCY

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1. Conceptual clarifications

Decentralization in education represents the redistribution of responsibilities and of the decisional authority, for specific educational functions, from the central level to the local one.

This can be translated through a participation of the civil society representatives in the process of taking several decisions (parents, ONGs, business medium, professionals associations, social partners, etc.).

We can say, in the same time that decentralization in education is the process of **transferring the decisional competences** from the central levels to the local and/or organizational, to close up the decision to the people that benefit from the public service of education. In an decentralized education service, in the process of taking decisions it is highlighted the **participation of non-administrative factors** (parents, civil society, business medium, professional associations).

At the level of pre-college education, **the decentralization represents the transfer of authority, responsibility and resources regarding taking decisions and the general and financial management towards the education facilities and the local community.**

If we analyze the general phenomenon, through decentralization in general we understand the transfer of decisional authority towards the lower levels of the hierarchy of an organization or outside it.

So being understood, the decentralization has two big essential dimensions: **deconcentration**, that refers at delegating the decision authority from the central levels towards the regional and local levels, and the **descentralization itself** ("devolution") which consists in the transfer of the decision authority outside the organization – especially the representative public local authorities.

The decentralization would mean the transfer of decisional authority from the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth towards the inspecting units and education units, as organizational levels of the education system, and the decentralization itself would mean the transfer of decisional authority to the county and local councils and mayors.

As a follow up, what generic is called "descentralization" represents **for each society and education system, a composite *sui generis*, of centralization, deconcentration and decentralization**, not existing in the world, two systems of education identical in this situation. In the same time, the decentralization model also depends on:

- **Managerial "philosophy", relative at the control in organization** - the cultural factors regarding "distance to power", as an example, it determines the degree of "trust" that can be given to subordinates and also the autonomy of taking decisions. In the Romanian education system, powerful centralized on hierarchy, the process of decentralization could meet cultural barriers: the dominant culture is not of negotiation and of participating at the

decision but of commanding, of control and of obedience towards bosses.

- **History, culture and the experience of that certain organization** – for example the long tradition and centralism make difficult the process of decentralization;

- **The capacity of managing the information** – if the system, as it's whole, and especially, the superior hierarchical levels, have the capacity to manage in real time the required information, tends towards centralizing and towards reducing the subcomponents autonomy. Because this thing is more and more difficult, the decentralization, and with it, the atomization of education units become pertinent options;

- **Competitional medium or not** – the powerful competitional level imposes a more tight control, so the decentralization;

- **The need of innovation and change** – in the conditions in which the innovation and change are required, it is required some decentralized structures and the organizational subcomponents autonomy, because the massive and centralized structures are inert, so they can be changed extremely hard, in a long time and with considerable efforts;

- **The level of qualification of the organization members** – a superior level of qualification of personnel imposes the decentralization. So, one of the characteristics of the professional mediums is the increased decisional autonomy;

- **Organization size** – the very big organizations, as the education systems, must be decentralized, the subcomponents gain increased decisional authority, because they become impossible to lead: either they are created too many hierarchical levels and the information and the decisions travel extremely hard, either it increases the number of subordinate units for each commanding unit, outside the real managerial capacity;

- **Geographic diversification** – if the organization functions in diverse physical-geographical conditions, it is imposed the decentralization;

- **The importance of decision** – if the decision or the decisional class has a great importance for the entire organization, then it is imposed the centralization of the decisional process;

- **The quality of management at the medium and lower levels** – if there exists well trained managers at these levels, it is recommended the decentralization.

1.2. Interest Domains which can be positive affected by the educational decentralization

The decentralization is not a purpose itself. It is inscribed in the national strategy of decentralization and has the meaning of creating an organized education system, administrated and financed as the European laws regarding the assurance of quality of the instructive-educative process, free access, equal and full of all children and youth to the educational act, the adequacy of educational offer at the interests and needs of the direct and indirect beneficiaries.

The efficiency of decentralization must be found in the added value in education, materialized trough the capacity of integrating the young people on the basis of their capabilities obtained and on the basis on the work force at the local, national and international level. The decentralization must not produce a disequilibrium in the organization, leading and sustainability at the national level of the education system. This process will assure the clear separation, equilibrate and well determined of the decisional power between the organs and representative institutions of the local and regional communities, and on one side of the national level – MedCT, MIRA, MEF on the other side. Also, the decentralization of decision does not

include, but implies the development of the monitoring system, of control and evaluating, from both the local community and the institutions and special governmental organs. The model of decentralization proposed promotes the free access to education, equity and the quality of educational services.

From the perspective of durable development and global education, to create the required premise of assuring the quality in education and using efficiently the resources, the decentralization is done in a dynamic way that imposes responsibility and implication on one part, but also strategic thought and control on the other side.

The model of decentralization which we propose, gives the school the role of **main factor of decision**, assuring the participation and consulting of all social actors interested. From the managerial point of view, this means that it is being passed to what in the special literature is called “**management centered on the education unit**”.

The domains, which we consider to be affected by decentralization are about:

a) Curriculum at the school decision

In present, curriculum at the school decision is established, many times, depending on the “needs” of maintaining/vacancy of some didactical places and not in the concordance with the options of students/parents, of the economical agents or of the development policy of that certain area. The importance of this is reduced and it does not exist a clear logic of the distribution, regarding the level of education. The main objective on the list of curricular decentralization was that to accentuate **the relevance and adequate** the offer of education in confrontation with the local needs and interests of students.

An important instrument is the **growing, gradual and separated**, of the importance of the curriculum at the school decision (CDS) in the national curriculum, depending of the level of education. The proportion of CDS, the

possible minimum and maximum limits of it, will be possible to be modified by the MEEdCT, at the proposal of its special institutions. In these conditions, the local factors will have more freedom in the structure of curricular offer, because of: the local need of work qualification; the potential of development of that zone and school; the human and material resources existing at the school disposal.

b) The schools network and students flux

Regarding the actual legislative frame, the school patrimonies – terrains and buildings – belongs to the public domain of the commune, cities and county residences and are in the administration of the local/county councils in which territorial path they do their activity. Through the local budgets it is being assured the financing of schools. The current administration of the patrimony and of the schools funds it is realized at the local councils level; only in the pilot counties, the administration and budget execution is realized at the school level.

The finance of a school is not correlated with its development objectives, established through the institutional development plans, correlated with the community development plans. The decision regarding the priorities on the school development does not imply every time the participation of the local public administration, through which the financing comes. Exceptions from this situation are the pilot counties.

c) Human resources

The leading council from schools are the first responsible for the quality and effects of the educative and instructive process, but the decisions regarding the selection, hiring and creating the didactical personnel belong to the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth and ISJ, and the payment and standardizing the didactical personnel are rigidly established through law, the school's leaders being unable to respond the mobility needs through a standardization and flexible salaries, or

curricular change or stimulation of the didactical personnel with performances.

d) Financing policies

In conformity with the law nr. 354/2004 for the modification and completing the Education Law nr.84/1995 and the methods of applying it's articles, on the basis of calculus of the allocated funds to the education units trough the local budgets it is represented by the cost of standard/student or prestudent determined on the basis of physical consume indicators, on levels and types of education. At the allocation of funds, besides the standard/student cost, we consider that is more efficient to be taken into consideration also correction indicators that consider the density of students in that area, the severity of some disadvantages of economical and social order in the area and also the percent of students of different national minorities etc.

By introducing these allocating indicators it is being avoided the use of medium historical costs or the number of education personnel as an exclusive fundamental indicator of the requirements of funds needed for education, as well as allocating separately the funds towards schools. The actual legal frame will continue the idea that the main effort for financing education belongs to the stat budget, but only for costs allocated for personnel, scholarships and books. These funds arrive into local budgets trough the county councils. The financing system has some limits, generating some disfunctionalities:

- The allocation of funds from the state budget towards the local budgets can not take into consideration the standard costs and also can not take into consideration the correcting indicators as time as these funds are exclusively used for scholarships and personnel expenses;

- The allocation towards the local councils and schools of the funds for salaries on the basis of standard/student costs it can not be done without creating

serious disfunctionalities in the payment of salaries, as time as the standardization and payment of salaries are established so rigid trough law on degrees and parts of years of the education personnel;

- The allocation of funds from the state budget towards the local budgets trough the county councils gives the last ones, the rank of intermediate straws of allocation which can create difficulties of allocation or/and partially destroying the process of spreading the funds in an objective manner;

- The calculus methodology and the standard costs fundamentals and the correcting factors, elaborated by the CNFIP which is used in present in the pilot counties as an instrument of simulating the budget creation and in allocation of funds does not response in a complete way to the allocating criteria established by the law and most importantly of the quality and educational performance criteria;

The decentralization process which we propose, says that the education finance should be realized, mainly from four sources:

- **State budget** – to be assured in totality, funds for the personnel expenses, books for the education and partially for scholarships, student transport. Different from the actual situation, we consider necessary to be allocated a minimum sum for covering the expenses for materials and services. Also the state budget could sustain the financing of some annual and multi annual programmes of investments in education and also of some programmes of social help towards students;

- **The budget of the County Council** – to allocate sums from the equilibrium fond of the local budget, for education. Also the state budget could sustain the financing of some annual and multi annual programmes of investments in education and also of some programmes of social help towards students;

- **The Local County budget** – to allocate funds towards schools, from own

realized incomes and to sustain the financing of some annual and multi annual programmes of investments in education and also of some programmes of social help towards students;

- **Own incomes of school**

In these conditions, the allocated budget for the school, as a global sum, should cover at least the cost/student/

3. Awaited results, risks and lowering policies generated by the process of decentralization of education

Trough implementing the model of decentralization, we await to be obtained **results** regarding:

- **Making the activities more efficient and growing the performances of educational institutions.** At central level – trough taking all the responsibilities from activities of current administration and focusing on the creation and monitoring the educational policy implementation; at local level – trough the increase of degree of responsibility of the local community and school; at the level of education unit – trough the consolidation of autonomy and the capacity of taking care of it's own financial and human resources;

- **The democratization of the educational system** trough consulting/involving the community and other beneficiaries of the education act in taking decisions and in assuring the quality based on self evaluation, external evaluation and public responsibility. The consulting decisional mechanisms will imply in the structures of education, but also in external partners or the beneficiaries of the educational services (parents, students, syndicates, local public authorities, the non-profit sector, professional associations);

- **Assuring transparency** in taking decisions and in taking care of their own public funds meant for education;

- **Assuring the access and equity in education** trough allocating the funds on the basis of costs on student;

- **The increase of relevance of offer of educational services** trough assuring a better correlation with the local needs with the diverse situations and problems of the community, with the individual needs and interests of students;

- **Stimulating innovation, of professional responsibility and public responsibility** at the level of education personnel, of school's managers and students, trough the level of transfers of decision power regarding the budget execution and personnel policies, but also trough the increase of percent in the curriculum at the school's decision. The close up of the financial, administrative, educational decisions and of human resources of needs and interests of the beneficiaries will lead to a better allocation of resources, at stimulating the partners in education and at the diversification of educational functions in schools.

I know that putting in practice the process of decentralization can lead to the appearance of certain **risks** regarding the disfunctionalities created because of resistance to some factors at the process if renewal or because of the inadequate intervention of politic in the process of hiring and promoting personnel, or in the way of allocating funds.

The risks can be registered if the steps of decentralization will not be well defined and will not happen coherent, controlled and at the established terms. **The weak points** of this process could be:

- The lack of managerial education of the involved personnel;
- The inefficiency of some local and national cooperating structures;
- The low degree of mobility in the education system;
- The low level of competition between institutions;
- Lack of attraction of the professor job;
- Difficulties of understanding the problem in education and of the decisional factors at local level;

- The insufficient allocation of resources in infrastructure, logistics, communication systems, etc;

- The apparition of some disequilibrium

To eliminate these risks, MEdCT, MIRA, MEF, the civil society, and the others factors implied will have to action in the process of decentralization so it can work on the basis on good knowledge of all who put it in practice, of the basic principles and of normative acts which govern this process. It is imposed a large information of the public opinion regarding the involved institutions and the advantages of this process.

A sudden decentralization could have unwanted effects and if lost without control, could lead to the destabilization of the educational system.

Analyzing comparative the results, risks and lowering policies we can conclusion that the process of educational decentralization could have a positive impact at all three level implied, as follows:

a) at school level, trough: democratization of school life; innovation and diversity of scholar offer; the responsible assumption of decisions regarding the quality of the education process and of the realization conditions of education;

b) at Local Council level trough: real and effective implication in functioning and developing the educational service; assumption of responsibility by the local authorities, regarding the provision of educational services the development of community trough transforming the school into an informational centre and community development;

c) at the society level trough: a better correlation between the offer and demand on the work force market; the social integration trough differing the graduates, regarding their competences and options; promoting the authencital values and the specific traditions.

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