

DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE FOR INCLUSION: A WHOLE COMMUNITY APPROACH



**Lessons learned and results of
the implementation of the whole
community approach for social inclusion.
A report produced in co-operation
with Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary,
Montenegro, Poland and Romania**

Funded
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DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE FOR INCLUSION: A WHOLE COMMUNITY APPROACH

Edited by
Evie Zambeta, Nelly Askouni,
Alexandra Androusou, Mary Leontsini,
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of the whole community approach for social inclusion

A report produced in co-operation with Bulgaria,
Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, Poland and Romania

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List of abbreviations

IEP: Institute of Education Policy

IOM: International Organization for Migration

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisations

RACs: Refugee Accommodation Centres

RECs: Refugee Education Co-ordinators

RSARE: Reception School Annexes for Refugee Education

SC: Scientific Committee

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Introduction

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The aims of the project

Although European societies have addressed human rights in various significant ways, democratic citizenship and human rights remain at stake. The current refugee crisis and the waves of immigration resulting from famine, extreme poverty or war constitute serious challenges for European states in order to consolidate humanitarian values and fundamental human rights as the core principles of the European political culture.

The “Democratic school governance for inclusion: a whole community approach” project, supported by the European Union-Council of Europe Human Rights and Democracy in Action joint programme,¹ has been implemented in six countries: Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, Poland and Romania. While for some European states participating in this project the refugee crisis and immigration flows represent the most urgent challenges, the existence of other vulnerable groups confronted with marginalisation or exclusion on the basis of ethno-cultural differences (for example Roma people), social origin, sexual orientation or disability should not be ignored.

Schools represent receiving points for new populations and “gatekeeping” institutions for social inclusion. The overall aim of this project is to contribute to the enhancement of democratic values in education, to promote tolerance and respect of diversity and to further the inclusive potential of European schools. More specifically, this project aims to study and promote processes of educational inclusion through the engagement of the whole community.

The “whole community” approach, which was the main outcome suggested within the scope of the “Addressing violence at school through EDC/HRE” project, perceives schools as public spaces of civic engagement and thus aims at facilitating deliberative democracy and social inclusion. In current post-industrial and highly urbanised social contexts the “whole community” approach implies the holistic integration of the various stakeholders in participatory governance in order to build horizontal relationships and improve networking. Democratic school governance should be based on opening up the school to the community. This would actively involve crucial stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents and educational leadership in schools. More importantly, the highlight of this approach is the involvement of civil society in school, to develop habits of civic and political engagement based on relationships involving trust, co-operation and support.

Transforming schools into socially inclusive systems presupposes an emphasis on social justice, respect and recognition of heterogeneity, critical inquiry and commitment to the production and use of collective goods. These core qualities of European values are in several cases confronted with scepticism and resistance, a process often driven by populism and conservative social groups. The “whole community” approach empowers schools to tackle controversial issues that divide the school community in a sustainable manner.

The whole community can provide for the social space of mutually reflective learning within the scope of democracy, tolerance, politics of recognition and social inclusion. This project aims to strengthen the inclusive potential of education, to enhance social engagement in democratic values and to build a democratic school for all; a school without walls in a Europe without walls.

1. The Human Rights and Democracy in Action joint programme has recently changed its name to Democratic and Inclusive School Culture in Operation (DISCO). For more information, please visit the website of the joint programme: www.coe.int/disco.

Democratic school governance as a strategy for social inclusion

From government to governance

During the past two decades there has been a growing shift of interest from government to governance, “the governance turn” as described by Ball (2009). To govern implies the exercise of authority. While government is associated with structures (such as legal and administrative systems, institutions and organisations), governance is associated with social functions or processes performed in a variety of ways at different times and places and by various social actors (Rosenau 2002: 72). There are several uses of the term governance (for example, in arguments for and against the neoliberal minimisation of the state, in new public management, in corporate governance, in the theorisation of “good governance”, in social cybernetics and in self-organising networks), all of them related to the social administration of actors (Rhodes 1996). In a formulation that soon became classical, Rosenau (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992) defined the emerging modes of governance as governing without government, implying that contemporary governance involves technologies of regulating social action through self-organisation and less visible steering mechanisms.

The theoretical discourse on governance largely stems from Foucault’s conceptualisation of “governmentality”. In Foucault’s terms governance is “the conduct of conduct”, an activity that aims to shape the conduct of the self and of others (Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991).

This contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self I call governmentality (Foucault 1988: 19).

The distinctive element of government, as opposed to sovereignty, is its “finality”, that is, the intentional use of a multitude of tactics and techniques for achieving its goals (Foucault 1991). In the era of governmentality the “disciplinary society” is transformed into a society of governance. The modern state deploys sophisticated technologies for controlling populations, not simply laws, but systems of knowledge and reasoning coupled with apparatuses of security and surveillance. Schools, manufacturing, psychiatry and the police are characteristic examples of institutions of governance. These systems, however, are both means of controlling social action and fields of political contestation (ibid.: 103). Thus, the power, survival and the limits of the state are based on the tactics and technologies of governmentality.

Contemporary theories of democracy have been illuminated by what has been called the “Foucault effect” (Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991), especially concerning the conceptualisation of governance. Democratic political participation and appropriation of collective goods are dependent on the generally shared “mentality of governance”, that is, on governmentality.

Governmentality is defined as a collectively shared mentality, or rationality, that conditions how we organize and produce concrete acts of government which aim to enhance the general well-being of the population by regulating the conduct of individual and collective actors (Sorensen and Torfing 2008b: 106).

The question of legitimacy: participation versus effectiveness

Contemporary Western-type democracies derive legitimacy from a basis of representation. Democratic regimes, however, are challenged by questions concerning power relationships and the rule of law, bureaucracy, transparency, openness and legitimacy of interests represented in the decision-making processes. These questions, inherently related to the use of power on the part of the state, are fundamental for the qualities of democracy and the capacity for good governance (Fukuyama 2013).

Quite often in the public discourse “system effectiveness” is juxtaposed with “citizens’ participation”, thus asserting a political dilemma. As Gbikpi and Grote emphasise (2002: 18), participation, in the sense of encouraging social actors to deliberately articulate and negotiate their interests, should be seen as part of the solution and not as part of the problem in developing sustainable policies and effective governance.

In an era of growing complexity and global/local interdependence, governance, seeking new modalities in order to cope with this complexity, tends to fail. Although ineffectiveness is often associated with participatory mechanisms, uncertainty and practical failure should be dealt with by enhancing democratic decision making and accountability (Jessop 2002). Broadening participation could be seen as enhancing institutional learning and providing for empowerment and access to social actors, with or without legal entitlements, hence contributing to effective and sustainable policy outcomes (Getimis and Kafkalas 2002: 167).

Democracy is a project to be performed and not a given social reality. As Habermas notes:

Any democratic constitution is and remains *a project*: Within the framework of the nation-state it is oriented to the ever more thorough exhaustion of the normative substance of constitutional principles under changing historic conditions. And, at the global level, the universalistic meaning of human rights reminds us of the need to develop a constitutional frame for an emerging multicultural world society (Habermas 2011: 28).

The link between governance and social inclusion and exclusion

The universalistic meaning of human rights could be seen as a contentious issue. Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000) have problematised the polarising discourse regarding inclusion and exclusion, arguing that it is based on historically constructed predispositions and systems of reasoning. For example, the effects of identity politics are susceptible to raising questions of groups or lobbies not willing to adhere to established taxonomic principles and hegemonic discourses. In this case, the “questions of representation and access of individuals and groups to educational and social practices”, inherent to the equity model (problematic) of governance, need further clarification in the light of systems of reason and power dynamics that account for inclusion and/or inclusion-related political (and educational) stakes. In this sense, there is a need to take into consideration the historic constitution of identities and practices while at the same time creating a convincing narrative and consequent educational choices in order to guarantee participation in a shared framework of rights (Popkewitz and Lindblad 2000).

Since governance is the systemic regulation of access to the social heritage and public goods, its role with regard to inclusion and exclusion is indeed critical.

Governance refers to the process of distribution and production of social (public) goods, including mechanisms of social inclusion/exclusion, through sets of institutions, networks, representations and actors, drawn from within but also beyond government (Lindblad and Popkewitz 1999: 1).

The critical role of school in democratic governance and inclusion

According to Durkheim (1984), since the 19th century, schools have played an instrumental role in establishing social cohesion and setting the terms for solidarity, since they are not only concerned with which areas of knowledge are important, but also with what kinds of individuals are imagined as desired and needed in society. Moreover, educational systems have been vital to the process of modern state formation as they have contributed in the construction and establishment of national identities and subsequently in social control (Green 2013). Social solidarity and cohesion are, hence, closely linked to perceptions of community, citizenship and the state.

In contemporary diversified, multicultural and globalised societies, which undergo multiple changes in economic and cultural spheres, issues of the institutional administration and the individual are changing (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2000). Shifting modes of governance, then, inextricably intertwined with changing concepts of “the individual” as a political and social actor, need to be reflected in school governance practices. Schools, responsible for producing the conditions for social cohesion, are called upon to reconstruct themselves in order to ensure all social groups’ access to the production and consumption of social/public goods and resources. Democratic participatory school governance, aiming at engaging all social groups’ participation in every aspect of contemporary education, calls for conceptualisations of the “community” in ways which exceed, but not ignore, the local versus the global divide.

The concept of the whole community

As we have mentioned in a previous publication (Zambeta et al. 2016), the “whole community” approach as a means for preventing phenomena such as violence in school has been central in several projects, most prominently in the Council of Europe’s Pestalozzi programme (Council of Europe 2012). However, the concept of the whole community seems to be reduced to the school community, i.e. educators, parents and the local community, and in fact the notion of community is conceptualised in terms of locality (Lajovic 2012). While the spatial aspect of community cannot be ignored, the relational dimension is essential for a non-static and dynamic understanding of the term. According to Boyes-Watson (2005), community is not only a mode of connection in terms of locality, but also a way and a sense of belonging, which generates social action. This approach entails a shift of power from central government institutions to the community, by establishing networks of relationships among citizens and organisations in order to achieve balanced partnerships.

In this pilot project our understanding of the “whole community” does not entail a nostalgic adoration of the pre-industrial sense of *gemeinschaft* (as it is defined by Ferdinand Tönnies), which involves the existence of an organic life based on traditional ties and emotional bonds among the members of a community attached to a certain place. In contemporary complex, highly urbanised, industrial and post-industrial societies traditional bonding fades, social relationships are largely impersonal and political allegiances are forged around contractual rights and obligations. On the other hand, contemporary modes of belonging and political engagement are rather reflexive and do not abide by traditional long-lasting commitments (Hustinx and Lamertyn 2003). Scepticism towards grand narratives and traditional ideologies, distanciation from one’s own context, presentism as opposed to nostalgic images of the past, and acceptance of hybridity and awareness of other cultures are perceived as basic components of contemporary urban citizenship identities. These qualities are considered as corresponding to the notion of “cosmopolitanism”, which is a virtue of post-modern citizenship as defined by Turner (2000).

In this context of fluidity and uncertainty an attempt to construct the “whole community” as a public space of citizenship engagement, involvement and commitment seems quite optimistic and challenging. Bob Jessop, considering the notion of deliberative (participatory) democracy, suggests the viewpoint of what he calls the “romantic ironist”:

in contrast to cynics, ironists act in “good faith” and seek to involve others in the process of policy-making, not for manipulative purposes but in order to bring about conditions for negotiated consent and self-reflexive learning ... become a self-reflexive means ... coping with failures, contradictions, dilemmas and paradoxes that are an inevitable feature of life. In this sense participatory governance is a crucial means of defining the objectives as well as objects of governance as well as of facilitating the co-realisation of these objectives by reinforcing motivation and mobilizing capacities for self-reflection, self-regulation, and self-correction (Jessop 2002: 55).

Since schools are learning-focused institutions, they might find it relatively easier to cope with the ironic challenges of “self-reflexive learning”, “self-regulation” and “self-correction” in the realisation of democratic school practices. A more difficult challenge for schools would be to define who the important “others” to be involved in the democratic process are. The crucial question is “who has the right to participate” in a democratic school governance model? Who has the right to address problems, such as violence in schools? Who has the right to be heard? In other terms, the question is who are the important “stakeholders” in building the school’s “whole community”? In times of globalisation and international flows of movement, citizenship as we know it is an insufficient basis for legitimacy in defining participatory governance, not least because it would exclude social strata and populations that are already represented among the student population. Moreover, citizenship-based legitimacy is confined to a state-centred vision of policy making (Heinelt 2002: 27). On the question of legitimacy Heinelt (2002), citing Schmitter (2002), argues that “persons/organisations who could potentially be invited or allowed to participate [because] they possess some quality or resource that entitles them to participate” are distinguished as “rights-holders, space-holders, knowledge-holders, share-holders, stake-holders, interest-holders and status-holders” (ibid.). More specifically Klausen and Sweeting (2005), based on Schmitter’s analysis again define them as:

- ▶ rights-holders are defined in terms of citizenship rights;
- ▶ space-holders are those who are legitimated on the basis of living within a certain territory;
- ▶ knowledge-holders are perceived on the basis of expertise;
- ▶ share-holders are defined in terms of ownership;
- ▶ stakeholders are understood as those who are materially or spiritually affected by decision making;
- ▶ interest-holders are those related to a particular interest group;
- ▶ status-holders are those officially representing organised interests (ibid. p. 225-226).

According to Klausen and Sweeting (2005) participatory governance is characterised by horizontal relationships between the social actors involved and networking at the level of the community. Community involvement places emphasis on the group level instead of focusing on the individual. It implies a sense of commonality and integration; there can be several types of communities, such as communities of identity, communities of place or communities of interest (ibid.: 218).

The “whole community” approach implies the holistic integration of the various “holders” in participatory governance that aims to build horizontal relationships and improve networking. In this sense, the whole community approach is an umbrella term for the involvement and engagement of the whole community in democratic school governance; this would actively involve crucial stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents and educational leaders in schools. More importantly, the highlight of this approach is the involvement of civil society in school, to develop habits of civic and political engagement based on relationships involving trust,

co-operation and support. The opening of the school to the community enhances the democratic commitment of both school and community stakeholders and strengthens collective commitment to the basic principles of democratic coexistence and respect (Thomas 2012; Bangs and Frost 2012).

Hence, based on the aforementioned, we should aim to work for an open, democratic school (Freire 1994) that embraces the whole community approach and focuses on building a democratic school culture that develops EDC/HRE and promotes a sense of civic responsibility along with intercultural understanding, as well as respect for human rights.

Project methodology and activities

The aim of this project has been to experiment with the whole community in a scheme applied and explored in each participant country through action research. Negotiation of approaches, recognition of otherness, coping with difference and conflict resolution constitute basic components of the whole community. A clear school policy of inclusion with regard to vulnerable groups such as newly arrived immigrants, refugees, ethnic groups or disabled people should be based on democratic school governance and participatory democracy.

Each participant country focuses on the educational inclusion of a certain social group.

Countries	Target groups
Greece Romania	Refugee children
Hungary Bulgaria	Roma children
Poland Montenegro	Children with special needs

Duration

It should be noted that this has been a small-scale qualitative research and action programme. Fieldwork lasted almost six months and took place from January to June 2017. The short duration of the project corresponded to some of its limitations, since social inclusion is a long-term process, while relationships involving collaboration and trust need time to be consolidated and fostered.

First phase: action research

a. Selection of the research site and preparation phase

Each national team explored the whole community approach in school governance by putting it into practice at a particular school site. The school sites were selected according to certain criteria, such as:

- i. the composition of the student population (for example, representation of migrants, refugees, ethnic groups, people with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups);
- ii. the wider social context of the school (for example, controversy in the wider community over school policies).

The first phase of the project activities involved fieldwork at the research site. Communication with the school community stakeholders, mainly the school leadership and teachers, was the first step in building relationships of trust between the researchers and the field. Mediators, such as local education actors who formed links between the research team and the school, were important in this process. Informing the school actors about our project's aims and acquiring their consent regarding the researchers' presence in the school was the main prerequisite for the implementation of the project's activities.

b. Understanding the context of the field

The next step of the project focused on understanding the context of the field. The basic research tool was participant observation on the school premises and especially in class. Moreover, other research tools were also used, such as interviews and group meetings with the basic stakeholders. Participant observation was recorded in field notes that were compiled in detailed diaries referring to each observation day. In some cases,

fieldwork was informed by ethnographic research and deployed more interactive tools and participatory methods, such as the “reflective album” in the case of Hungary. In the course of the implementation of this phase, the interaction among the researchers and the field became more intense, a fact which gradually transformed participant observation into a rather participatory method. The latter was clearly the case in Greece.

c. Developing inclusive practices

The intervention phase of the project aimed at helping the school leadership and teaching staff to apply a democratic school governance model. Facilitators from the national teams supported school actors in adopting whole community practices and coping with controversial issues that may have arisen.

The overall aim of the project was to contribute to social inclusion. The school community, supported by the project’s facilitators, developed a strategic plan of inclusive practices referring to the specific social group in question (such as meetings with the local community to address the issues at stake, “bridge” educational activities to integrate new student populations in schools, creative activities for children with traumas, peer mediation processes, open classes, workshops and teacher seminars).

Second phase: studying and evaluating the project results

The project’s outcomes have been discussed and assessed at national and international level. At the national level the stakeholders involved evaluated the project’s outcomes. The outcome of this assessment has been discussed and compared in meetings with partners, leading to points for consideration in order to promote democratic school governance and inclusive practices in European schools.

Third phase: dissemination activities

The pilot project’s results have been disseminated at the national and international level through teachers’ seminars, publications, conferences and websites.

The national case studies

Understanding the process of refugee children’s inclusion

Refugees in the Greek educational context

Newly arrived refugees, who had recently fled their countries and temporarily reside in refugee accommodation centres, constitute the group whose inclusion process was studied in Greece. The first research phase included participant observation of the special educational structures that were established for refugee children (RSARE), which were afternoon classes (2 p.m. to 6 p.m.) designed to bring the new populations into the schools. The fieldwork involved 48 hours of observation, which was then compiled into diaries. The analysis of the field notes revealed the following challenges: fluidity as the main characteristic of school attendance for the refugee students; institutional and pedagogical segregation between the morning school and the RSARE; reluctance by the morning teachers and the RSARE teachers to design and implement joint activities; competitiveness among teachers; and the professional inadequacy of RSARE teachers, since they were not experienced in the teaching of migrants. The intervention aimed at facilitating communication between the two groups of students and the refugees’ gradual integration into school life. The project’s activities revolved around the preparation of the school’s end-of-year events and included a successful pedagogical intervention implemented by a researcher/facilitator along with a small number of teachers who were willing to co-operate. During this intervention, the two student populations communicated with each other and started to form bonds. Although refugee children were denied visibility in the final school feast, because of existing tensions, social closure strategies and communication failures among the teachers, as a result of this project’s intervention, refugee students participated in a smaller school ceremony. At this event, refugee parents were invited in the school premises for the very first time and they had the chance to address the school community in their own languages via interpreters. Refugees’ educational inclusion, however, is a long-term process that has to be further sustained by systematic and continuous action.

Refugees in Romanian education

Refugee children were the target group of the action research held in Romania. It must be noted that the refugees studied in this project were rather settled populations, since the families reside in homes and the fathers have jobs. The basic fieldwork took place in a school in Brăila (Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School of Brăila), which is attended by refugee students. The research tools used include observation of classes attended by refugee students, interviews with school stakeholders and questionnaires for teachers. The intervention phase focused on enhancing communication among teachers and parents, on providing teachers with methodological tools to avoid burnout and on negotiating the needs of those in the school, through training sessions and seminars. Moreover, the institutional development plan of the school was revised in order to include references to principles such as intercultural dialogue and respect for ethno-cultural diversity, as well as new priorities to support local ethnic minorities and migrants. The intervention activities resulted in commitments on the part of the school community to work towards enhancing minority cultures' visibility, which were realised in an international school project proposal, posted on the eTwinning platform and the inauguration of cultural sessions attended by mothers of students. The greatest challenges to the refugee students' integration into the educational context were irregular school attendance, lack of communication between the school and the refugee parents, inadequate command of Romanian by the parents, reservations and prejudicial predispositions by the non-refugee parents, and resistance from teachers, as far as adopting differentiated and inclusive pedagogical practices was concerned.

Understanding the processes of Roma educational inclusion

Roma education in the Bulgarian context

The Roma population is marginalised and discriminated against in Bulgarian society, associated with prejudicial representations, such as criminality and derogatory images. Large numbers of them remain unregistered, while their access to education is rather limited with 8% not attending school and almost 50% not completing compulsory education. Despite the national strategy for the inclusion of ethnic minorities and Roma, a substantial number of Bulgarian schools remain segregated. The project was implemented at an ethnically mixed school, which is part of the UN Association school network of Bulgaria, where Roma represent 36% of the student population. The research conducted involved questionnaires and interviews with the school stakeholders as well as observation at the school site. A lack of communication among parents has been identified as a factor in Roma marginalisation. While teachers have been considered as highly trained, their motivation for engagement beyond their typical official duties needs to be enhanced through material resources. The intervention phase of the project combined a multitude of techniques, such as the training of "young trainers", a scheme targeted at students of the wider area and aiming at peer mediation processes for inclusion, workshops with the school and the local community stakeholders, and a "social laboratory" that engaged the different stakeholders in problem-solving regarding an issue of local relevance. The researchers adopted a series of dissemination strategies to raise the visibility of the project's results to the wider community. It is acknowledged, however, that the inclusion of Roma in Bulgarian education needs further action with particular emphasis on systematic observation of the student flows as well as additional funding and investment in Roma education.

Roma education in Hungary

Roma people constitute the largest minority in Hungary with a long history, different languages and traditions. They tend to form segregated communities, most of them living in ghettos, suffering from social discrimination, poverty and high unemployment rates. Within the highly selective Hungarian educational system Roma children mostly attend segregation schools, with very low educational achievement, one third of them not finishing primary education. This project focused on one of these segregated schools, located in an inner-city area of Budapest, since this type of schooling represents the common educational experience of Roma people in Hungary.

The research adopted an ethnographic participatory and action-oriented methodology in the field. It focused on involving professionals in reflective enquiry regarding their everyday practices by using ethnographic tools such as participatory observation, interviews and shared diaries. This process of interaction among the researchers and the school community has gradually developed a "reflective album" portraying the different actors' interpretations of the school life. The content of the "reflective album" was further discussed with the school stakeholders and informed the action research. The whole school community was targeted as the main focus of the project's intervention with a particular emphasis on teachers that have been identified as key stakeholders for innovative and inclusive practices. The educational exclusion of Roma, however, is a wider social strategy, which intersects

with their socio-economic positioning in the Hungarian context. A major finding of the Hungarian case, which is of utmost importance for the whole project, is that the positive school climate and a culture of collaboration among the different members of the school community, that is, the whole school community, is a prerequisite for educational inclusion which facilitates the opening of the school to the wider community as well.

Children at risk of exclusion and special needs children

Children at risk of exclusion in the Montenegrin educational context

Children at risk of exclusion constituted the target group of the project held in Montenegro. Research was carried out in two primary schools located in the city of Bar. Refugee students from the former Yugoslav republics, students from Russia and Ukraine, two student athletes from Azerbaijan and Turkey, and a special educational needs student made up the (potentially) vulnerable student population. The first phase of the team's work included interviews with school management and systematic observation of classes in order to record the level of communication of all the participants in the teaching process, their sensitivity to the needs of others and the frequency of team work. While the sense of belonging to a school community was shown to be sufficient, parents and other stakeholders were not sufficiently involved in the process of planning and the improvement of work, and a lack of activities aimed at developing the personality of students in general was recorded. In the second phase of the project a song entitled *Don't laugh at me* was produced by students and teachers, and educators (six male, 11 female) carried out workshops with lower-school pupils. This process improved the capacity of some teachers to provide additional support to children at risk and fight against widespread prejudice towards vulnerable social groups. A video recorded for the song *Don't laugh at me*, hence used as an unofficial anthem dedicated to promoting acceptance of the diversity values, was seen as a way of achieving cohesiveness and engagement of the whole community. The dissemination phase of the project was comprised of seminars involving teachers, representatives of the pedagogical and psychological services, and school directors in Bar, Niksic and Podgorica.

Students with disabilities and special educational needs in the Polish educational context

The whole school community was targeted in order to address the processes of inclusion of students with special educational needs in a small village primary school located in Lutostań (92% of small primary schools are village schools in Poland). Research tools included questionnaires addressed to teachers, students, parents and the school director, and participant observation in meetings and workshops with parents and students. During the implementation phase, community events took into account the results of the research phase. Intervention within the school comprised training sessions for teachers, training sessions for students and community events. *Compasito* (Flowers 2007) and *Teaching Controversial issues* (Council of Europe 2015) proved to be valuable tools for the preparation and implementation of events. The Day of Spring, Earth Day, World Autism Awareness Day, Mother's Day and International Children's Day were occasions during which the project aims were highlighted. The project contributed to awareness raising among students with special educational needs on behalf of all participants, peer learning and collaboration among school teachers was achieved, the presence of students with special educational needs was not proven to impede overall and educational achievements of the class, and communication among teachers and parents was improved. Students developed listening skills and enjoyed lessons based on *Compasito* techniques. Parent-teacher communication was enhanced in the sense that parents expressed their satisfaction at the exchanges with teachers in a collective way. The involvement of the community in the inclusion of students with special educational needs progressed substantially, in the sense that sustained participation in school activities in the (short) period of three months enhanced awareness through the sharing of resources.

Part 1

Understanding the process of refugee children's inclusion

Refugees in the Greek educational context

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The project's target group

Identification of the target group

Refugee children constitute the target group of research conducted in Greece. The term refugee has been used to refer to forcibly dislocated people, who were seeking refuge in regions other than their own, well before the term acquired its legal status after the Second World War. According to Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Geneva Convention, the term refugee shall apply to any person who:

owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

In this project, we use the term refugee to refer to asylum seekers, regardless of their legal status or the final outcome of their request.

The reasons for the choice of this target group lie with the hundreds of thousands of people who have been arriving in Greece since the second half of 2015, in search of sanctuary in Europe, but also with the fact that the refugee crisis is one of the biggest challenges of contemporary European societies. The majority of refugees passing through Greece come from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Palestine, Algeria, Congo and other countries rocked by war and violence (IOM 2017).

Migration and asylum seeking have been major political issues in Greece since the 1990s, at first in the case of newcomers from the northern borders with Albania and former Soviet countries, and since the mid-2000s from Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, as a result of severe social, economic and political turmoil in these regions (Afouxenidis et al. 2017). Since 2015, refugee flows have been intensified by the Syrian war. The raging conflicts in Syria since 2011 have forced over 5 million people to flee from Syria to other countries, leading to one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time (Rummery 2016). A rather important fact is that the vast majority of asylum seekers in Greece are mobile populations in transit, meaning that they wish to be relocated to northern European countries, such as Germany and those in Scandinavia.

Basic statistics

According to the UNHCR's figures, over one million people fled to Europe by sea during 2015, mainly through Greece and Italy, while over 800 000 crossed Greece from Turkey through the Eastern Aegean Islands (Clayton and Holland 2016). During 2016, sea arrivals in Greece reached 173 450 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017b). There has been a notable decrease in arrivals since March 2016, due to an agreement between the European Union and Turkey. According to this agreement, Turkey agrees to house refugees in exchange for financial incentives, visa-free access to Europe for Turkish citizens, and serious consideration of the Turkish request to join the EU (Chtouris and Miller 2017). Another factor related to refugee flows is the closure of many European countries' borders, which results in refugees being trapped in Greece, unable to travel to their preferred destination. During 2017, according to current UNHCR data, 25 694 migrants and refugees reached Greece by sea (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017b).

There is no clear picture as far as the number of refugees in Greece is concerned, considering that there are everyday arrivals and departures. A recurring number in various reports is 60 000, but it should be treated with caution. Some 15 000 of these 60 000 are located on Greek islands.

Most asylum seekers temporarily reside in accommodation centres (the "camps"), some live in other structures supported by international bodies and some stay in city apartments. Refugee camps are located in the Attica, North Aegean, Peloponnese, Epirus, Central Greece, Eastern Macedonia and Central Macedonia regions.

On the mainland, the number of refugees residing in camps is constantly decreasing, for three main reasons:

- ▶ many are gradually moving into apartments, hotels or other forms of accommodation supported by NGOs and local authorities in urban areas;
- ▶ some leave Greece following approved relocation;
- ▶ some leave Greece via informal networks.

Relocation processes are very slow, considering that until 4 January 2017 “only 7 760 asylum seekers had left Greece or were scheduled to leave under the EU Relocation Mechanism agreed in late 2015 to relocate within 2 years” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017a). This represents around 12 per cent of the number agreed upon.

It is estimated that the number of refugee minors in Greece amounts to 20 000, while, according to recent statistics, 37.6% of refugees are children (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017b). Many of them are unaccompanied or separated from their families.

Public discourse perception

This huge arrival of refugees and, consequently, the discourses emerging from it are very recent events and estimations regarding the perception of refugees in public discourses are rather premature, not least because no systematic research has been conducted so far. Public discourses about refugees before the recent refugee flows have not been adequately researched, which might be associated with the fact that “the basic background of asylum policy [in Greece] has been – and it seems to still be – the policy of the intermediate station” (Kontis et al. 2005: 38). That is, the asylum requests, the number of refugees living in Greece and the rates of recognition of asylum status have been, until recently, among the lowest in Europe (ibid.).

Rather, we might draw upon research conducted on the various representations of immigrants in the Greek press, during the last few decades. The research suggests that there are several shifts in the aforementioned representations. While, during the 1980s, emphasis was placed on the consequences of immigration on the Greek economy, during the 1990s the social consequences were highlighted, with delinquency being the prominent topic (Kountouri 2008). Since the 2000s there has been a shift in discourses from the dangerousness of immigrants to more complex representations, in which immigrants are not always perceived as a homogeneous population and the economic and social consequences of immigration are discussed as also acting on immigrants themselves (ibid.). Several other approaches deconstruct the alleged vulnerability of immigrants and perceive them as active subjects in social interaction (Lyberaki and Pelagidis 2000; Baldwin-Edwards 2004).

Reactions to the recent refugee flows might be roughly summarised as ranging from the xenophobic and nationalistic, to shows of solidarity. On the one hand, there is a mixture of xenophobic discourses held by conservative and nationalistic social groups (for example, Golden Dawn supporters), who raise issues of security and public health, express fears of cultural disintegration, and emphasise the negative impact of migration on the economic and social suffering caused by the economic crisis in Greece. On the other hand, there has been an impressive boost in solidarity responses all over Greece, since many people have been mobilised in a plethora of ways to support refugees. These people are not only human rights activists and volunteers, but also locals in areas where refugees are established or pass by. The bottom-up active mobilisation of citizens of heterogeneous political and ideological backgrounds in horizontal modes of sociability signifies a qualitative shift, from the notion of hospitality to that of solidarity (Papataxiarchis 2016a).

Notably, “solidarity with refugees” is articulated at the local, national and European levels. According to Papataxiarchis (2016a: 12), since 2015, the symbolic meaning of the “refugee” has been widely associated with the meaning of the “travelling human in need”, triggering a generalised predominance of solidarity. Refugees are identified as humans who have to be rescued, a discourse which has been promoted by the media and legitimised by the legal-political intervention of the UNHCR (ibid.: 14-15). This solidarity discourse had been embraced by European and governmental policies, especially during 2015, and has contributed to the development of what Papataxiarchis calls “patriotism of solidarity”. That is, solidarity displayed by Greek citizens becomes a new element of their national identity and, in fact, one which they can take pride in.

As far as refugee children in Greek schools is concerned, there have been incidents where parents and the local community have tried to prevent their reception by protesting about it, as well as incidents in which parents and the local community have organised welcoming ceremonies, demonstrating their support for the integration of refugee children.

Research review

Research on refugees, conducted so far in Greece, deals primarily with Greek-speaking refugees and refugees produced by political upheavals in the wider Balkan region (Gounaris 2004) and the Coast of Asia Minor, while there is a lack of literature focusing on African and Asian refugees, refugee children, refugees and education, and refugee children and education in Greek schools.

The literature comprises mainly historical, ethnological and folklore studies. Refugee populations are divided into expatriates, repatriates and allogeneic refugees (Pelagidis 2003). Expatriates include communist Greeks who fled to Balkan (Tsekou 2010) and Eastern European (Lambatos 2001) countries after the Greek Civil War in 1948 and repatriates are mostly Asia Minor's refugees. Few works place the issue of refugees in a global perspective and include forced migration from Asia and Africa (Cutts and Xenaki 2001; Troumbeta 2012).

The bulk of research focuses on Greek-speaking refugees coming from Asia Minor in 1922. This refugee flow was the result of war between the Greek Front and the Turkish National Movement for the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War and lasted from 1919 to 1922. The war ended with a Turkish victory, which was followed by an exchange of populations between the two countries. These studies deal with the culture of refugees, such as their music, apparel and their integration into Greek society.

There is yet limited research on the refugee flows since 2015, such as the ethnographic studies by Papataxiarchis, who studied the various theatres of engagement and the diverse motivations of those involved (local fishermen, elderly women, NGOs, professional humanitarians, volunteers, refugees) in the reception of refugees in Lesbos² (2016b) as well as the refugee camps in Lesbos and the political debates surrounding the crisis (2016c).

Despite the lack of research on the education of refugee children, there is some research activity on second-generation children within the Greek education system (for example, King and Christou 2010; Haliapa 2009). While the process of inclusion and the social, political and psychological situation of immigrant children in Greek schools are in many ways different from those of refugee children, there is an overlapping of issues that have to be dealt with in both cases. For example, learning Greek as a foreign language, the experience of migration, negotiations and building of hybrid identities, cultural differences among students such as language and religions, and gendered practices are all issues that have been addressed in the Greek literature and constitute an important stock in the effort to include refugees in Greek schools.

Relevance to the project's aims

In this project we aimed to work towards building a framework that facilitates refugee children's inclusion in Greek schools, through practices promoting democratic values and human rights. The current refugee crisis and the waves of immigration resulting from famine, extreme poverty or war constitute serious challenges for European states in order to consolidate humanitarian values and fundamental human rights as the core principles of the European political culture.

Schools are receiving points of new populations and "gatekeeping" institutions for social inclusion. It is of vital importance that hate speech, racism, xenophobia and prejudice be effectively eradicated from European schools, considering they are meant to boost democratic citizenship and a human rights culture.

Education policies

The unprecedented refugee flows received by Greece since 2015 represent a major challenge for the already weak Greek economy and welfare state provision (Matsaganis 2011; Matsaganis et al. 2016). Educational provision for refugee children is both a human right and a social and political challenge. Following the universal, inalienable and indivisible character of human rights recognised by the international treaties ratified by Greece (the 1949 UN Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), the Greek state is bound to guarantee access to education to all children residing in Greece. Therefore, there have been arrangements on the part of the Greek state in order to fulfil its duties towards refugee children and respond to this new challenge.

2. An eastern Aegean island, very close to the Turkish coast, through which thousands of refugees have reached Europe. The author calls it "the informal gate to Europe".

Furthermore, a wide range of civil society institutions, NGOs and other non-governmental bodies operating in Greek territory have undertaken initiatives regarding refugee children's education. Although these structures and initiatives do not provide formal education, their activity remains important when reviewing relevant policies.

State policy focusing on the group

The Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (MERR) authorised a Scientific Committee (SC), in March 2016, whose task was to suggest appropriate measures for the inclusion of refugee children in Greek schools and Greek society in general. The final goal of this effort was to prepare both refugee children and the schools, so that refugee children fully attended Greek schools in the academic year 2017-2018.

This SC conducted a survey in camps and collected data about the population of refugees and children, the site and infrastructure, the bodies involved in educational activities for children, and adults (Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs 2016). After the processing of these empirical data and by taking into account the multiple factors (social, political, educational, psychological), so that its proposals met the diversified needs of the refugee population, the SC came up with suggestions, which were approved by the MERR in June 2016.

In accordance with these final suggestions, the MERR has founded reception classes for children aged 6 to 15 and, in the near future, is planning to launch kindergarten classes inside the camps, so that very young children are not separated from their families. Those children who live in mainland accommodation centres attend afternoon (2 to 6 p.m.) reception classes in schools located near their residence. These classes are called Reception School Annexes for Refugee Education (RSARE) and have been gradually operating since 10 October 2016. RSARE are special structures aiming to provide a bridge for facilitating the transition from camp life to school. Children who already reside in apartments can enrol in nearby schools. However, the situation regarding school attendance is exceedingly fluid since this population is on the move and Greece is primarily perceived as a transit country. This fact critically impacts on school attendance.

Reception School Annexes for Refugee Education (RSARE)

With regards to the afternoon reception classes, data suggest that 2 061 refugee children were enrolled in primary schools and 742 in lower-secondary schools during 2016-2017. Furthermore, 684 refugee students attended reception classes at primary schools' morning programmes. This is a total of 3 487 children attending compulsory formal education. The schools hosting the afternoon reception classes included 70 in primary education and 35 in lower-secondary education.

In order to meet the needs for the operation of the RSARE, the MERR recruited 234 supplementary teachers (165 of them on a part-time basis) for the academic year 2016-2017. The criteria for their eligibility were the same as for claiming employment in public education, namely academic qualification, experience in teaching and social criteria (for example, disability). Experience or academic qualifications relevant to intercultural education or to this specific educational context were not prerequisites for the RSARE teachers' eligibility, who, nonetheless, received brief training by the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP).

The RSARE teaching personnel are responsible to the school principal and the regional school advisor. For the camps, the MERR has appointed Refugee Education Co-ordinators (RECs). The latter are full-time public education teachers, experienced and highly qualified, who, after their application, were seconded by the MERR to co-ordinate refugee education. Their role is crucial in mediating between the refugee families and the school.

In collaboration with the IEP, the SC created a special curriculum, customised to the needs of refugee children, and suggested appropriate educational materials for the teaching of Greek as a second language. These materials have been created as part of intercultural education programmes, which have been implemented since the 1990s. In primary education the RSARE curriculum consists of the following subjects: Greek, English, Mathematics, Physical education, Computer science and Arts and Drama education.

Civil society initiatives

An exact overview of the bodies involved in educational activities for refugee children is not possible, since their composition is changing. These bodies constitute a heterogeneous assortment, which was recorded in 2016 by the SC. The SC's survey revealed that at the time there were 76 bodies, including NGOs (international or Greek), various collectives (associations, unions, etc.), universities, solidarity groups and so on. In addition to these bodies, there were seven cases of lessons organised by the refugees residing in the camps themselves.

Of these bodies, 36 were associations, unions and volunteer groups, 32 were NGOs, five were universities, three were public bodies (public libraries, for example) and seven were refugee initiatives. It is interesting that of the 105 surveyed educational activities for children, 40 were located in four centres: in Diavata, the Municipality of Lesvos (Kara Tepe), Elaionas and Thessaloniki Port. This concentration is disproportional to the number of refugees residing in each structure.

Most of the educational activities for children were taking place inside the accommodation centres. About two thirds of cases were educational activities of creative engagement, such as games and painting, or psychosocial support. In only one third of the cases (35 of the 105 cases surveyed) lessons were mentioned.

The subjects of the lessons were primarily English, secondarily Greek and, less frequently, mathematics. In seven cases, Arabic lessons were organised. Some activities were forged around the self-organisation of children, providing lessons on personal hygiene and social protection. Notably, in several cases, the intervention programme was co-shaped, according to the desires and suggestions of refugees.

Methodology

The research field

The context of the research site

The research was conducted in a primary school located in an inner-city area of Athens.

The school operates as an “all-day school”, which means that apart from the ordinary obligatory programme (8:10 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.), an extended afternoon programme (1:15 p.m. to 4 p.m.) is also offered on an optional basis. The student population numbered 383 students who attended the obligatory morning programme, divided into 18 groups (three groups in each grade). A smaller number of these students (150) attended the afternoon programme (five groups operated until 3 p.m. and three groups until 4 p.m.).

Students were of mixed socio-economic backgrounds, consisting mainly of middle- and working-class families. Their ethno-cultural background was also mixed, while 20% of them originated from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt and other countries.

The school staff consisted of 35 full- and part-time teachers. Twenty-four of them were general teachers and 11 were specialist teachers of subjects such as English, German, French, Physics, Computer, Art, Drama and Music.

The school received refugee children that had settled at the Atlantis³ site. The refugees attended the MERR's special RSARE programme, which operated in the afternoon (4 to 6 p.m.) and the refugee children attended special classes organised as a reception stage in the school. As the RSARE teaching staff formed a separate structure within the school and did not participate in the school's teachers council, the responsibility for creating the links to the school community rested with the school principal and the local school advisor.

The Atlantis refugee accommodation site

The refugee camp of Atlantis is located in an industrial zone of the Attica region. Nowadays, this area is rather deindustrialised and deprived.

The Atlantis camp is one of the official accommodation centres that host asylum seekers of varied origin. Syrians, Iranians, Afghans and Syrian Kurds are some of the dominant nationalities residing there. Refugees in Atlantis live in container homes (30 square metres) with two rooms, a WC, kitchen, running water and sewerage. Greek and international NGOs and organisations, such as Médecins du Monde, UNICEF, the UNHCR, the Danish Refugee Council, Praksis, Metadrasi and others have established annexes in the camp and offer first aid and other services. Aid and donations (food, consumables, furniture, clothes, toys, etc.) come from a wide range of civil society initiatives and individuals who have supported the operation of the camp since its foundation. The MERR's Refugee Education Co-ordinators are also located in the camp and are responsible for the RSARE structures at the camp level.

Children living at Atlantis were allocated to RSARE structures that had been set up in four nearby primary schools and one lower-secondary school. They were transported to the school by buses provided by the IOM.

3. Atlantis is a pseudonym, to ensure confidentiality of all participants.

Description of RSARE

Student enrolment and attendance

The RSARE structure of the research's site was set up in October 2016. Initially, 69 students enrolled in the school's RSARE, allocated to three grades according to their age. In January 2017, when the observation phase started, this number reduced to 45 students. Fluidity was the main feature of school attendance, which for most students living in the camp was neither systematic nor stable. As this population perceives Greece as a transit country, school dropout rates could be attributed to relocation. Some students' reappearance after a long period of absence could be attributed to the family's unsuccessful attempt to transfer through informal networks. Irregularity of attendance, however, demands further analysis since it is mediated by variables of socio-economic origin, gender and culture, national and international strategies for managing the refugee crisis, the social specificities of the camp, and personal trajectories. A major variable of school attendance is the students' school experience and the way the RSARE is received by the refugee families.

Attendance was recorded daily, both by the RECs, on the student's transportation from the camp to the school, and by teachers at school.

Everyday rituals

The camp's refugee children gathered together to wait for the school bus around 1.30 p.m. every day, five days a week (Monday to Friday). The RECs were responsible for supervising the whole procedure and recording children's boarding. At 2 p.m. three mini-buses arrived at school accompanied by attendants who bring students to their teachers. During the reception time, students put their schoolbags in three different lines according to the class they were attending. They played in the school playground until 2.15 p.m. when they entered classes. They attended a programme comprised of four teaching periods (between 2.15 and 6 p.m.). The duration of each teaching period was 45 minutes followed by a 15-minute break. At 6 p.m. the teachers oversaw the students' boarding of the buses that transported the children back to the camp.

RSARE curriculum

The refugee children attended a special curriculum consisting of the following subjects

Table 1 – RSARE curriculum

Subject	Teaching periods per week
Greek language	6
English	4
Mathematics	3
Arts and Drama Education	2
ICT (Information and Communication Technology)	2
Physical Education	3

The initial reception of the refugee children at school

The wider school environment and in particular a significant number of parents were unreceptive to the presence of the refugee children at school and the RSARE. According to the teachers' and principal's accounts, the extreme right-wing and racist political party of the Golden Dawn is significantly represented in the school district. The discontent of some parents was vividly expressed in a furious school meeting that took place at the beginning of the school year. During the first weeks of the RSARE the school principal had asked for the presence of the police outside the school in order to avoid any episodes against the refugee children. Some parents (around 10%) withdrew their children from the afternoon's extended programme in reaction to the refugee presence at school, although it was made clear from the outset that the refugees would attend separate classes. Despite these initial responses, no further reactions had been expressed by the non-refugee parents, until the end of the project.

Until March 2017 the school staff deliberately prevented any contact and communication between the refugees and students who attended the extended programme (from 2 to 4 p.m.). Breaks had been scheduled at different times for the two groups to avoid being in the playgrounds at the same time. These arrangements were motivated by fear of "parental reactions".

RSARE grade C

Action research was focused on one of the three RSARE classes, grade C, attended by the 10-13 age group. The teaching staff consisted of six part-time supplementary teachers recruited ad hoc for the RSARE classes. Two of the teachers were women (Mathematics and Arts and Drama teachers) and four of them were men (Greek language, English, ICT and Physical Education teachers). Their previous teaching experience varied from 3 to 10 years, while one of them had lengthy experience of more than 25 years.

During the observation phase, 17 students (11 girls and six boys) attended the class, out of the 26 students that had enrolled in October 2016. They were of Syrian, Afghan and Iranian origin. There were no reliable data regarding the exact date of the children's birth or previous school attendance.

Refugee students eventually began to become multilingual. Students of Syrian origin were fluent in the Arabic language. Students from Afghanistan and Iran were speaking Farsi, except for one girl who could also communicate in Arabic. All Grade C refugee children had some command of the English language at an elementary level. All children had acquired some very basic communication skills in the Greek language as well.

Most of the students had limited or interrupted previous education ranging from three to five years of schooling.

School attendance reflects the fluid situation of the refugees' status. Ten students attended regularly, six students had a relatively low attendance rate, while three only came to school once every month or two months. These three students were refugee girls from Syria, presumably older than declared by their family or companions, being maybe 14 or 15 years old.

The project's methodology

The aim of our project was to study and support the process of inclusion of the refugee children in the school community. The project activities were organised as action research that involved participant observation and active intervention.

The aims of any action research project or programme are to bring about practical improvement, innovation, change or development of social practice, and the practitioners' better understanding of their practices (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007). Action research in this project aimed at developing a community of practice that contributes to the educational inclusion of refugee children. Through active engagement in the school life, the project's researchers aimed at mutual learning and understanding of the context, reflecting on existing experiences and creating transforming practices. More specifically our goals were to:

- ▶ facilitate the reception of the refugee children at school;
- ▶ encourage communication among the refugee students and the all-day programme students;
- ▶ transform the school community into an inclusive system.

Research data mainly derived from participant observation of the school's RSARE classes. In participant observational studies the observant is situated in the research setting, remaining engaged for a substantial period of time and focusing on recording social interaction as well as sharing experiences and becoming an active participant (ibid.). Following this approach, our researchers not only observed the situation in the RSARE but also assisted and supported students and teachers in the classroom and participated in the planning and implementation of educational activities during the inclusion process.

Two basic researchers and project facilitators observed proceedings three times a week. Observation was recorded in the form of field notes compiled into diaries for each observation day. It focused on the interaction taking place in the classrooms, during the breaks, in the schoolyards and during any other school activities related to the inclusion process of the refugee children in the school community. Field notes also referred to the physical environment of the classroom, the events occurring before, during and after each class period, and the various interactions among the refugee students, their friends in the day programme and the teachers. In order to get a textured account of the inclusion process (ibid.), data were also collected from school meetings, from an RSARE teachers' training meeting organised by the area school advisor and from a meeting with the educational co-ordinators at the Atlantis camp where the RSARE students lived. We had frequent meetings with the school principal in order to collect data about the RSARE students' enrolment and the progress of the inclusion process.

The duration of the fieldwork was six months (January to June 2017), involving both observation and intervention activities. Observation diaries corresponded to 48 hours of observation, 30 of them focusing on the third grade of the RSARE.

Basic axes of observation

- ▶ What are the basic features of the refugee children's relationship to the school? How are they received and situated in the school?
- ▶ Is refugee children's attendance a process of inclusion? In which ways? Are there any barriers to their inclusion?
- ▶ How does the school community welcome refugee children? Are there any specific actions or initiatives undertaken to facilitate their inclusion?
- ▶ What are the modes of communication between teachers and refugee students? How is discipline enforced? Do the students seem interested and engaged in the learning process?
- ▶ What are the modes of communication among refugee children during the classes and the break times? How are friendships and teams formed? Are their relationships co-operative or competitive?
- ▶ What are the characteristics of the children's school performance? Do they experience difficulties? In which subjects?
- ▶ What is the interaction among refugee students and the morning students?

Ethical issues

One of the main ethical issues was to provide an honest and plausible explanation of the purpose of this study to the school leadership, the school advisor and teaching staff. We explained our role as participant observers in the class while aiming to obtain consent from both teachers and students. We emphasised creating confidence to the teachers and reassured them that our role was not only to observe but also to support them in the process of inclusion of their students in the school community. All data were transcribed using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

Analysis of the observation data

Refugee students

The relationships among refugee children were mediated mainly by the cultural categories of national origin and gender, but other factors, such as language, relationships between teachers and students and, to a lesser extent, between researchers and students, were all susceptible to how refugee students interacted with each other.

Homosociality, as "the seeking, enjoyment and/or preference for the company of the same sex" (Lipman-Blumen 1976: 16) traversed students' relationships and revealed how horizontal and/or hierarchical relationships were established. At the same time, segregation between specific national groups and tensions caused by the conflicting interests of the different groups affected relationships across nationalities at school. Teachers' pedagogical practices seemed to be a key factor in reinforcing, as well as impeding, collaboration among the students.

Relations between the students and the RSARE teachers were close. The students addressed all the teachers on a first-name basis and they joked or played games with them during the breaks. The communication between students and teachers was different inside and outside of the classroom. In the classroom, most of the teachers were more stressed by their attempts to teach and communicate in Greek, while during the breaks teachers were more relaxed and friendly towards the students.

Most of the teachers faced discipline problems with the students, inside and outside the classroom. In the classroom, students did not obey the class rules: they were leaving the class without permission, they fought with each other, they were eating or drinking during the lessons and they often screamed for no obvious reason.

School performance

In general, the RSARE teachers adopted traditional teaching styles and methods. Greek-language lessons consisted of dictation, reading and grammar. Writing and copying activities occupied much more time than oral activities. Greek language RSARE teachers were teaching Greek as a foreign language using the material provided by IEP, which is based on contemporary pedagogical principles and emphasises the communicative

approach.⁴ However, they, especially the less experienced ones, were not familiar with the rationale and the methodology of this material and they were actually unable to use it effectively.

Most of the students performed well in mathematics and participated with much more interest than in the Greek-language lessons. Even the students with the most irregular attendance performed well in mathematics.

The school community

Our knowledge of the morning teachers' stance towards the RSARE is mainly based on their meeting with the school principal and the RSARE teachers and then on our very limited interaction with some of them during our observation. According to our observations, they had expressed diverse opinions and predispositions towards the RSARE, which ranged from scepticism towards the integration efforts to explicit and tangible support.

The reservations, which had been expressed by the morning teachers, revolved around the poor organisation of the policies concerning the inclusion of refugee children and their fear of further reaction from the parent's council.

Communication and professional co-operation between the RSARE and morning teachers was lacking until March. In March, the school principal and the school advisor arranged a meeting with both RSARE and morning teachers to discuss ideas on refugee children's inclusion. The RSARE physical education teacher did not attend it at all. During this meeting, the common break for refugee and non-refugee students was decided upon, though not unanimously agreed upon by the morning teachers. Some of the morning teachers stated their reservations regarding the allocation of responsibilities during the breaks, whereas others adopted a more bridging and compromising position. Following the teacher's council decision, the common break was applied.

After the inauguration of the common break, we observed the children playing football in mixed groups of all genders and nationalities, as well as the formation of the first friendships among them. The meeting of the student population during the break was largely smooth and there were no reactions or unpleasant incidents.

An exception to the reserved stance taken by some of the morning teachers was the deputy principal, who took the initiative of running an educational programme in her class, which touched upon forced migration. After running it for a number of weeks, she co-operated with the RSARE maths teacher, and together they implemented a very successful joint activity with their classes. The teachers organised this activity with the purpose of encouraging the two classes to meet each other during play times. This was the sole joint activity organised by school teachers themselves, without any intervention on the research team's part.

Communication between the school and the refugee parents was both direct and indirect, that is, mediated by the RECs. Direct communication took place periodically, when RSARE teachers visited the camp to inform the refugee parents about their children's progress at school. The refugee parents had never visited the school or the teachers during the school year. RECs sometimes acted as mediators between the teaching staff and the parents and periodically visited the families in their homes in order to remind them and convince them of the importance of regular school attendance.

Tensions and resistances

RSARE teachers essentially formed a different teaching community. They maintained that they were underpaid compared to their counterparts working in mainstream classes, while they had to deal with an extremely complicated and unfamiliar educational framework. In certain cases, they had explicitly expressed mistrust towards what they perceived as "superiors" and had articulated suspicions regarding the configuration and the aims of RSARE structures. Despite complaining about insufficient support and training, some of them refused the training offered by the school advisor, by not attending or by criticising the training as being superficial. This latter stance created tension between these teachers and the school advisor, who in fact was exceedingly collaborative with the teachers and supportive of their inclusive practices. Their resistance was also illustrated by some statements from RSARE teachers that detailed their reluctance to organise, participate in or accommodate any joint activities between the RSARE and the rest of the school community. They refrained from any collaboration due to concerns regarding a loss of control over their professional jurisdiction, competitive relationships and fear that any good practice would be credited to another group. This resistance escalated during the school year and was only partly alleviated because of the interventions of the principal and our active presence at the school.

4. Teaching material produced by projects for the integration of repatriate students and students from the Muslim minority of Thrace.

The principal's role as the only link between the teachers of mainstream classes and the RSARE teachers made her vital to promoting co-operation among the teachers. However, her insistence on keeping the balance between the two groups did not encourage collaborative strategies.

The researchers as a third party

Initially, most of the teachers reacted positively to the presence of the researchers who represented a third party within the school community. Some of them were also interested in the research questions and the aims of the observation. While the teachers allowed the researchers to support students and sometimes suggest pedagogical approaches, they also limited their contribution with regard to the teaching process. During the school year a relationship of mistrust escalated, a fact that became exceedingly evident during the intervention phase when most of the RSARE teachers refused to participate in or even subtly prohibited the intervention activities.

The pedagogical intervention at the school

Our intervention was related to the development of pedagogical activities aimed at communication and co-operation in RSARE grade C. Observation was carried out from January 2017 to March 2017 in one of the extended programme's classes with students from the same age group. The intervention was designed on the basis of the general framework of the RSARE's operation, the findings of systematic observation and the wider objective of the programme, in order to facilitate the inclusion process of children on the move in the particular school setting (Scientific Committee for the Education of Refugee Children 2017).

In particular, we took into account the following parameters.

- ▶ The possibilities to co-operate with both of the two teachers' groups, bearing in mind that the tension in the relations between them impeded the efforts of inclusive practices. We considered that our intervention, stemming from "the university" – i.e. an external actor – could make a decisive contribution and give a new impetus both to the development of inclusive practices and to the co-operation between the two groups of teachers.
- ▶ The lack of motivation and the absence of the communicative and experiential approach necessary to teaching Greek as a foreign language, since almost all of the RSARE teachers focused mainly on the achievement of cognitive goals. At the same time, we identified the elements that mobilised this group, such as creating opportunities for the use of the Greek language in real communication circumstances, animating and rewarding, and engaging in creative activities based on the interests of each student.
- ▶ The main characteristics of the students and their attendance at the RSARE; that is, irregular school attendance, various cultural references, different cognitive levels and different levels of familiarity with the school, tensions among the various national groups and gender. It should be noted that these issues are more widely identified in the RSARE and are not specific to the particular school.

Aims of the intervention

The main aim of the intervention was to empower the RSARE group of children in order to express themselves and work with the children of the other group. In order to achieve this, it became necessary to create a framework of permissibility within the RSARE condition that would allow the members to feel safe and accepted (Cummins 2005).

At the same time, we aimed for a gradual development of communication between the members of the two groups through actions that would mobilise them and respond to each of their interests.

Design difficulties/adjustments

As our intervention began seven months after the beginning of the RSARE operation, both the planning and implementation were carried out on the basis of the constraints and conditions that had already been developed in the school by that point.

Since the tension in the relations between the two groups of teachers (the morning programme and the RSARE) was obvious from the start, our first concern was to involve in this process those teachers willing to adopt inclusive practices. For this reason, we planned and proposed a series of joint actions that would involve the

development of communication between the RSARE and the extended programme of the school with the ultimate goal of assisting and participating in the school's closing events.

More specifically, we designed and proposed the following.

- ▶ Actions that would develop the communication and co-operation of RSARE grade C with a mixed group from the extended programme. We identified two teachers within this group with whom we had already had good co-operation.
- ▶ Actions that teachers of the two groups could develop and had already collaborated on in a joint action or had shown a co-operative attitude towards. These actions had to do with the improvement of communication and co-operation between the RSARE groups and the extended programme of the school in order to prepare the school's closing festivities.
- ▶ Another major concern was the choice of activities based on the pedagogical aims we had set, but also on the limitations and operation of both the RSARE and the extended programme of the school.
- ▶ To that end we tried to recognise the different cognitive and cultural references of the students of both groups and chose activities adapted to their own desires and questions (Androusou 2004).
- ▶ Acknowledging students' lack of motivation in the educational process, we chose to focus on activities that mobilised and provided opportunities for free expression and creativity. Hence, we opted for artistic activities to help children express their feelings, their fears and thoughts or, in some cases, to even create a picture of their silence.⁵
- ▶ Recognising the mixed feelings (insecurity, fear, anxiety) that would arise from acquaintance with the "other group", we chose actions that would bring together the two groups gradually, in phases, giving them the time needed to recognise our intervention as something new and to accept it (Zografaki 2004). Indeed, to facilitate communication, we used the informal communication developed between girls of the two groups during the common breaks, we supported and supervised them, and, ultimately, they acted as "mediators" in our effort to attract the rest of the children.
- ▶ Finally, recognising the fluid context and the RSARE group's lack of stability in attending, we opted for flexible and open activities, so that every child could easily join them regardless of whether he/she had participated in all stages of our intervention (Sphyroera 2004).

Implementation

The actions developed by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens team during the intervention lasted for a total of one month and took place in two three-hour weekly meetings. Nine students (five girls and four boys) from RSARE grade C and nine students (seven girls and two boys) from the extended programme's class participated in these activities.

The implementation of this intervention was undertaken by one of the two researchers, based on her professional identity (teacher) as a co-ordinator/supervisor of the two groups, with the second researcher operating in an auxiliary role.

Our intervention was developed in three phases: in the first phase the two groups acted in parallel and corresponded with each other; in the second phase the two groups met and communicated in order to get better acquainted; and in the third and final phase they co-operated to create a visual intervention that would be displayed at the school's end-of-term events.

In the first phase, we used as teaching tools the little books⁶ and correspondence. Through these Freinet-based⁷ techniques, children develop writing and reading skills in a real communication situation, while being motivated to use written language that is to be read by others (Audet 2005; Vernioux 2001).

In the second and third phases, we used art as a teaching tool, in accordance with the Education Programme for the RSARE art lessons, on the basis that it is "a safe, creative way of expressing and dealing with reality".⁸

5. www.iep.edu.gr/images/IEP/EPISTIMONIKI_YPIRESIA/Epist_Monades/A_Kyklos/Diapolitismiki/2016/2016-10-11_EKPAID_PROGR_AISTHIT_AGOGH.pdf.

6. Simply with a piece of A4 paper, small eight-page mini-books are produced in order to be read by other peer groups, giving them a distinct meaning in their work and a motivation to learn.

7. <https://skasiarxeio.wordpress.com/>.

8. www.iep.edu.gr/images/IEP/EPISTIMONIKI_YPIRESIA/Epist_Monades/A_Kyklos/Diapolitismiki/2016/2016-10-11_EKPAID_PROGR_AISTHIT_AGOGH.pdf.

Phase A: 27-29 April 2017

During the first phase, three meetings were held and both groups worked in order to write their little books: the RSARE group worked with the researcher who is a teacher and the extended programme's class with the two morning programme's teachers, under the supervision of the researcher/teacher.

During this phase, we also used the element of "surprise" to motivate the members of each group to not disclose what they were preparing.

A basic requirement for the co-operation of the RSARE group with the researchers was to create a climate of trust and permissiveness. To make her realise that her role was no longer to observe the observer/researcher but to supervise and co-ordinate the intervention, the teacher-researcher used mainly non-verbal communication (mime and drawing) to communicate with the children, who very quickly understood her new role.

Once a good level of communication was established with the children from both groups, she suggested the idea of the two groups communicating with each other by presenting themselves via the information contained in the mini-books they had produced.

In this phase, a common feature of both groups was the children's assertion that language would be an obstacle to communication among them. The RSARE group insisted that they should write in Greek, claiming "only Greek for Greek children", while at the same time several children from the other group asked to write in English so that "the other children do not find it difficult".

Another common feature of both groups was their determination to present their little books properly and to make them readable. Indeed, during this process we noticed that within the RSARE group children from different national backgrounds, who until then had had tense relations with the others or had not managed to communicate with them, worked together to produce a good result.

Phase B: 3 April to 9 May 2017

In the second phase there were three joint meetings aimed at better acquainting the two groups and introducing the subject of children's rights, which was also the subject of a theatrical performance by the deputy principal's class. For this reason, we used the film entitled *Children's rights – Animation made by children* as a trigger.

The first of these joint meetings was a very special and significant day for both the children and us, as it signalled the move from purely written communication between the two groups to live, oral communication, and for this reason we treated this event as something of a celebration, despite its rather formal nature. We developed an almost ceremonial process of delivering and picking up the small books between the two groups, while the two researchers played the role of postal workers. Then, after giving them time to review the little books they received, the two groups met to try to identify the senders and the recipients of their little books and to discuss their content.

We noticed that members of both groups suffered some very intense feelings of anxiety and impatience at the start of the exercise, which gradually gave way to feelings of relief and enthusiasm, especially when they understood that they could communicate without language being an obstacle; the illustrations and the use of both Greek and English helped them to communicate with each other. Throughout, our role was mainly to supervise, with the help of specific students who acted as mediators in the team-building operation.

The next two joint meetings aimed to strengthen acquaintance and communication between the two groups. They always started with games to help each other become acquainted and to improve confidence, and we noticed that the boys of the RSARE group, who during the first meetings seemed more insecure and had more difficulties communicating with members of the other team, gradually joined the process with greater self-esteem.

Phase C: 15 May to 25 May 2017 and the school celebrations in June

In the third and final phase of our intervention, we worked on the issue of children's rights by using art as a teaching tool. We chose to make a banner and then a poster that would "communicate" to the school community (teachers, students, and parents) children's rights issues as perceived by the two groups. On the banner, the outlines of children were depicted, accompanied by a slogan we used when working on children's rights: "All children want..." and the words "home", "school", "care" and "support" framing the banner.

During the drawing process, some Afghan girls felt embarrassed to let a child from the other group outline their body on the banner and we adapted the activity by giving them the time and choice to express how they would like to participate in the process.

Lastly, it should be noted that at this stage three Syrian girls showed up after many months of being absent, but they very quickly understood and joined in the process with great willingness.

In all three phases of our intervention, there were children from the RSARE group who had difficulty or even refused to take part in the joint activities with the children from the other group, probably out of fear and insecurity caused by their acquaintance with the other group. As we have already pointed out, the time that each child needs to accept a change might differ, so we did not try to impose a similar procedure on all of them, and indeed during the activities most of these children overcame the difficulties of involvement and very discreetly “entered” the activities and developed trust in us.

At the same time, some of the activities we proposed to the teachers of the two groups were developed at this phase: games in the playground, the projection of film animations on children’s rights and the setting up of the scene for the theatrical performance organised by the deputy principal’s class.

During these activities and despite our constant presence and support to the teachers, there were difficulties in communication and co-operation. These difficulties, combined with the resistance of a group of teachers from both groups, worsened the climate and created tensions over the participation of the RSARE class in the end-of-term events. The principal, on the one hand, tried to maintain balance but also did not support the more active participation of the RSARE students in the end-of-term events, citing the possible reaction of some parents.

The result was a very limited participation by the RSARE in these events. Thus, at the school’s main end-of-term event, RSARE students did not participate at all, and were simply present. In the second, rather small, theatrical performance organised by the deputy principal’s class, they had a more apparent presence. At this event the refugee parents were invited to the school for the first time and they responded with great joy and satisfaction to this invitation. The RSARE students participated in the performance with a song and played games in the courtyard with the children of this class. There was also an exhibition of the crafts the RSARE group had created during the school year, a presentation of the banner the two groups had created and the distribution of posters to the students as a way of remembering this collaboration. In this event refugee parents had the chance to address the school community in their own languages via interpreters.

Assessment

We consider that the assessment of the whole project could be divided into three levels.

- ▶ With regard to the RSARE group, we believe there were positive benefits for this group. Our initial pedagogical aims were achieved to a large extent, and through this process the RSARE group was greatly strengthened and the feelings of rivalry among its members were reduced.
- ▶ As concerns the RSARE students’ inclusion in the school community, the project contributed to the move from a level of informal communication the students of the two groups had established during the common breaks to a level of coexistence and co-operation, thus creating bridges of communication between the RSARE students and those from the morning school. Although the presence of the RSARE children in school became more visible, the reduced participation of the RSARE students in the school’s end-of-year events showed the limitations of integrating the RSARE children into this particular school.
- ▶ With regard to the teachers of the two groups, the teachers who participated in the joint activities we had proposed had the opportunity to approach each other, although there were difficulties in communication and co-operation between them that came from the established perceptions of the members of the two groups about their respective professional identities. At the same time, the continued resistance of one group of teachers not involved in the inclusive practices highlighted the difficulties of the whole venture.

Finally, when assessing our participation in this project we believe that the RSARE experiment primarily gave us the opportunity to experience and understand to a great extent how to plan and implement to a fairly satisfactory degree an intervention that responds to the pedagogical aims we set.

Moreover, this first attempt at co-operation between the RSARE and the all-day school could help to gain a better understanding of and to eliminate the stereotypes and prejudices against those considered “different”, while at the same time suggesting that it is possible to integrate children on the move into the school’s morning programme when supported by the reception classes and appropriate teaching practices.

Discussion of the project's findings and results

The main agencies in refugee education governance

Education governance with regard to the education of refugees in Greece involves a variety of “holders” (in Schmitter’s terms).

At the international level several agencies have offered support to the Greek state to help deal with the unprecedented refugee crisis. Most notably the EU, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid body and the UNHCR supported the Greek government in providing protection and assistance to refugees and migrants).⁹ Part of this humanitarian aid has been channelled towards refugee education. Furthermore, the IOM has provided for the transportation of refugee children from RACs to schools. In the case that this project has studied, the Council of Europe and the European Union have also influenced refugee education through the initiatives and interventions of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens research team.

At the national level, the main state bodies are the Ministry of Education, the Institute of Education Policy and the Scientific Committee on Refugee Education. However, other organisations and agencies have influenced and facilitated refugee education, such as the Ministry of Health (the vaccination of refugee children), the Ministries of Defence and Immigration Policy, and the Greek Parliament (which has contributed to funding schools that accommodate RSARE students) (Scientific Committee for the Support of Refugee Children 2017). In certain cases, the police were used to prevent potentially dangerous incidents, especially during the first weeks of the RSARE operation.

At the school community level, which is the focus of this research project, the basic holders who were involved in refugee education governance at this specific site are as follows.

- ▶ Students – The refugee students are the main “stakeholders” in the sense that they are the target group essentially affected by the specific policy. The morning school students are also basic stakeholders affected by the accommodation of the RSARE classes in their school.
- ▶ Teachers are the main “knowledge-holders” in the school community, since they are the ones who possess the professional education expertise. At the same time, teachers can be perceived as “interest-holders”, since they are organised as a corporate group and trade union. Two groups of teachers were active at the research site: the RSARE teachers and the morning school teachers. These form two distinct groups, delineated by diverse and sometimes conflicting professional interests and claims. The teachers’ council, as the body which represents the teachers’ group in school governance, did not explicitly include both groups of teachers.
- ▶ Other key participants and knowledge-holders from the teaching profession are the school principal, the school advisor and the RECs. The principal and the advisor represent authority and hierarchy within the profession and education governance.
- ▶ School principal – She acted as the link between the morning school and the RSARE and she collaborated with the school advisor and the RECs. She was responsible for creating opportunities for communication between the morning and the RSARE teachers and, consequently, she was vital to shaping inclusive strategies.
- ▶ School advisor – He acted as a facilitator for the RSARE teachers’ competences concerning pedagogic practice (i.e. organised training) and he supervised the RSARE operation through communication with the school principal and the RECs. His role was to monitor, advise and facilitate inclusive strategies.
- ▶ RECs – They acted as the link and mediators between the RSARE teachers, the refugee parents and the children, as well as among those within the RSARE and made arrangements concerning translations and transportation to and from school. Their role was highlighted when they were asked to contribute to refugee children’s and parents’ attendance at the school celebrations (they arranged transportation and interpreters).
- ▶ Parents
 - Refugee parents are important stakeholders since they are directly and indirectly affected by refugee education governance. Refugee parents (especially non-Syrian ones) demonstrated a commitment to sending their children to the school until the end of the school year (this is not the case in other schools with RSARE). All of them responded to the school’s invitation to attend a school celebration with non-refugee parents, showing their willingness

9. <http://donors.unhcr.gr/echo/en/home/>.

to be considered effective members of the school community. Some of them complained (through the RECs) about the RSARE teachers' practices concerning their children and thus exercised their right to monitor the school strategies and practices. Most of them did not attend meetings with the RSARE teachers in the camp throughout the school year, though. Refugee parents are not part of the parents' council.

- Non-refugee parents can be perceived as rights-holders on the basis of citizenship entitlement and at the same time as status-holders, since they represent an organised interest group that claims dominance in the educational institution. There are not many clues about non-refugee parents' participation in school governance. Their initial negative reaction to the RSARE operation at the school was superseded by a calm period, since some of their primary concerns (safety, hygiene) were addressed. Despite being used by the principal and deputy principal as an excuse to avoid the implementation and support of inclusive activities, when they were invited to participate in joint activities most of them accepted.
- ▶ The local authority is a space-holder in Schmitter's terms, which could play an essential role in refugee education governance. It has significantly contributed to the accommodation arrangements, although its role in this particular school was rather invisible.
- ▶ Interpreters – They are knowledge-holders and essential mediators that make verbal and written communication between Greek speakers and non-Greek speakers possible (especially between refugee parents and other interested parties). Their presence was mainly limited to the Atlantis camp, but they once escorted refugee parents and children to the school and played a role interpreting speeches during the school events.
- ▶ Security staff and cleaners – They were recruited after following non-refugee parents' demands to guarantee security and hygiene at the school. Although they cannot be perceived as holding any significant power in school governance, they represent an imaginary "safety net" to the "dangers" stemming from the presence of refugee children at the school. During everyday school life, they also functioned as adult figures who cared about refugee children's whereabouts and well-being.
- ▶ The university – Our research team, consisting of researchers and/or facilitators. Our task during our presence at the school was to facilitate and monitor democratic governance and inclusive practices. We did not succeed in overcoming the resistance of some of the RSARE teachers or gaining their trust to ensure co-operation with our team and other stakeholders. One reason was that we have not been perceived as support to the (RSARE) teachers' work, but rather they thought of us as distanced observers and sometimes controllers, despite the researchers' efforts. The RSARE teachers interpreted our research project as being a judgment of their work, and developed a detached, defensive and sometimes aggressive stance towards our project. Combined with our team's institutional and academic specialisation in education, we were perceived as those who *know*, criticising those who *do*. Nevertheless, we did influence and managed to implement inclusive strategies.
- ▶ Civil society organisations are essential stakeholders that can actively support inclusive school strategies. In fact, NGOs and other volunteer organisations or initiatives have significantly contributed to dealing with the refugee crisis in Greece. However, the Greek school governance culture is not particularly receptive to more open strategies such as allowing civil society organisations to participate in school initiatives. Although this project aimed at involving civil society in inclusive policies, the field conditions were rather discouraging, a fact that restricted our team's opportunities for action.

Understanding the target group

The terminology used to describe different modes of mobility often depends on legal, social and ideological factors. Border-crossing immigration (as opposed to internal immigration) is largely subject to international and national regulatory and surveillance administrations, which impact on individual mobility, and, as such, it raises issues of power (Schiller and Salazar 2013). As a result, the movement of some populations is normalised or legitimised, while others' movement is criminalised or seen as a result of entrapment (*ibid.*). Legitimation of immigration depends on multiple factors affecting local, national and international policies and discourses. Hence, while refugees are perceived as people in need, associated with loss and trauma and therefore deserving of the right to asylum, other immigrants are turned back and deported. These distinctions are equivalent to those deployed in Greece during the 1990s regarding the management of migration flows (immigrants/refugees/repatriates).

In this study, fluidity is the core characteristic of refugees' practices. Irregular school attendance, uncertain futures and destinations, and a sense of insecurity concerning their stay in Greece all indicate that these refuge-seeking

populations are people in transit, in between homes, locations and countries. They have not reached their final destination yet and are unwilling or unable to invest in their present or imagine their future in Greece.

During our observation it was obvious that the group of “children on the move” is not a homogeneous one. Divides caused by the above-mentioned factors are probably reproduced in the observed modes of sociality at school, in the form of national origin segregation among students. Controversies among the various nationalities in the camp because of conflicting interests might be factors affecting children’s relations at school.

Furthermore, gender seems to be an important parameter of students’ social identities, which was a factor in the communication between the two groups (the RSARE students and morning students).

Governance strategies regarding inclusion/exclusion

RSARE has been designed to offer a process of transition, from the “moving identity” to that of “schooling identity”. Symbolically, schooling, both as an institutional provision on the part of the state and as a social practice on the part of the children on the move, highlights that passing through Greece means acquiring characteristics of settlement. In the above context, schooling represents a process and a way to manage immigration flows in the wider spectrum of the European refugee crisis. In other words, it can be perceived as a mode of European governance through funding mechanisms, parallel to those deployed in the European policy space (Lawn and Lingard 2002; Zambeta 2002). European resources – along with other global humanitarian resources – are invested in educational structures for children on the move, who are hosted in refugee accommodation sites throughout Greece. Thus, the provision of education, as a fundamental human right, at the same time serves as a governing mechanism for immigration flows to the north of Europe. Schooling, even in the form of RSARE in Greece, contributes to developing a sense of settlement, reception and a doorstep to integration in a society initially perceived as a transit country.

The fact that RSARE are annexes within a mainstream school has multiple effects. First, it brings the new populations into public education venues, and is therefore a major test of Greek society’s reflexes towards the reception of and coexistence with refugees. Second, it provides a bridge between a life on the move and formal schooling, and represents a transition towards a life with “order”, regularity and an everyday routine within the dominant socialisation procedures in the host/transit country. The extent to which RSARE can contribute to a rehabilitation process for children on the move is a challenge that depends on a wide range of parameters, from the fluidity of their situation, to socio-political constellations, institutional configurations and the social dynamics developed in each particular setting.

Concerning the institutional pattern, RSARE is designed to be a distinctive structure within the school for receiving refugee children in the current academic year (according to the policy, refugee children are to attend mainstream classes but RSARE classes may operate for new arrivals or children who still live in RACs). For various reasons – related to EU funding procedures, internal teachers’ recruitment policies and the timing of the establishment of RSARE, which began well after the beginning of the school year – RSARE teachers did not come from the permanent teaching staff, but had been employed specifically for these projects, most of them on a part-time basis. As a result, they constituted a separate group with an unspecified relationship with the mainstream teaching staff and the school governing board (the teachers’ council). At the research site in question, RSARE teachers did not participate in the teachers’ council. According to the Scientific Committee’s report (Scientific Committee for the Support of Refugee Children 2017), it seems that this pattern has been followed in several schools that accommodated RSARE around the country. At the research site, meetings between the two groups of teachers were rare. The principal was charged with the task of connecting the two groups of teachers. Moreover, the RSARE teachers did not have significant experience or special training to cope with these exceedingly demanding working conditions. This situation, along with the fact that the refugee students attended separate classes and followed a special curriculum, developed a dynamic of fragmentation rather than co-operation and integration, which was the initial expectation of the RSARE policy.

As far as co-operation among those in the school is concerned, the morning and RSARE teachers were reluctant to design, implement and/or participate in inclusive strategies collectively. The RSARE teachers attributed their reluctance to insufficient training, poor professionalism by education officials and other teachers, poor organisation of the RSARE, negligence on the part of the Ministry of Education and the IEP, and small salaries. All their arguments revolved around protecting or defending their professional status, while, at the same time, they refused to exercise their pedagogical duties. A possible interpretation is that the teachers strategically used the argument that their professionalism was under threat in order to not modify traditional teaching styles with which they felt safe and develop creative and contextualised pedagogic strategies. This reveals the governance mentality of the teaching profession in Greece; working rights’ claims tend to overshadow

pedagogical deficiencies and sometimes act as instruments of resistance to change. In some extreme cases unwillingness to perform inclusive practices and even racial prejudice has been disguised as a proclamation of “professional ethics” and “resistance to interference in their work”. Professional territoriality, i.e. the fragmentation of the spheres of one’s jurisdiction, has been used to legitimise social closure strategies, and hindered communication and attempts to develop a whole community at the school level.

The principal, despite co-operating with both groups of teachers, avoided bringing to the fore issues, which would require dialogue, argumentation and possible conflict and might lead to criticism of her management skills. A convenient strategy used by the school leadership, and by the teachers as well, was the argument that non-refugee parents would react fiercely to more overtly inclusive strategies and students would be on the receiving end of this. The high cost of the principal’s attempt to compromise was a governance failure to promote the whole community and inclusion.

The interventions, which were put forward by our team, aimed at reinforcing communication among the two groups of students and teachers, engaging the morning and RSARE teachers in common educational processes, enhancing the RSARE’s visibility at the school and establishing the RSARE participants as crucial school stakeholders. Despite encountering resistance by some in the school, communication and co-operation between the two distinct school populations were achieved, to a certain degree. RSARE’s full participation and visibility at the main end-of-year school ceremony was not supported by the teachers and the school’s leadership. Nevertheless, the operation of RSARE in the school and the inclusive strategies of this project have contributed to raising visibility of the refugee issue and social awareness regarding their educational and human rights.

Policy considerations

Greek refugee education policy has been developed amid an unprecedented refugee crisis in a country undergoing a deep economic and social crisis at the same time. Refugee educational provision in the form of RSARE, apart from providing education as a fundamental human right, has contributed to raising social awareness of refugee rights. The major achievement of RSARE was that the refugees became part of the educational institution.

This project embodies the limitations of small-scale qualitative research. However, having studied a rather unfortunate case of refugee education governance, it could contribute to reflection on possible improvements.

For various reasons, not least those of funding, RSAREs have been constructed as annexes within existing schools, operating with a different timetable and a different curriculum with teaching staff recruited specifically for this purpose. This fact on its own is a condition of fragmentation that, under certain circumstances, can lead to segregation, as witnessed by this project. The Scientific Committee’s proposal for refugee children to attend reception classes in ordinary schools in the future is, thus, reasonably grounded. However, there is a strong possibility that some RSARE structures will continue to operate at least for one more year for those children who live in camps located far from mainstream schools.

A factor of utmost importance seems to be the selection of RSARE teachers. Issues of particular concern include the required qualifications and their status as substitute teachers; the fact that they were eligible to apply for other teaching posts; and, subsequently, were given the opportunity to leave their position during the school year.

First, the requirements set by the Ministry of Education in order to recruit RSARE teachers do not include experience and/or other special qualifications relevant to inclusive pedagogies or teaching Greek as a second language. The RSARE teachers’ task is undoubtedly a very demanding one in exceptional educational conditions, hence they need to be experienced professionals or otherwise committed to working with immigrants. This consideration is also expressed in the Scientific Committee’s evaluation report, by stating that RSARE teachers, because of their selection by the substitute teachers’ pool, lacked the necessary motives for this specific position (Scientific Committee for the Support of Refugee Children 2017: 62-63). Of course, RSARE teachers also need specialist training and continuous support for their work. It should be noted that populism and traditional corporate clientelism in the Greek political culture (Charalambis 1996) has facilitated the unreasonable satisfaction of teachers unions’ illegitimate protest against the application of special requirements for the recruitment of RSARE teachers.

Second, the status of RSARE teachers as substitutes allowed the teachers to leave RSARE during the school year, in order to pursue other positions. This created changes in the make-up of the RSARE staff and many problems for the educational process. The school is supposed to provide stability, regularity and a sense of continuity to the education of refugee students and to avoid disruption.

Third, the RSARE's relation to the school has been unclear. Policy documents have classified the RSARE as a distinct part of the school, administratively and pedagogically. Many of the problems we encountered during this project could have been overcome had RSARE teachers been included in the main body of the teaching staff, taking part in teachers' councils and in the decision-making processes. Moreover, a pedagogical connection between the RSARE and the morning school would have promoted inclusion and democratic governance.

Last, continuous community awareness raising should be facilitated by the opening up of a school to wider society. Certain governance failures identified in this project are indicative of the Greek school governance culture, which perceives school as a closed system. Opening a school to civil society would benefit the inclusion process by highlighting the societal dimension of refugee inclusion and giving responsibility to various different groups.

Refugees in Romanian education

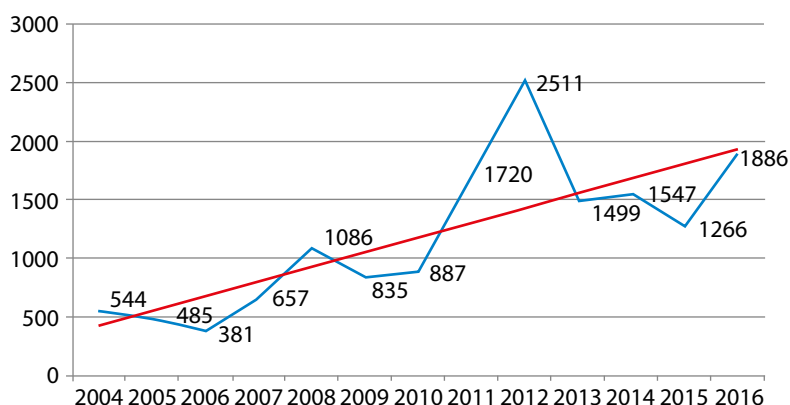
Andreea-Diana Scoda and Sorin Mitulescu

The project's target group

Identification of the target group and basic statistics

Romania, like much of Europe, indirectly faces challenges originating from other parts of the world. International events, such as local or regional wars, other kinds of conflicts or simply poverty or the lack of resources or health assistance in different parts of the world, are forcing European countries to adapt to global changes. This recent phenomenon requires that Romania find ways to host and integrate an increasing number of refugees, even if they may be only in transit.

Figure 1. The number of asylum applications received by Romania between 2004 and 2016



Red line = general trend

Source: <https://bit.ly/2nQFhnl>

The number of asylum applications, even lower than in other European countries, has followed an upwards trend, and projections for the upcoming period indicate a similar development. There were on average 700 asylum applications a year between 2004 and 2010, reaching 2 511 asylum applications in 2012. In 2016, there were 1 886 asylum applications, most of which were mainly from Syria (816) and Iraq (472).

The number of asylum applications in Romania is growing. This means that Romania must be prepared for the coming years, at a national, regional and local level, in order to better accommodate this population.

According to *Asylum Trends 2010-2012 – Provisional statistical figures for Centre Europe, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia*, a significant number of these refugees are children, sometimes unaccompanied minors (43 in 2012 out of the total number of 2 511 asylum applicants registered, as per UNCHR data) (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2012: 2).

Starting from this situation and especially considering the expectations for the coming years, the Romanian team working for the “Democratic school governance for inclusion: a whole community approach” project decided to conduct their own national pilot project on the integration of refugee children, especially those who attend public schools in the towns or villages where they are hosted. In our view, refugees’ inclusion represents a kind of test for our schools (as violence was in a previous project).¹⁰

We believe that schools responsible for teaching refugee children face a challenge and therefore have an extra chance to break that circle of conservatism and habit and depart from the routine of traditional schools (which are largely authoritarian, based on discipline and are characterised by a lack of communication).

Thus, this pilot project emphasises many different aspects related to the different needs of those involved (teachers, pupils, school counsellors, school principals, inspectorates, etc.).

These target groups have not been thoroughly investigated because Romania has a short history of integrating them and because many of them tend to migrate to other countries that are more attractive.

The following sections will show that the main target group comprises Syrian minors attending a public school in Brăila town. Their families arrived in Romania in the early 2000s (or some years later) and many work in and around the city (in agriculture, transport or trade). They do not live in a camp, but have rented apartments in the city centre. Although most of them arrived by applying for a work permit (and not by illegally crossing the borders) they can be considered “refugees” because they cannot return to Syria where their lives would be in danger. Besides the target group, our study was developed in another school in Bucharest and other groups (see the methodological phases).

Public discourse perception

In the last century, Romania was confronted with several situations of having to host refugee populations of different origins (from Armenia, Poland, Greece, Korea or Chile), starting immediately after the First World War and going on for more than 50 years. The collective memory keeps images or local (direct) experiences from that time and many newspapers have recently (re)published such information in connection with the 2013-2015 refugee crisis in Europe. The reaction of the population in all these cases was positive though and there was no question of systematic assimilation.

The recent wave of refugees fleeing major conflicts in the Middle East or Africa is different and connected with other challenges and threats. The authors of a recent study on “Romanians’ perception of refugees noticed that the lack of information and the negative influence of mass media caused confusion among the population” (Iacob 2016:10). This is why the results of some surveys are sometimes contradictory. Even if some studies emphasised the idea that Romanians are among the most favourable of Europeans regarding foreigners’ rights (Voicu 2013) and even if the Romanian population is (traditionally) quite tolerant towards foreigners coming to Romania and they would support some protection measures for the latter’s benefit, the 2016 study showed that only 54% of the population agreed to the presence of refugees in Romania. However, the same study showed that 65% of the respondents would agree to refugees’ children attending the same school as their own children and only 28% would be against it (Iacob 2016).

Other recent national polls have revealed that three quarters of Romania’s population are against the EU’s policy of reallocating refugees; most individuals surveyed agreed that refugees are a vulnerable population that must be helped. What is more, while a few political parties – the Popular Movement Party in particular – have taken an anti-refugee stance in an effort to broaden their electorate base, the main political parties are not catering to the still feeble anti-immigration voices of some segments of the population (Ulceluse 2016).

Relevance to the project’s aims

The current refugee crisis creates serious challenges for European states, including Romania, even if this phenomenon is not as widespread as in other countries, such as Germany, Greece or Italy. Some Romanian schools have already received these new populations and are facing several difficulties that will be analysed within this project. To this extent, the importance of reducing hate speech, racism, xenophobia and prejudice remains to

10. The “Addressing violence in schools through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education” project was supported by the Council of Europe and European Union in 2016, with the aim to build more co-operation, understanding and awareness between schools, stakeholders and other important school actors on the topic of reducing school violence through tolerance, reason and the ability to cope more efficiently in different surroundings. In connection with the current European project, the idea of “acceptance of refugees”, as well as reducing violence in school, demands more tolerance, open mind and co-operation from schools (Council of Europe (2016a)).

be effectively understood in our schools, provided they even support democratic citizenship and human rights culture. Thus, this project also takes advantage and makes use of the opinions and perceptions of various people and bodies involved and includes work with those in the target group (teachers, school directors, school inspectors, etc.) in order to contribute to the improvement of a democratic school culture.

Education policies

Romanian legislation

The first steps in the legislative process regarding the actions necessary for asylum in Romania were taken over 25 years ago (in 1991) when Romania acceded to the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. In 1996, Romania adopted its first national law on asylum (Law No. 15/1996). In accordance with the provisions of Article 15.e of this law, one of the asylum seeker's rights is "to attend primary school under the conditions stipulated by the law for Romanian citizens and other forms of education under the same conditions as those established for foreign citizens".

In accordance with the provisions of Ordinance No. 44/2004, issued by the Government of Romania, "minors who have acquired a form of international protection in Romania benefit from a free Romanian course for beginners during a school year and are allowed to attend other didactic activities, whether theoretical, practical or recreational, without being officially enrolled. This introductory course ends with an assessment of the level of Romanian by an evaluation committee and allows subsequent enrolment in the corresponding school year" (in accordance with the provisions of Article 10, paragraphs 1, 2 and 3). According to the Romanian laws on pupils' education, they must learn Romanian and attend school, depending on their age and individual circumstances.

The curriculum (approved by the Order of the Minister of Education No. 4041/2004, 16.06.2004 (c)) for Romanian as a foreign language is aimed at children of refugee families in Romania. The duration of the course is one year and there are four hours a week, so that at the end of the year children can be enrolled in the Romanian education system, in grades corresponding to their age. Thus, the curriculum for Romanian was adapted for the following three levels: level I, for those aged 6 to 10; level II, for those aged 11 to 14; and level III, for those aged 15 to 18 (Ministry of Education 2004c: 2).

The initiation course for foreign children who have acquired refugee status and unaccompanied refugee minors includes a Romanian textbook (Bako 2009). This textbook for school aims at providing the transition from beginner to upper intermediate level and then gradually moving from a basic knowledge of phonetics and spelling to speaking, communicating and reading of easy texts. The lessons are in the form of dialogues and aim at communication speed.

There are methodologies drafted and approved since 2009 by the Minister of Education (Minister of Education, Research and Innovation's Orders 5924 and 5925) where one can find the conditions for enrolling refugee children and adults in Romanian courses for beginners held in schools and the conditions for the teachers teaching such classes. Minor children can be enrolled in the secondary education system after an initial assessment. This assessment is usually held at the beginning of the school year. In accordance with the provisions of Order 4041/2004 (a), "for the duration of the Romanian course for beginners, refugee children may freely attend various didactic activities, organised together with Romanian children, without being enrolled in official documents" (Article 10, paragraph 1).

Equivalence of studies (studies finished in the country of origin) must be evidenced by documents, according to the legal provisions. Should these documents be missing, the pupil will be given both a language test and a test in mathematics.

Available data regarding educational attendance and attainment

For our target group (refugee children), data show¹¹ the following information on the number of pupils registered and enrolled in Romanian schools for the school year 2015-2016 in 13 counties (especially near the borders) throughout Romania.

11. The data were given by the Ministry of Education. It is important to keep in mind the fact that these data can change from one month to another, since many parents decide to come or leave the country depending on their needs (it is a transit country) or situation (from a legal point of view).

Table 1 – National data on the number of minors and adults enrolled in the 2015-2016 school year

Current number	County within Romania	The number of minors in a form of protection that are in education in 2015-2016	The number of minors in a form of protection that are enrolled in education in 2015-2016	The number of minors and adults enrolled and attending the Romanian language initiation course at school in 2015-2016
1	Bacău	0	10	0
2	Town București	5	5	16: 5 minors/11 adults
3	Brăila	7	24	7
4	Călărași	0	7	0
5	Constanța	18	18	8
6	Dolj	0	10	0
7	Galați	0	6	15 adults
8	Girugiu	0	1	0
9	Iași	0	0	1 adult
10	Maramureș	2	2	24: 3 minors/21 adults
11	Sibiu	0	48	0
12	Suceava	2	1	42: 8 minors/34 adults
13	Timiș	2	2	36: 6 minors/30 adults
	TOTAL	36	134	

Source: Ministry of Education, 2016

Recent evidence attests to the extremely dynamic situation of refugees; there are counties where the situation varies from one year to another.

Unfortunately, certain obstacles make it difficult to make a reliable estimate of the current situation in Romania regarding the number of minors currently enrolled in the school system. These obstacles include fluctuation (parents come and leave as they please); the number of schools prepared to take in this target group; and the current legal right to stay in the country. These aspects make it a real challenge for this project to provide adequate data concerning this target group.

State policy focusing on the group

There is concern at the national level about the strategies focused on the integration of foreigners, a concern that affects schools, since foreigners are legally entitled to be integrated into the education system.

Romania remains mainly a transit country for illegal immigrants and asylum seekers (IOM 2014). Many of the refugees who are in Romania are mostly concerned with finding other areas/countries in which to settle down. The general opinion is that they do not want to or cannot make plans for their lives in the short or medium term in Romania because of low living standards, low wages, etc., but there are other opinions according to which a decision to move away from Romania is made on the basis of the bureaucratic, cultural or political obstacles faced. Some educational integration difficulties contribute to it.

One worrying conclusion from *Immigrants Integration Barometer 2013* is that immigrants' access to public education in Romania is restricted and the state does not show concern for this service (Ionescu 2013: 38). This aspect has been also underlined by another independent researcher, Corina Popa, who participated in our first seminar held at the Institute of Educational Sciences in Bucharest in March 2017 and who considers that although, from a legal standpoint, access to education is theoretically provided without discrimination, in practice,¹² in some situations it is unclear or they have to struggle with a lack of goodwill, trust or sympathy from the authorities (for example, undocumented adults and minors, etc.). The same report, *Immigrants*

12. Corina Popa, (Romanian Arab Cultural Center ACCRA TIMISOARA, Integration Director, Romania) described how scholastically the Romanian language is taught, saying that some refugees feel that it is a waste of their time. Moreover, Romanian language is not taught as a "foreign language", as they do not use modern audio/video means of teaching. In addition, the contact with parents is limited, since they do not speak Romanian.

Integration Barometer 2013, underlines that it is difficult, but not impossible to obtain information provided by authorities about the level of access to the language and cultural courses of a foreign child: “each school chooses whether they enrol a foreign child or not and how they integrate her/him” (ibid.).

Civil society initiatives

Various campaigns or projects have been developed at the national level to ensure better integration for this target group; organisations such as Save the Children, JRS Romania (Jesuit Refugee Service), UNICEF and Terre des Hommes have developed initiatives to support refugees and asylum seekers by improving living conditions and observing the rights provided by national and international legislation. Most of these projects were carried out at reception centres (in Timișoara, Bucharest and Galați). However, only a few considered collaboration with schools attended by refugee children.

The context of the research site and the project’s methodology

Considering the situation of refugee pupils in Romania and the capacity of our small team, we chose a simplified research methodology. The Romanian team decided to focus on piloting an intervention programme at a school with more relevant previous experience of educating refugee children or at one that has faced challenges with refugee children (immigrants), especially with their integration.

The fieldwork involved two main phases of the project’s methodology.

1. The extensive phase targeted a number of schools to participate in this project, in order to acknowledge the general status and choice of schools with refugee pupils. In this sense, the Institute of Educational Sciences in Bucharest held a seminar with the participation of school inspectors and teachers from many counties where refugee children attend schools. We were able to select where the pilot school plan would be developed based on this discussion and data presented by each participating school.

Research methods used in this phase included a survey for the schools and a group discussion on the needs of schools with refugee pupils.

Our task was to select a school (among many) where our project had the best chance to develop.

We used the following criteria for the selection of a school in order to participate in this project:

- ▶ a large enough number of refugee pupils in the school;
 - ▶ some previous experience in the education and integration of refugee pupils;
 - ▶ a willingness to develop and support its own plan of intervention to increase the integration capacity and achieve a whole community approach.
2. The intensive phase was oriented towards one school where the intervention was developed. We conducted more thorough research at this school, aiming at investigating the situation of refugee children, school evaluation methods, the capacity to manage the education and integration of refugee children and the ways they could implement measures to strengthen democratic school governance.

The methods used in this phase were classroom observation in two schools (Gymnasium School No. 145 from Bucharest and Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School from Brăila), thorough interviews with teachers, parents and school principals and group discussions.

In the end, the Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School from Brăila was chosen for the intervention, in spite of the fact that most of the children in the target group were not refugees in the ordinary sense (meaning children accommodated in reception centres with or without their families and in a poor financial situation). As we have already mentioned, they must be considered “refugees” because of the political situation in Syria, as for the time being they cannot return to their country.

The city of Brăila is situated in the south-eastern part of Romania, on the left bank of the Danube River and has a population of 180 000. The history of the city has witnessed numerous changes of influence (between Romanian and Turkish) and periods of cohabitation of many ethnic groups (especially between 1829 and 1970).

Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School is one of the oldest and most famous in the town, the first information about its existence being from 1867; since 1996 the school has been named Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School.

Analysis of the observation data

Data about schools

In relation to choosing one of the participating schools in this project, we organised a seminar in Bucharest, with participants from five counties in Romania (the extensive phase). A questionnaire was completed by each county representative before attending the seminar; the results can be summarised as follows.

- ▶ Each different school understands in their own way their mission in relation to refugee pupils. The number of hours spent with these children differs from one school to another depending on the didactic implication.
- ▶ Refugee children attend on average 50% to 75% of the activities, but their participation level is lower.
- ▶ Few school staff have received training on the school integration of children from refugee families. Not all of them have benefited from the work with non-governmental organisations.
- ▶ There is a lack of support for the refugee pupils from the school counsellors.
- ▶ The language barrier makes it difficult to work with these children and their parents. In order to become familiar with the context of the refugee schooling we entered into the two schools (Gymnasium School No. 145 in Bucharest and Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School in Brăila), where we decided to conduct the classroom observations in these schools to see how they function (conduct different activities, the level of communication developed, the school performance, etc.) aspects that we will discuss below.

Field observation in schools¹³

Classroom activities

The main points observed referred to the fact that pupils spoke and understood Romanian quite well; they were eager to learn, but very few materials, such as audio-visual tools, were used to captivate their attention during classes.

The Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School had 23 refugee children (mainly boys) integrated into classes or attending Romanian language lessons.

We decided to observe a group of pupils that were learning the Romanian language and we can make the following remarks concerning the gender orientation of Syrian families.

- ▶ All pupils except one were boys.
- ▶ The Romanian language course was taught twice a week. The lone girl's parents requested that she work without a break, because they did not want girls to mix in the hallway during the break (according to the teacher).

Spatial distribution and co-operation in the classroom

During all the classroom activities we observed that the pupils were free to choose where they wanted to sit. In Gymnasium School No. 145 in Bucharest there were only refugee children, but the girls sat separately from the boys. While at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School in Brăila, the children were placed according to their level of participation in the classroom.

In the Bucharest school, we noticed that the pupils were seated in rows and therefore their distribution in classroom was mediated by gender and national origin. Practices of co-operation across genders of the same national group were very common since there were only refugee children.

The mother of a third-grade Syrian pupil told us that her son shared his desk with another Syrian pupil. That was the teacher's wish, as she wanted to be able to help them whenever they faced comprehension difficulties.

In the school in Brăila, we could notice the low level of co-operation among refugee pupils. Pupils were also seated in rows, but there was no collaboration between them, especially because they were integrated into normal classrooms. Perhaps if they were seated next to each other they could communicate in their own language, help each other out, they would not feel alone, and thus, would be better integrated.

13. Gymnasium School No. 145 in Bucharest and Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School in Brăila.

Disagreements

In the Bucharest school, there was no evidence of any disagreement between the pupils. They were disciplined, which is exactly how the school director described them: “very quiet, unlike our pupils, especially during the break”.

In the school in Brăila, there was evidence of disagreements between children of the same national group:

There are two boys in my class who fight. One of the pupils even swears in their language if I become more authoritative with him. We need a teacher who stays only with him, a support teacher. (Teacher from Brăila)

The parents revealed that education at home should be vital to helping the integration of refugee children:

I teach my son at home that children are all the same. He shouldn't make differences. It depends on us as parents and grandparents to teach our children not to make differences. We have to change our attitude about these children. (Parent from Brăila)

Another parent, not a refugee, added that we need to think of their needs:

We have to think of the fact that these children didn't choose to come here, they came because of their situation. So, we have to find a solution to help integrate them! (Parent from Brăila)

Communication with teachers

A parent from Brăila felt that there was a certain barrier between pupils and their teachers. He considered that a student should have a say in the whole learning process:

The pupil needs to learn to say that he or she doesn't understand something. He/she needs to be able to say that he/she doesn't understand this, they shouldn't be afraid to say that they really don't understand the lesson. We don't know how they feel or how they interpreted something. They might suffer from something that we don't really know. (Parent from Brăila)

According to the teachers, pupils were enrolled according to their age, which was not a good idea:

It would have been easier if they were in one class and we had worked with them separately. They don't understand when I ask them to open the textbook, because they still haven't learned the language. (Teacher from Brăila)

School performance

The Romanian language lesson consisted mainly of dictation, reading and grammar. The grammar lesson was obviously difficult for their level. Some of the pupils faced difficulties in dictation. It was the most demanding process of the course, since it requires practice. We noticed that most of the pupils did their homework in the Bucharest school, especially the girls. Most of the pupils participated, except for two boys who had just arrived in Romania. It was obvious that they could not keep up with the rest of the class, and so they were left behind somehow. When we asked the school director about this matter, she said that she could not establish another class in the middle of the school year. Perhaps this is the reason why another school near to this one was preparing to take in another group of refugees (Ferdinand I Gymnasium School). We could also notice that the teacher did not need to spend a lot of time in order to convince them to open their notebooks and write.

Some observations on Syrian children's learning outcomes following their participation in the 2017 “narrative evaluation”

Following the participation of 12 refugee pupils in grades II, IV and VI in the national evaluation, one can emphasise that, although most of the pupils showed the desire to learn, the results were not at the desired level. Some even needed special support from teachers; they needed extra attention and support in comparison to others. They had difficulties with the correct understanding of the requirements and also experienced difficulties in writing or reading (accomplishing the work could be overwhelming for some of the pupils). It was noticed that especially in grade VI they received poor results mostly in Mathematics and Sciences, which is due mainly to the difficulty of correctly understanding the messages, the requirements, the graphs and the units of measurement.

Homework

Pupils, especially in the Bucharest school, accomplished their homework “obligations” and did it willingly. As a teacher said: “They like to participate in this class even though I know it is not easy for them.”

The teachers from the school in Brăila had a different opinion about their work; they felt that they could not accomplish or move on with their activities since the pupils did not understand the lesson or perhaps were not willing to do what they were told:

Some pupils don't do their homework, because they prefer to speak Arabic. Most of the times the homework isn't completed. They don't have much to accomplish, only 2 or 3 sentences and the teacher can't continue the lesson. They cannot read and most of the teachers dictate. (Teacher from Brăila)

The Syrian parents' opinion was that there was too much homework and it was too difficult, and they could not help their children as they cannot speak Romanian well. One family we spoke with had hired a tutor to help the three children with their daily homework.

Interaction with the school community

Some families came to Romania in the early 2000s and only some of them have a refugee status. Most have no financial problems (there are rich – especially compared to the average Romanian parents). Fathers work in agriculture (they are farm owners, not just agricultural workers), businessmen or ship owners. Some families even have a housekeeper, nannies and tutors, which seems to be surprising for the Romanian parents who can generally afford less.

- ▶ Most Syrian children are integrated into a regular classroom and their families have plans to work and remain in Romania (at least for a while).
- ▶ The parents (especially mothers) have little or no knowledge of Romanian, which makes it more difficult to communicate with school representatives.

There were some reactions from the Romanian parents, who worried that the teachers who received refugee children as pupils had no time to deal with all the children.

Teachers who work with these children did not receive any special training. It also raised the question of classes having too many students and not allowing personalised teaching techniques.

The Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School's point of view

The teachers were not very pleased with the fact that the Syrian parents did not have a close relationship with the school. In other words, collaboration could be better: "They come when I call, but it isn't enough. They would prefer I gave private lessons. Mostly the fathers speak Romanian, but they are away. Mothers don't speak Romanian." (Teacher from Brăila)

Conclusions

Common vision of the school and the community receiving refugees

The approach of the school and of the community that receive these refugee children is not an official one (the process of receiving these children is not established in any official document issued by the local educational authorities), but rather a default one.¹⁴ Several Syrian families rented apartments in the school area, thus requiring a process for integrating refugee children. Certainly, the school accepted them into the classes like any other children, but the mission and primary duty of the school would still be to get better or prepare more for accepting these children. Although the responses to our questionnaire at the beginning were open, didactically speaking, we would have expected more implication; the teachers supported the idea that the school should have a vision such as "unity in diversity", but this was not the case when we received the questionnaires. Their answers were generally evasive. Perhaps the fact that the school director collected them could explain this.

Romanian parents share the same vision in that they are sympathetic to Syrian children, they have nothing against them, but they would not like the school to be additionally burdened since the teachers did not receive any other supplementary support to have these children integrated (additional salary, pedagogical support, special training, etc.).

14. In Romania, school authorities are obliged to accept an applicant (a child) in the school if they are living officially (with documents) in the school district.

Obstacles to collaboration or integration

In some cases, communication is poor with these children's parents, either due to the language barrier or to the cultural barrier; for instance, Syrian mothers do not really go out in public, nor engage in discussions (in private or public).

Another obstacle mentioned is the fact that some pupils do not attend school, as the teachers from Brăila mentioned, making it difficult for them to learn the language, or for others to evaluate their real level of knowledge.

Syrian families do not send their girls to school (99% of the pupils are boys). However, that does not concern the schools. They are not actually concerned about the fate of the group of Syrian girls who instead only engage in tasks they receive from "their superiors", the men.

The needs of those involved

In the point of view of teachers and Romanian parents, they do not need to know if Syrian pupils cause problems or not, they are only aware of their needs (additional learning materials, time to adjust, a translator, etc.) The discussion we organised with parents and teachers at the school highlighted several issues, but until our presentation these problems were not discussed with anyone and certainly not in any formal framework. Interestingly enough, we noticed that the wishes expressed by teachers in the discussion group (seminar) were not expressed in writing when the same teachers completed (individually) our questionnaire.

In our discussions the teachers felt they needed additional recognition of their efforts in working with such pupils. In other words, they felt they needed special training in order to work with these pupils.

Better management in developing a relationship with these pupils and their families is needed, such as providing a contact person, a translator who would permanently be with them or a kind of "mediator" as we have in Romania for the Roma communities. Speaking Arabic would mean earning the group's trust. In this sense, Syrian children need more support to learn Romanian so that they can correctly answer during classes, in order to meet the requirements of the official curricula, or the programme needs to adapt to cater for their reduced abilities, especially in Romanian.

Methods used for decision making

Unfortunately, there are no such mechanisms, at least in schools. That was the theme of our project. What strategy should be used to solve cultural differences and how can this minority group communicate their needs with those involved? This was just one of the questions asked by us, the researchers, throughout this project. Perhaps we can discuss a "personality syndrome" for the schools investigated, which lack such a strategy and should be helped and supported (by the whole community approach) in order to accomplish such a goal.

In this way, the school could be a good ground for:

- ▶ techniques that make the process of social inclusion more efficient;
- ▶ preventing the escalation of conflicts;
- ▶ finding a common platform from which to plan the future together.

Presentation of the project's intervention

During May, June and July of 2017 we were able to conduct a series of activities: seminars, meetings, analysis of official documents, preparation of the eTwinning project, classroom activities and cultural events. On 20 September we organised the last event – a national evaluation and dissemination seminar held in Brăila. Aspects relating to these activities will be further analysed.

Seminar on the introduction to restorative practices held in Bucharest (23-24 May 2017)¹⁵

The Institute of Educational Sciences in Bucharest organised an introductory seminar on restorative practices for a group of teachers, school inspectors and other specialists from several counties in Romania, who were all involved in educating children from refugee families.

The seminar facilitator was an international trainer specialising in restorative practices.

The purpose of the seminar was to provide methodological support to teachers for democratic interventions in the education system when it addresses children who belong to vulnerable groups (in our case, refugee children and families).

Evaluation of the seminar

All participants were extremely involved in all activities; they were determined, curious and eager to learn and collaborate and they proved they were willing to assimilate the newly introduced information. The need to share the daily issues they have to deal with was always present, especially in small groups, where they could freely express their needs, emotions and demands without any constraint. The participants acknowledged the value of verbal communication based on expressing individual and group requirements, as well as deciding together with those involved (not for them or instead of them). The participants considered that restoration questions (specific to the technique presented) are very useful, as they could prevent professional “exhaustion”, especially for those who faced frustration and helplessness due to the lack of support and specialist knowledge of working with refugee children whom they tried to teach Romanian or whom they had to integrate into Romanian classes.

Restorative seminar with community members (parents) at Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School, 25 May 2017

Background – Considering the requirements made by the school director and teachers regarding the difficulties in encouraging the active involvement of the Syrian children and parents from Brăila, presented during the aforementioned seminar, we decided to organise a restorative meeting, following the technique presented during the seminar.

The school directors invited the parents to further discuss the issues raised by some parents and teachers to establish a debate framework promoting open-mindedness and understanding between the parties.

The development process

The discussions with school representatives highlighted the opportunities and obstacles arising from the collaboration between parents and the school. The director’s open attitude could contribute to the inclusion of pupils in school and community, but the lack of knowledge regarding customs, the lack of sincere relationships, the way of communicating and the lack of common language, along with the refractory attitude of some of the parents in both groups, made this task more difficult. The attempts to engage Syrian parents in joint activities did not produce the desired results; they had a negative effect on the feeling of safety and trust and on the parent–school relationships. Some teachers reported difficulties in differentiating between teaching and evaluation in the cases of Romanian and Syrian pupils when standards are the same for all pupils. On the other hand, some teachers are aware of the values and cultural wealth of including the refugees. The discussions carried out showed that the lack of support for teachers; the lack of resources for additional activities and legislation that allows differentiation and evaluation of results based on individual efforts may result in tense situations among those at school, an increase of teachers’ helplessness and dissatisfaction from parents and of the school in general.

We have chosen the proactive circle method in order to prevent escalation of tension and group separation, but also to provide a safety framework for all participants and a structure that enables the expression of needs without causing any damage.

15. We would like to thank Ms Vidia Vasilica Negrea, international trainer, for her involvement both in the training seminar and in this research by sharing her experiences and views, all of which were really helpful. We also appreciate as highly useful all the comments and recommendations made by teachers, school principals, school inspectorates and colleagues from the Institute of Educational Sciences in Bucharest, Romania, who attended this seminar.

Proactive method

A total of 25 people attended the meeting, mostly Romanian parents, some teachers and only two Syrian parents, but they represented several families. The activity took place in a classroom with chairs placed in a circle, with refreshments prepared for the participants and a large toy bee as a “talking piece” to remind us that children are the subject of our debate. There was no prior arrangement of the seating positions, so the different groups of participants ended up being clearly distinguished: the Romanian parents formed a compact group, sitting closely together; the Syrian parents and their translator were a little distant from both teachers and the Romanian parents, but they were relaxed.

Brief reflections on the meeting

The seminar in itself was unusual and the use of a toy was even more surprising. The toy was used to help establish order in the sense that the person who wanted to speak held it. This rule established from the beginning was not easily accepted by the Syrian parents at first; however, it was helpful in maintaining the focus on the discussion. During the discussions we noticed that they accepted the rule. Questions asked while being in the circle aimed at raising awareness of similarities both as values and desires, as well as difficulties leading to clarifications and concrete accountability. Participants were helped to express themselves, but the level of conformism and generalisation was high, especially in the case of the Syrian parents, who avoided answering concrete questions except one: the desire to have English courses in addition to the Romanian classes. The priority themes formulated by Romanian parents and teachers were those related to the need to communicate in Romanian, to know each other better, to be aware of the Syrian customs and traditions, to have common relationships and activities among women (mothers), to meet school requirements and to provide extra training to the Syrian children to increase the Syrian pupils’ participation in classes.

Further steps are required

From these themes, the participants formulated five concrete plans to strengthen their relationship, through knowledge of the customs and the common celebration of various holidays; people were appointed to coordinate the plans. Two of them will be carried out with the help of the school, the inspector, two Romanian parents and a Syrian one; two projects will require external support (from the Institute of Educational Sciences, the International Institute for Restorative Practices, NGOs and community leaders) and one was planned to be completed by the end of the year, all with the help of the director and the support of the teachers attending the meeting. The meeting ended after two hours on a positive note and carried on informally with the participants enjoying the refreshments prepared by the hosts.

A “to do” list was drafted by the end of the meeting. This title was given to show what the school could achieve in the following months. The main activities identified included children’s birthdays, appointing a representative (a Syrian male who could speak Romanian well) to act as an intermediary between the school and parents and organising the celebration of the European Day of Languages.

Some of the opinions expressed

We can consider each child’s birthday, especially Syrian children’s birthdays, and organise a sort of a party to help them better integrate into the class. (Deputy Director)

After our Ramadan we can organise a party (the school Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School), it is our tradition, it is called “Bayram”. I would also like to be the intermediary so as to have a connection between school and parents. I know that they (other parents – A.N. pupil attending the school) do not answer the phone; they do not come when they are required to do so, so I will try to be of assistance in this regard. (Syrian parent)

The European Day of Languages is celebrated on 26 September; we can do something with them related to this. We want to learn more about their traditions. (Romanian parent)

Conclusion

The benefits of applying the restorative circle were noticeable and significant for the participants, because the anxiety among the Romanian parents diminished and the feeling of isolation and insecurity decreased, each participant felt that every opinion matters and parents feel responsible for helping to provide a climate of positive collaboration/learning.

Recommendations

- ▶ There is a need to clarify the requirements of those involved and their impact both emotionally and motivationally.
- ▶ A partnership should be established from a perspective that encourages the constructive approach of the issues that have arisen and that will emerge in the future.
- ▶ Thorough training for facilitators is needed to maintain this approach.

The restorative circles are focused on the spirit of tolerance, accepting the other, rebuilding and regaining individual dignity and developing the sense of belonging to the community that can only be done gradually, with small steps and great patience. That is why it is important for the school to organise activities on themes that produce positive emotions (culinary habits, traditions, dance, music, sports, themes related to the groups' history and culture, etc.) which strengthen the sense of belonging to the community.

Being aware of the possibilities and resources, both internal and external, helps those directly involved to see things from another perspective, find mutually acceptable solutions and be more open to change. However, there is a need for co-ordinated collaboration between groups and organisations at local, regional, national and international level.

The restorative circle can be considered a step in the process of working with parents to ensure adequate support for children; it is a process which requires the continuation of these stages and the inclusion of other resources and actors.

Rethinking the institutional development plan of Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School

The institutional development plan (IDP) is a document drafted in accordance with the legal provisions by all schools in Romania in order to provide comprehensive information on the managerial strategy of the school, starting from the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats analysis (SWOT analysis) of the initial situation. The document includes aspects related to an operational school managerial plan: internal and external diagnostic, statistical data (number of teachers, qualification, area of qualification of teachers, etc.); the school's offer for the school year 2016-2017 (curriculum, activities, school strategies); a political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis (PESTLE analysis); prognosis and managerial strategies (vision, mission, strategical target, expected results, etc.). Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School's IDP is an official document of 81 pages, representing the common will of the teaching staff, administrative staff and the community (parents and representatives of the local community). When reading this document (its 2016 version) we noticed that a specific mention about the refugees (our main target group) was included, so we decided to start from here in our discussion with the school director. We analysed and discussed where to alter the document, what could be done to include the target group more in the school strategy and what could be improved for the coming school year, as part of an inclusive strategy.

Following the discussions between the project team and the school management representatives (school director and deputy director), but also as a result of the staff participation in the project (seminars, training, meetings with parents), alterations to the initial document were decided upon, as well as the addition of new elements, as follows.¹⁶

- ▶ Introducing new principles, such as:
 - creating a working environment appropriate for the requirements of education and democratic citizenship; forming civic attitudes and behaviours that serve ethnic and cultural diversity;
 - promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, gender equality, developing mutual respect for human dignity and shared values.
- ▶ Detailing the most recent Romanian legal acts regarding the inclusion of children with special needs and those under international protection and some European documents:
 - Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;
 - Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.
- ▶ New local priorities were added:
 - to develop a programme to support local ethnic communities and Syrian migrant groups that will improve the school's image and increase its prestige locally, nationally and at the

¹⁶ In accordance with the provisions of the Law of Education (1/2011) the institutional development plan drafted by the principal is to be approved by the board of directors.

- European level; developing partnerships and projects aimed at educating about democratic society and social inclusion;
- training teachers to integrate disadvantaged groups (migrants from Syria).
- ▶ The achievements of the programme offered to refugee and asylum seekers, mentioned as a strong point: 100% increase in the number of Syrian students attending the Romanian language, culture and civilisation course organised by the school.
- ▶ Opportunity for the development of the school's human resources:
 - organising formal or informal meetings with parents of Syrian pupils to develop the school–family relationship.

Some limits were kept in this new version of the IDP for the proper understanding of multiculturalism and tolerance (for instance when religion is mentioned, children and families' possible different choices are not accounted for: persons of religions other than the official religion or non-religious persons). "The attitude towards religion is consecrated by the orders of the Ministry of Education through which religion became a discipline of the common core." (Dorobăț 2016: 38) However, the new document is closer to the democratic view which an inclusive strategy includes.

We believe that altering the IDP was a useful exercise of an inclusive approach to school management, a step forward towards adopting democratic school governance.

Diaries

Several participants attending the restorative techniques seminar have applied some of the techniques learned in the classes they teach or where they are head teacher. The purpose of these techniques is to enable pupils to express their needs, to become more involved and to co-operate in achieving the group's objectives.

Three of the teachers with Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School applied the "proactive circle" technique in May 2017. Among the classes was one with four refugee pupils. Their participation was successful, and they improved communication with their classmates.

Preparation of an eTwinning project

Following the suggestion of the Institute for Educational Sciences (through eTwinning Romania) the management of the Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School drafted an international school project proposal and posted it on the eTwinning platform. The project was introduced into the programme database and awaits the identification of the partners in order to be put into practice. The following are the main elements of the project.

The purpose of the project is to facilitate mutual understanding between the Romanian pupils (majority) and migrant/refugee Syrian pupils and their parents by acquiring knowledge related to common historical, social and cultural contexts.

Initially, the teachers will meet virtually in order to agree on the tasks and types of activities they will be in charge of. The teachers can communicate in any way they wish, using Skype, e-mail or Twin Space. Afterwards, they will plan activities which include pupils, teams, schools and towns, including historical aspects of the partners' towns. These activities are intended to help the pupils get acquainted with the Twin Space tools.¹⁷

Organising "the mothers' cultural evening" with the participation of Syrian pupils' mums

One of the conclusions of the discussions on the inclusion of Syrian pupils held at Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School was that communication with their families and especially with mothers should be improved. A first step in this direction was taken in July 2017 by organising the first cultural sessions attended by several Syrian mothers. They discussed traditional Romanian or Arabian dishes, the sewing of Romanian popular shirts and other issues. Traditional sweets were offered from both cultural areas.

Participants decided to continue this kind of meeting in the next school year as well.

17. For a better understanding of the possibilities offered by this programme see <http://etwinning.ro/despre-etwinning/> (link in Romanian).

Discussion on the project's findings

Our project aimed at increasing the level and quality of a group of Syrian children's inclusion in a school in Brăila by implementing some measures of democratic governance and community involvement. We analysed the response of the school and community environment and we tried to draw conclusions that would be valid for the entire education system in Romania and especially for the improvement of the methods regarding the inclusion of refugee children.

Main actors in the educational community

1. The 23 refugee pupils attending classes at Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School strive to adapt to the requirements of the Romanian education system. For many of them (as for their families), the plans for the future are not very clear. They do not know whether they will stay in Romania for a long time or settle in another country. They rarely attend extracurricular activities and even school attendance is disrupted (they leave the city with their families during the school semester or skip classes for some family events or religious celebrations). They scarcely have friends among the Romanian children, either at school, or in the area where they live. They spend most of their time in the small Syrian community in their city. There are a large number of Syrian girls (these boys' sisters) who do not attend the public school. The private Arab school supported by the Syrian community is enough for them; they also learn some Romanian there.
2. Refugee parents (migrants). The Syrian parents do not seem to have too much connection with school, since there is a language barrier, due to the fact that they cannot speak Romanian. Fathers (who in the Oriental/Islamic culture usually are the spokesmen for their families) are very busy with their businesses or jobs, while mothers are not very active outside their own houses and cannot speak Romanian very well. This creates confusion among the Romanian teachers, who are accustomed to communicating especially with mothers when it comes to the children's school progress. Attending the school meetings regularly seems an unpleasant experience for the Syrian parents, considering that their children are not praised for their achievements.
3. The Romanian parents, even if they mean well and are optimistic with positive feelings towards children of another nationality, are quite dissatisfied: why does the school which their children attend (Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School) have to fulfil additional tasks? Why do the teachers have in their classroom a group of pupils with learning difficulties and why do they need to provide extra support during the time spent in class? After all, is this not at the expense of the quality of education offered to their own children? The same reaction occurs in Romanian schools when trying to integrate students with health problems (those with disabilities or learning difficulties). And, as some parents have told us, in this situation, they did not waste any time before enrolling their children in another school. At the same time, the Romanian parents who attended the restorative circle declared that they would like to know more about the culture and language of the Syrians in order to better understand their behaviour, traditions, customs, etc. This consequently induces a certain kind of dilemma, in which a "win-win" situation is difficult (but not impossible), namely to cope with the requirements of the whole community.
4. As for the teachers, although they have officially stated that they support the multicultural communication and inclusion, in fact many seek to avoid having refugee children in their classes, because that requires more attention on their part and the use of different inclusion strategies or methods, and especially as there is no official recognition for their efforts. Moreover, the level of the class may drop and the results of the national assessments are affected. Older teachers seem to be the most reluctant in this sense. Some have come to disapprove of the fact that the principal receives Syrian pupils too easily into the school, especially as this is considered to be an elite school (with great results) in the city.
5. Local authorities and civil society did not show much interest in supporting the school throughout its inclusion strategies.

As a result, the Institute of Educational Sciences research team and the restorative techniques may be considered as first initiatives at the school level to open up to the community. Thus, one may hope that inclusion rates will increase as well. The actions had to be launched in May 2017 (by the eTwinning project, by establishing relations during the meeting with the Syrian parents and by involving the Syrian pupils in extracurricular activities) will have to be continued over the next year to achieve concrete and positive results.

From the perspective of inclusion strategies based on the extended community, the most promising aspect for the Institute of Educational Sciences research team, until now, seems to be enabling and motivating the school to develop relationships with parents (both Romanian and Syrian). Partnerships with other schools could also bring along both challenges and opportunities for the coming years.

Some issues were identified, especially during the restorative cycle:

- ▶ the insufficient and rigid legal framework regarding the conditions in which the education system integrates these refugee pupils, and how this whole process is handled (time allocated, resources, etc.);
- ▶ little opportunity for democratic initiatives from civil society;
- ▶ the persistence of prejudices and stereotypes at the level of teachers or parents.

Main directions of implementation

The duration of implementing the project was very short. We needed time to correctly understand the situation in Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School and to agree with the school staff about the measures that could be taken. It also required some time for staff training in the techniques presented.

When comparing the situation of Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School at the end of the project with the initial one, one can notice the following.

The school staff have become more aware of the challenges represented by the presence of a group of refugee children in the school. School management has become more realistic in developing its action strategy (IDP) and seriously considers the long-term presence of the group of refugee children in school, for which they need to find appropriate educational methods.

Parents have become more open to co-operation and discussion. Refugee children's parents have begun to understand that they also have certain obligations and that they must co-operate with the school and the other parents.

Local authorities understand more clearly their obligations in the given situation and find new resources to use.

There is a chance for the mobilisation of civil society from both the local community and the country.

New opportunities for the school were opened up through the implementation of the project:

- ▶ co-operation with other schools in the country facing similar problems;
- ▶ the school's participation in international projects.

We believe that the mere acknowledgement of the Syrian children and their parents' cultural and psychological specificity within the community and school represents a step forward towards democratic governance.

Issues and opposition

It has not been easy to stimulate school staff to move from the competitive approach to inclusive education and focus on the child and family's individual effort with an inclusive approach that is centred on increased co-operation (both during and after classes). It has been difficult to persuade the school staff that they need to take a more active role, show more creativity and pay more attention to the relationships between pupils and not only to school results. As for the parents, they should give up the conservative and limited approach according to which education is passive consumption rather than an open learning experience. What we did during the implementation was just the beginning in that direction. Nevertheless, we believe that the development of the measures will lead to the school's increasing openness towards the community and also to a better understanding of the community's school problems.

Part 2

Understanding the processes of Roma educational inclusion

Roma education in the Bulgarian context

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The project's target group

The project implementation in Bulgaria is aimed at the students of Roma ethnicity origin who need an improved environment of acceptance in Bulgarian schools and support to reduce the risk of dropping out of the educational system.

Statistical data on the presence of the Roma group in Bulgarian society

Traditionally, the Roma ethnicity is the third largest and, according to the latest census in 2011, there are 325 343 people, representing a 4.9% relative share of the Bulgarian population. Experts estimate the real total to be about 800 000 people, because not all declare their identity as Roma. There is hardly a populated area without Roma in Bulgaria. Some 12% of the children up to the age of nine are Roma, 9% in the 10-19 age group and 6.8% in the 20-29 age group (NSI 2011).

Roma in Bulgaria are a public group that occupies the lowest level of social hierarchy. They are not adequately represented in political life and in the country's governance. In socio-economic terms, the status of Roma is dramatically lower than the average for Bulgaria: high unemployment rates, neglected housing conditions, poor health and high illiteracy rates. These long-term characteristics of the state of the Roma community are external manifestations and direct consequences of discriminatory treatment too (Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society 2010).

Poverty is a worrying phenomenon for Bulgarian society, especially for the Roma ethnic group. In 2015, the relative share of children aged 0-17 at risk of poverty was 25.4%, or 305 600 children (NSI 2016). The share of poor Roma and Roma children was significantly higher. The authors of a study by the UN Economic Commission for Europe on Roma poverty point out that 87% of Roma and 49% of Bulgarians are at risk of poverty in Bulgaria (Todorov 2016).

One of the most important reasons for this difference is the low level of education of the Roma ethnic group. According to the latest census from 2011, there are 112 778 illiterate people in Bulgaria, with the greatest share being Roma (11.8%), while in the group self-identified as Bulgarians 0.5% are illiterate, and those identifying themselves as Turks 4.7%. There are twice as many illiterate Roma women as illiterate Roma men. There is a large number of girls who have dropped out of school early. A total of 23.2% of the children between 7 and 15 who do not attend school are of Roma origin (UNICEF 2016).

The reasons are discussed in many documents but are most widely and systematically presented in the BAS Report on the demographic problems of the country from 2015. They are as follows: the inability to use the official Bulgarian language, social exclusion, a low share of Roma children in preschool activities and groups, spatial and school segregation, widespread negative stereotypes among other children, their parents and some teachers, low educational level of the parents, dominance of the patriarchal family model, which limits the opportunities for women to develop, and difficult interaction between teachers and parents/guardians (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences 2015: 31).

How is this group viewed in public discourse and the relevant literature?

In Bulgaria, there is an accumulated experience in interethnic relations. There is a spirit of tolerance and openness to different ethnicities. In recent years, however, new trends have emerged that seriously jeopardise ethnic peace in the country. "We cannot close our eyes and speak about a successful model, when an ethnos such as the Roma is marginalized, disintegrated and essentially excluded from this model" (Simeonova, Korudzhieva and Petrova 2007: 3). Some of these trends are related to the:

growing ethnic heterogeneity of Bulgarian society and the systematic representation of large ethnic communities in the country as a demographic, cultural, economic and political threat, ultimately as a threat to national security. This everyday political and media discourse contributes to the increasing mistrust, fears and social distances towards large ethnic communities, and to the increasing of the risk of social exclusion and marginalization of the ethnically diverse, especially Roma-related, as well as re-encapsulation of the communities and a higher risk of mistrust and frustrations leading to destructive conflicts (BAS 2015: 28).

There are deeply rooted stereotypes of the Roma ethnic community. In a 2016 hate-speech study, Roma continue to be consistently associated with negative perceptions – 33% of respondents associate "Roma" with "criminal". There is a significant increase in the proportion of respondents who associate "Roma" with "criminal". In 2013 and 2014, this association was made by one fifth of the respondents, and in 2016 one third of them reported that they made such an association (Ivanova et al. 2016: 11-12).

Roma people have been stereotyped by Bulgarians as not understanding or valuing the importance of education. Roma people themselves often have prejudices against the school institutions and what they have to offer. Their leaders and representatives criticise the fact that their specific suggestions for improving access to education and the quality of education for their children are not taken into consideration and implemented.

A sustainable solution to the issues which society faces can be found only and if both sides – Roma people and other ethnicities – realize that everyone has interest in resolving the educational issues of the Roma community (Krumova et al. 2011).

There are a number of interconnected factors for the tendency to segregate Roma children in isolated schools. According to data from NGOs in Bulgaria, there are 300 mixed schools and 106 purely Roma schools, where the students are 100% Roma, and, undoubtedly, "the separation of children by ethnic and any other sign is unacceptable" (Krumova et al. 2011: 7).

In the opinion of one of the leading experts on Roma ethnicity in Bulgaria, Ilona Tomova, the macro-society builds difficult barriers towards Roma, attributing an extremely low social status to them, defining their culture as underdeveloped, primitive or eclectic, and their way of life and their behaviour as discreditable. For the rapid "identification" and isolation of the Roma, different markers are used, starting with some anthropological features, passing through the language (or their pronunciation) and the way they dress, and finishing with their poverty, specific ways of earning their living, and their living conditions and residential areas (Tomova 2013).

On the part of the Roma, the feeling of being discriminated against is growing. Based on a field survey conducted among Roma in 2012, the authors found that over 70% of Roma felt discriminated against, and that this had a serious impact on their lives. Invited to compare discrimination against the Roma at that moment compared to 10 years ago, 45.6% of respondents reported that they felt more discriminated against at that moment, 24% did not report any change, 16.9% could not tell and just over 8% determined themselves as less discriminated against than before (Bogdanov 2012: 37).

On the basis of the statistical data presented, it can be concluded that the problem of the low educational level of the Roma ethnic group is a problem for the whole of society and that it is important to seek a solution. The assessment of the place of the Roma community in Bulgarian society is hampered by the fact that the National Statistical Institute does not collect data separately on ethnic populations.

There is no way to carry out scientifically and politically motivated planning of measures for balanced demographic development and for the development of human capital (including the population with its education, qualifications and health status), their effective implementation and their reliable assessment if we lack current, disaggregated statistical information on ethnicity (BAS 2015: 34).

From the referred publications of the scientific community and the non-governmental sector, it can be concluded that there are well-established stereotypes on the part of the majority, which impedes desegregation in the school system and the achievement of a high quality of education. On the other hand, there are many reasons for the early dropout of children from the education system, which puts them at a serious risk of falling into long-term social exclusion.

Educational policy

Current status of the educational integration of Roma children

According to the Ministry of Education and Science, in 2011, ethnic Bulgarians made up over 55% of the share of kindergarten attendees among children aged 3 to 6, while Roma children were over half that share – only 30.9% (Ministry of Education and Science 2015: 7). A problem of the educational integration of Roma children is the large number of unregistered, non-attending children and dropouts. According to data from the 2011 census, of the total number of children not attending school who were of compulsory school age (7-15 years old), 23.2% were Roma children, 11.9% were Turkish and 5.6% were ethnic Bulgarians¹⁸ (National Strategy for Demographic Development of the Republic of Bulgaria 2006: 48). Bulgaria ranks at the top among the countries in the European Union on the indicator for young people, aged 18-24, who are not employed and are not included in education or training. In 2011, the share of non-school attenders and unemployed from this age group in the EU was 16.7%, while in Bulgaria the share was 27.9%. A significant proportion of these young people, 38%, did not graduate higher than primary education (Eurostat).

Strategy for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, every Bulgarian citizen has the right to education. Education up to 16 years of age and free primary and secondary education in municipal and state schools is mandatory.

In the Preschool and School Education Act of August 2016, education is stated as a national priority, which is implemented in accordance with principles such as equal access to quality education, inclusion of each child and each student, and equality and non-discrimination in the conduct of preschool and school education.

Many other strategic documents draw attention to the universal right to quality education for all. The National Lifelong Learning Strategy (2014-2020) is one of the priorities of “providing an educational environment for equal access to lifelong learning, active social inclusion and active citizenship”. The education section of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on Roma inclusion (2012-2020) foresees a series of activities to contribute to the inclusion of more Roma children in the education system.

Important strategic documents such as the National Demographic Development Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2030) and the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Inclusion (2012-2020) have been adopted. In 2015, a Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020) updated a strategy under the same title from 2004. The strategy is guided by international documents on children’s rights and the rights of persons belonging to ethnic minorities.

It can be categorically stated that there are sufficiently well-developed strategic documents and plans for the educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities. Lack of information and co-ordination makes it difficult to achieve the goals set. This is recognised as a problem in newer strategic documents:

due to the lack of regulation, long-term targeted funding or consistent institutional and public support, the process of closing down segregated kindergartens and schools was stopped, and its positive results were largely minimized by the secondary segregation that followed. (Ministry of Education and Science 2015: 8)

Another important issue is mentioned:

Communication between the different institutions within the educational environment (MES, RIE, municipalities, schools) and the individual pedagogical specialists working on educational integration is not efficient enough, and the opportunities of modern communication technology are not fully used.

The positive thing is that Bulgaria has developed special policies to reduce school dropout rates. In 2013, a national strategy for reducing the share of early school-leavers (2013-2020) and an action plan, which is an integral part of it, was adopted. The strategy defines the important role of the “early warning” as a condition for implementing key policies and measures, as well as for identifying the specific cases of children and students at risk. For the implementation of the 2015 strategy, all relevant ministries were involved.

18. It is necessary to take into account the fact that this data does not contain information about almost 10% of the population who did not share, during the last census, what kind of ethnic group they belonged to.

Civil society initiatives and inclusion

There are many NGO projects funded by the European Social Fund aimed at integrating Roma children at risk of dropping out of school or reintegrating those who have dropped out. There are many projects on education in tolerance and education on human rights. It can be said that the activities of the non-governmental sector help to change attitudes and generally to empower young people and to democratise Bulgarian schools.

One of the active participants in supporting civic initiatives in the educational integration of Roma children has been the Roma Education Fund, which has worked in Bulgaria for many years with the following main goal: “the removal of the enormous difference in education of Roma and non-Roma through policies and programmes that support the quality of Roma education, including the desegregation of the education system”. In the past few years the Norway Grants and EEA Grants schemes have supported projects for social inclusion and democratic development.

The context of the research site and methodology

We chose a school in the city of Karnobat for a number of reasons. First, the ethnic structure of the city is very similar to that in the entire country: according to a 2011 census Karnobat has 18 454 residents, 89.4% of them self-identified as Bulgarians, 9.33% as Turks and 5.27% as Roma. Second, in a small town it is easier to observe the potential of the whole community approach for the idea of democratic school governance for inclusion. Third, there is a UN club acting as a partner of United Nations Association of Bulgaria (in this school).

Another important reason for choosing Karnobat was that education is one of the highest priorities of the local government. In strategic documents from the municipality it is mentioned that only 11.56% of the residents are university graduates, compared to 19.6% in the whole country. Some 38.38% are high school graduates, compared to 43.4% in the country. The number of people who have graduated from secondary education is higher (29.95%) and also those with primary education (11.48%). In the Bulgarian ethnic group those with a high school education predominate, while in the Turkish and Roma ethnic groups the majority of the population has graduated from secondary school.

A major problem in the field of education in the city is the lack of motivation to study in Roma children (especially in their teenage years) since they do not see education as an important part of their future personal or professional development. The Roma students prospering in school are scarce in number and few advance to a higher level of education. The main reasons that have emerged in conversations and observations seem to be the parents’ lack of funds and resources, a lack of culture associated with education and an inability to see the perspective for future development. There are nine schools in the Karnobat municipality, approximately 250 teachers and the number of students is close to 3 000, although there is a tendency for this number to drop. In the city there is a school with only Roma pupils – 371 – which is close to the Roma neighbourhood. There are two secondary high schools and one vocational high school which offer classes up to the 12th grade.

All of these data underline the importance of the efforts undertaken by the local authorities to improve the educational environment and for the educational integration of students in danger of dropping out or not advancing to a higher level of education. With a project from the operative programme “Regional Development 2007-2013”, the condition of the school and kindergarten buildings has been substantially improved. A very good pre-existing condition for inclusion in this community is the fact that the cultural traditions are neatly kept within it. Efforts are made to organise diverse cultural activities through different initiatives and activities in community centres, clubs and other cultural institutions; the efforts that are being made in the field of sports are also serious.

The choice of Sts Cyril and Methodius secondary school as a field research site was made because this is one of the few schools in town with education up until 12th grade. Many children from the municipality who want to acquire quality education in a secondary school enrol there, regardless of their ethnic background. Motivating children of Roma background to stay in school and continue their education is an important task which aligns with the national and local strategic goals in the field of education and the democratic development of the learning environment. There are 760 pupils enrolled in the school, 25% of which are of Roma origin and 10% of which are from the Turkish ethnic group.

A student parliament and a UN club have been functioning in the school for the past six years. The goal of their work is to encourage self-governance, build teamwork skills, work in a multicultural environment and learn to communicate while respecting the principle of tolerance and the rights of other people. Some of the most successful activities in this aspect include: “A trip around the world” – getting to know the culture,

economy, issues and traditions of different countries around the world; awareness campaigns about human trafficking; the “Mum, Dad and I” competition – letting parents participate in the school world; and “Strength lies in sport” – presenting opportunities for spending leisure time in a positive way. A lot of the events are held at a municipality level – students from all the schools in town participate, as well as representatives from local authorities and local stakeholders.

There is a parent’s council in the school. Around 25% of the parents in the council are of Roma background. There is a public council where parents are also represented.

For the purposes of the project two types of empirical research were conducted. First, a field research with the methods of conducting a survey among the stakeholders on the inclusion of the community in the social and educational integration of the target group and, second, the inclusion of an observation of the educational process in the chosen school.

Observations in the classroom were based on a “Criteria and indicators for observation” form, previously developed by one of the experts. A protocol form was prepared on the basis of the criteria and indicators describing impressions of those who were observed. Every observation protocol was signed by the observing researcher.

Six key criteria were identified by relevant indicators:

- ▶ the spatial location of children
- ▶ the classroom interior
- ▶ the training process and training methods
- ▶ the training process and educational content
- ▶ the teacher–student relationships
- ▶ the student–student relationships.

Analysis of the observation data

Results from the community stakeholders survey

From the interviews and the group discussions with stakeholders, it can be concluded that the municipality was not particularly active in the work on minority integration. The Community Support Centre for Children and Families at Risk (CSC) is a municipal structure with the status of a supporting unit of the Child Protection Department. It has a co-operation agreement with the Sts Cyril and Methodius school and is able to include children from it in its programmes. A major problem in the CSC activity is the inability to work on-site due to insufficient number of staff, and this is important especially as regards contact with parents and the extended family.

The teachers themselves underwent many training sessions on intercultural education, working in a multicultural environment, dealing with aggression, etc. They thought they did not need to be trained further. In their opinion “if there is division between the students, it is between aggressive and non-aggressive children. And this can lead to more serious problems”. That view was shared by all teachers. In our opinion this is a finding that supports conclusions that teachers tend to interpret violence in individualistic terms.

A major difficulty that was reported by the teachers was the poor work with parents. They do not separate the parents based on ethnicity. On the contrary, according to the principal of the school, the Roma and Turkish parents are the only ones who have expressed gratitude about the quality education that their children have received. The principal feels that it is necessary to look for options to develop initiatives for the education and inclusion of the parents of all ethnic groups in the school governance.

It is necessary to find ways to educate parents, but not in school or by the teachers – it should be in a different environment – so that society can change as a whole.

The main opinion of the parents, participating in the group discussion (40% of them of Roma origin) was that their children felt good at school, obtained knowledge and the teachers were treating them well. And here the main concern was aggression among children. There was no ethnic division, but rather division between aggressive and quieter children. It is the opinion of all the parents, included in the survey.

Results from the school observation

For the purpose of the study, a total of 15 observations were made, five in each of the three levels of study, respectively in the primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary levels of the school.

The subjects of the observation were 14 teachers and 365 students; of the students 183 were from the majority (50.14%) and 182 were minority students (49.86%) – 133 Roma (36.44%), 33 Turks (9.04%), 14 Karakachani (3.84%) and two Syrians (0.54%). The sample represented 48.3% of the total number of students in the secondary school, 755 (100%), distributed as follows: 106 primary students (41.5%),¹⁹ 63 of whom were from the minority groups; 137 lower-secondary students (57%),²⁰ 77 of them minority students; 122 upper-secondary students (46.9 %),²¹ 43 of them minority students.

Fifty-eight classes were observed, in Bulgarian language and literature, History and civilisation, English, Russian, The World around us, Mathematics, Informatics, Music, Technology and Physical education and sport. All observations were reflected in protocols.

It was noticed that the highest share of minority students was in the primary section (years 1 to 4), followed by the lower-secondary section (years 5 to 7), which was in line with the Roma school dropout rate (an increased number of minority children enrolled in year 1) – 59.4% and 56.2% respectively as opposed to 35.2% in upper-secondary education (years 8 to 10). As an example, the ratio in class Iv was: 11 majority children, nine children of Roma origin, three Turkish and two Karakachani; class IIv: three majority children, 10 Roma, three Turkish origin and one child from Syria; class IIIb: 12 majority children, nine Roma and three of Turkish origin; class IVv: nine majority children and 11 Roma; class VIIa: eight majority children, 11 Roma and three of Turkish origin; class VIIb: 11 majority children, 11 Roma and three of Turkish origin.

On the basis of the criteria and indicators described in the monitoring protocols, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Spatial location of the children

In primary school, minority students (almost 60%) were evenly distributed in the rows and columns. They were placed at two-seater desks in the following manner: Roma and Bulgarian; Turkish and Roma; Karakachani and Bulgarian. In only one of the classes (IIIb, in a compulsory subject, Bulgarian language and literature) two Roma sat at a desk at the back together.

In the lower-secondary group, minority students were fewer (about 56%), but were still predominant in number. Both types of student seating plans: standard (double desks in rows and in three columns) and a U-shape or two semi-circles, showed a certain concentration of Roma children in certain parts of the room: at the bottom of the U-shape, in three of the classes (Va, Vb and VIIb), in the middle of the large semicircle, in the two semi-circles (Vb) at both ends (Va) and the mid-outer ring (VIIb) and the middle and last desks in two of the classes (VIIa and VIb). This cluster could also be explained in terms of dominance as the number of children from minorities (for example in Vb with 12 majority children, 15 Roma, two Karakachani and one Turkish student; and in VIIb with 10 majority children, 11 Roma, three Turkish and one Karakachani), although a similar seating scheme could be made for the relevant ethnic mix. Mixing of children by ethnicity is more likely to be seen when using double desks.

In the first year of high school, the situation was different for the observed classes – there was an even distribution of minority students in rows and columns, as well as clusters of students from the same ethnic group. In class Xv, two Karakachani students and two of Turkish origin sat together at the same desk. In another lesson, there were two pairs of Karakachani students sitting together. Six Roma students in class Xb sat together at double desks. In class IXa there was a cluster of Roma pupils (nine) at one end of the room, while students of Turkish ethnicity (three) and the Karakachani (two) were evenly distributed among the other students of Bulgarian ethnicity (nine).

In general, with some exceptions, there was an adherence to the requirement to avoid clustering of minority children in the same spatial part of classrooms, in order to achieve practical integration through ethnic heterogeneity in the seating scheme.

About the school facilities

The school building of the secondary school is old but solid and was aesthetically renovated after major repair work five years ago. The primary school building was solid and well maintained. The classrooms were cosy,

19. The number of students in the initial stage of primary education was 255.

20. The number of students in the lower stage of secondary education was 240.

21. The number of students in the upper stage of secondary education was 260.

with nice furniture, relatively new flooring (laminated), a lot of light and a high degree of aestheticism of the school environment – posters, portraits, wall panels, school boards and appliques, mock-ups, decorations, etc., made mostly by students. On each teacher's desk, there was a computer for teaching purposes.

Almost all the rooms of the main school building needed decorating, as well as the gym of the primary school.

Overall, there were the necessary material conditions for the process of education and integration of the children of minority origin. There is a need to improve some aspects of the school space, but the opportunities for this depend on the school budget (in Bulgaria, schools receive delegated budgets directly related to their number of students).

Teaching process and teaching methods

In the process of teaching, experienced teachers, 70-80% of whom were over 50, used mainly interactive methods: brainstorming, group work and discussion. In the process of acquiring knowledge and developing skills, the students of different ethnic groups had equal opportunities to participate.

The most emotionally expressive was the Roma group, in their lessons in music, Bulgarian language and literature (word games, search for rhyming or rhythm riddle response), PE (racing games) and English (musical soundtrack for educational films).

The individual approach of the teacher was present in each of the observed classes. For example, they helped the slower-working Roma children to deal with tasks, language exercises, sports exercises, etc.

In the lecture method, there were some differences in the activity of the students from the different ethnic groups. For example, in the Informatics lessons the Turkish and Karakachani students were active, as opposed to the Roma students; in the History and civilisation lessons it was mostly the majority students who answered the teacher's questions, although the teacher invited everyone to answer. There were no difficulties observed in the answers of the minority children about languages, technology, history, music, etc. – everybody participated actively in the discussion and group work, no ethnic division was observed and the teacher encouraged them all to take part. There was a problem in the Geometry lesson when no Roma student wished to take part. In maths lessons, it was mainly children of the majority who answered the questions. The situation was similar in one of the IT lessons. The pupils' activity probably depends on the students' methods of work in the classroom, the content of the subjects and on the gaps they have in their knowledge accumulated over the years.

For the group work, in all observed classes there was a distribution of the students in heterogeneous ethnic groups and they were all active in the execution of tasks. Role play was also used, and the distribution of roles included students from different ethnic groups (for example, in the Bulgarian language and literature class in class IIIb the roles were divided between two children of the majority, one Roma and one of Turkish origin).

In summary, there was a high degree of inclusion of minority students using various methods with clear pedagogical tact (patient listening, politeness and smiling when addressing students; the use of a one-minute group relaxation session to deal with disruptions caused by the primary school children, instead of using harsh words).

Teaching process and educational content

In most of the lessons, except for Geometry and IT, the curriculum included elements related to universal values: cultural diversity (in the Music lesson; in the World around us lesson; in the Physical education and sport classes – about the famous Bulgarian champions of different ethnic backgrounds; in the History lessons – about the rights of the free citizen in the ancient Greek polis; in the compulsory Bulgarian language and literature module suitable adjectives were selected to be placed in a piece of text). All this shows that the curriculum in modern Bulgarian textbooks has sufficient potential for the formation of intercultural competences and each teacher could use this potential in their work in monoethnic or multicultural classes.

Student-teacher relationships

During the observed lessons, enough examples were found of permanent efforts by teachers to create a positive, creative, learning atmosphere and psychological climate of integration, mutual respect and co-operation between students of different ethnicity. We can mention the individual work with the Roma students who were slower or behind with solving geometric problems or correctly spelling the names of Sparta and Athens, and the encouragement to the gifted students without making any distinction between ethnicities (the Physical education and sport teacher hugged the Roma wrestling winner and promised to make him a champion).

There was no preference demonstrated for working with children from one or other ethnic group. In some of the lessons, teachers paid attention to differences in student performance, calling for understanding by those who work faster, explaining that everyone had their own pace and skills.

Student–student relationships

The whole observation provided sufficient data evidence that there is a process of active educational inclusion of children of minority origin in the school environment. Students from the majority and minorities co-operate and respect one another during classes and in the breaks, and, according to their teachers, in the extracurricular forms of communication.

Out-of-lesson situations were also observed which provided additional data: primary school children played in mixed ethnic groups in the breaks – chasing, running with joyous screams or excitedly discussing games on the screens of their mobile phones. Students from the different ethnic groups of the lower-secondary school (mostly the girls) sat together on the benches in the corridors and chatted in a friendly and informal manner with one another.

The quality of clothes, shoes and the learning materials used by the Roma pupils did not differ from those of the children from the other ethnic groups. This fact might be explained by the increased income of part of the Roma families who work (or at least one of the parents) abroad, buy houses outside the Roma neighbourhood and develop new manners and tastes.

Presentation of the project’s intervention

The Bulgarian team chose to continue exploring the selected school in Karnobat through specific activities, aiming to employ the key ideas behind the “whole community” approach. We worked with a conviction that if we were to adhere to society’s democratic principles we ought to apply them in our everyday tasks; that opening the school to the community could lay the foundations for the solutions to one or two challenges. What we understand by “challenges” in this case is raising not only the quality of teaching, but also the interest of the students in attending classes, as well as involving the parents in the learning and educative process.

In a city and school with an ethnically mixed population potential challenges are to be expected. A human rights approach, which is to be observed by students, parents and teachers alike, should be a good choice for the democratic governance of the school. In fact, the United Nations Association of Bulgaria, the local partner in the project, has long-standing experience in human rights education in schools. The activities are focused on operating UN school clubs, headed by a pedagogical advisor or teacher that promotes acceptance and stability. Members of the clubs are young people aged 16 to 18, who participate actively in national training events, such as “Model United Nations” and “peer-to-peer education in human rights”.

Having this experience from our previous partnership, we are convinced that the whole community approach builds upon and enriches the human rights approach. The most important thing is that it adds new important stakeholders to the efforts of enforcing human rights education in schools. Initiatives for involving the community have been immensely helpful in amplifying the effects of what has been achieved so far. Incorporation in just one school can be successfully multiplied across the network of UN clubs, which includes approximately 40 groups in the whole country.

Our target group for this project was Roma children. To implement the whole community approach in the chosen school site in Karnobat, we applied the conclusions from previously completed research on the national politics aimed at Roma people, from studies and analysis done by sociologists and from our own empirical research in Karnobat. Following the results of our research, we chose to focus on the parents from all ethnic groups, i.e. to draw them into their role as active participants in the solving of existing or potential problems for the integration of Roma children.

Theoretically we could separate the parents into two groups – those of a majority (Bulgarian) background and those of a minority (Roma for example) background. For the former it can be stated that, given the choice, they would rather send their child to a school without many Roma children. For the latter group it could be concluded that in some cases they have no opportunity, and in other cases there were not strong enough motives to send their children consistently to school, as well as help them prepare for it. This division does not only characterise the small community in Karnobat but stands rather as a potential wall between the permanent and successful implementation of all rules and values essential to our society. Communication between

parents of different ethnic groups in the school is a good prerequisite for the achievement of all aims of the modern world – dignity, prosperity, freedom and cultural diversity.

With regard to the methods used while working on the project in the Karnobat school, we combined the “peer-to-peer education in human rights” with the “Laboratory for Parents and Teachers and Students”. The approaches taken in dealing with parents are diverse and have to be tailored specifically to the situations given, which are all different as a result of the varying social and geographical demography of the families. In the case of the school in Karnobat, there is no segregation and no observable special attitude from teachers towards Roma children.

Despite the lack of serious obstacles to the social integration of Roma children in the selected school, all students, as well as their teachers and parents, need the change that the whole community approach offers them. Our “opening the school” in the case of Karnobat meant empowering the families and including the parents through the direct participation and initiative of the pupils.

In fact, in this project we extended the methodology of peer-to-peer education in human rights to the community, including teachers and parents in the model of interactive training. We trained teams of young human rights coaches, they entered class lessons with younger students, then together they provided, prepared and organised a “laboratory” for parents, teachers and students in a hall provided by the municipality. What impressed us as observers of the process was the success of the students in implementing the role of community organisers; in essence, practitioners of the whole community approach. The choice of place, as well as the involvement of representatives of the municipality and Local Centre for Social Integration contributed to the realisation of better vertical and horizontal communication between all stakeholders.

The process of implementing the ideas of the whole community approach in Karnobat began with training for young trainers. It was organised by the UN club co-ordinator and members, while trainers from the youth section of the United Nations’ Association of Bulgaria prepared the methodology and led the sessions. The training took place in a municipal hall. Aside from teamwork skills and activity-making techniques for Human Rights Education, the participants were also trained in observing, noting and reporting the target group’s social integration in the school environment.

The whole community in the town welcomed the idea of the project and specifically the training of young trainers. Preliminary communication ensured the municipality’s co-operation, for example, in providing a place for the event. Students from the two schools in the town took part in the training of young trainers in human rights. The adults who attended the training were impressed by the methods of learning by experience. All the factors needed to democratise the educational process were manifested – experience, tolerance, good interaction and rapidly acquired communication skills.

The next activity lasted two months and included the entry of trained young coaches into classes of younger pupils to conduct interactive training on the right to education, tolerance and non-discrimination, and social integration. The co-ordinator who monitored the process says that young trainers were worried at first, but at the end of the school year they were apparently more confident, well-meaning and understanding. The feedback from the younger students, the “trainees”, was even more positive. Children were particularly pleased that their peers carried out their activities and were visibly enthusiastic and involved.

An activity that encompasses the definition of a “good practice” was organising the social laboratory for solving problems. It enabled parents, students and teachers to get to know each other better, to learn to work together and to rely on each other, to share expectations, to “get into the shoes of the other”. It is important to mention that students not only from the high school participated, but also from the primary school, from which many of the high school students hail. They were part of the training for youth trainers during the beginning of the activities and acquired skills for organising the community.

During one of the games, created by the young trainers, parents and teachers were blindfolded. After that they had the task of crossing the room from one end to the other, following confusing commands from the children – forward, about-turn, turn right. There were objects scattered around the room for them to bump into. The students were the ones reflecting on the game. Together with the adult participants they reached the conclusion that often children receive differing guidance separately from teachers and parents, which they cannot grasp in its entirety. They become confused, because no one tells them why they are doing the things they are supposed to be doing. In the second part the young trainers divided the participants into three groups: teachers, parents and students. The groups were given flipcharts on which they had to write their expectations for the other two groups. After that, each group had to answer for themselves – do they have the capability, skills and knowledge, and are they successful in fulfilling these expectations of both groups completely? A

conclusion was drawn that it was important to see the expectations, strengths and weaknesses of the three groups and what they needed to change in order to work towards common goals, which will unite them.

The last activity in which the students participated was being part of a focus group in the national simulation game "Passages", an awareness game putting players through the experience of refugees. Together with the local project co-ordinator a group of children from Karnobat came to Sofia. This game is a good practice which has been used in many countries around the world in order to inspire solidarity towards the fate of refugees. The presence of the group from Karnobat gave the students an opportunity to meet friends and colleagues, and to exchange experiences that have been gained during the projects. Being a part of this national simulation gave them the positive feeling of gaining more confidence, being accepted, being part of the others and a feeling of belonging.

Discussion of the project's findings and results

From the brief presentation of the public discourse, the relevant literature and the official documents related to the process of the educational integration of Roma students, we can conclude that although a high number of strategic documents, adequate in their essence, have been adopted, their implementation and co-ordination between institutions leave room for active action. The effect is still minimal, mainly due to the fact that they are not financially secured in the long term by the state or municipal budgets. Our recommendation with regard to national policies is to improve the mechanism for monitoring the movement of children in the education system and to organise the collection of statistical data at national level on enrolment or dropout rates by ethnicity.

The observations on the educational process at the school site were more optimistic. Based on interviews with the main stakeholders in the community, we came to some important conclusions. In general, there are no visible forms of discrimination in the town and no rejection of ethnic minority people. Perhaps this is also the reason why local governments and locally based state institutions are not particularly active in the field of integration policies. The Sts Cyril and Methodius school has no problems in this respect either. There is no favouritism and ethnic division; the pupils interact with each other. Although it is highlighted as a problem, aggression at school and outside it has not crossed the boundaries of the normal – there are no drastic cases of conflict, and in their milder version they are not on an ethnic basis. As everywhere in the country, here the school–parent relationship is broken or at least insufficient. Parents, in their vast numbers, are interested in the end result, the diploma, rather than the process of education and upbringing. Teachers have the relevant competences as specialists and educators and have undergone a great deal of training, but are relatively passive when it comes to working outside the routine.

Crucial stakeholders in the school's whole community

The stakeholders involved are easily identified: students, parents, teachers, the local authority and civic organisations.

Beginning with the last of that list we can confirm the support of the municipality for the fulfilment of the project in Karnobat. There are a small number of civic organisations with a low-key activity in the town, but the school administration and the teachers are taking steps to establish communication with national networks of NGOs in order to find partners for the civic education of the students. Aside from taking part in the UN school clubs network, the school actively participates in initiatives for global education run by the Bulgarian Platform for International Development. The school took part in the national competition "Global School" during 2015, the European year of development. The school board welcomes the idea of participation in such initiatives, provides financial aid for teachers going to training seminars and supports clubs' activities.

We confirm that students are the most important stakeholders in the whole community approach for the democratisation of the school. This does not mean that we underestimate the role of teachers and school leadership. From our observations in class and outside of the classroom we can convincingly conclude that the school is trying to create a free space for the pupils to express themselves. Good teamwork is displayed within the student council, in which the classes have chosen 46 pupils in total to participate – six Karakachan, five Roma, three Turkish and 32 Bulgarian children.

Traditional, sustainable extracurricular activities are being created. The children have the opportunity to participate in two vocal groups, one for folk songs (12 students) and one for popular songs (11 students), both ethnically mixed. A high percentage of children from marginalised groups take part in different types of

artistic endeavours. There is a good link to be made between the work in class and manifestation of student governance. The most active in work on individual subjects are also strongly involved in extracurricular activity.

We believe that parents need to be more involved in the process of democratisation of the school. With the activities at the chosen school we targeted the parents as potentially the most concerned and least activated in the school government. From the innovative method of establishing a connection with the parents, named here a Laboratory for Parents and Teachers and Students, it was evident that the parents, as a whole, are interested in the process.

The project's target group's perception in the school community

The presence of children from marginalised ethnic groups is not a novelty. The data from the research show that challenges in relationships are better sought out in situations of aggression in the school environment, without interpretation through ethnic belonging. The study rather illustrates a situation of cohabitation, in exact terms in the school environment between representatives of traditional co-dwelling ethnic groups, well acquainted as groups, equipped with mutual expectations.

Strategies on the part of the school and the wider community with regard to the inclusion/exclusion of the specific group

As for the integration of children of marginalised descent, the school council follows an educational policy defined on a national level and detailed in different strategic documents, such as the "Strategy for educational integration of children and students of ethnical minorities (2015-2020)". On the territory of the school it could be said that the definition of educational integration in the aforementioned strategy is being realised to the fullest.

Educational integration is an institutional process, during which educational subjects, carriers of specific ethno-cultural traits, interact in a unified educational environment, while forming, in the process of education, intercultural competency and shared civic interests, in the meantime preserving their ethno-cultural identity and receiving equal opportunities for social realisation.

As an institution in the system of national education, the school must follow the general guidelines, adjusting them according to the specifics of the ethno-cultural differences in its region.

Democratic school governance practices put forward during the project

We accept the human rights-centred management approach in school as a good democratic school governance practice. This human rights-based approach encourages the protection of rights and obligations, the division of responsibilities, and the formation of student self-governance. This method was once again commented on during the execution of the project and has, in fact, been a topic of discussion ever since the establishment on a UN club in the school. The training of young trainers for peer-to-peer Human Rights Education in classes, realised through this project, is a specific good practice for implementing both the human rights-centred approach when it comes to school governance and the whole community approach.

Another good democratic school governance practice is the organisation of and participation of the students in Model United Nations. This is a way of learning about the world through which the children acquire not only knowledge but also the skills to discuss complex issues, to find solutions and to reach consensus. All of this helps in the creation of a group of students in school that can be the drivers of the future development of the school. The participation of students in the simulation game "Passages" in Sofia is preceded by the preparation of the UN club.

Problems that could impede the whole process of inclusion

Observers of the educational process in the secondary school in Karnobat identified a lack of resources for realising a sustainable course for the involvement of the children and for reducing the risk of their leaving school. Better financial aid and organisation of the educational process could lead to improvements.

No serious interethnic tensions have been noticed; the problem of negative stereotypes and prejudices is not at the forefront at the moment.

Other comments relevant to the theme

The research and activities carried out show the specifics of realising the whole community approach in an environment of integrating minority groups that are well acquainted with the majority groups and have established

over decades (and even centuries) habits for living together. Of course, cultural differences remain the main markers of uniqueness and distinctiveness of the separate ethnic groups, which, through good governance, could help develop pedagogical activity in the direction of realising the aims of intercultural education.

As for the educational results of the learning process, it is clear the approach must aspire to the achievement of national education standards by all children, with adequate support for the acquisition of learning material. Pedagogical staff should be available to provide help when needed, in particular when trying to master the Bulgarian language. This is part of the approved standard set by Bulgaria's Inclusive education (2016) strategy, which has yet to be fulfilled within the Bulgarian education system.

Suggestions for further action

Recommendations for the community

- ▶ Local authorities can engage in activities and initiate events that cover all schools in the town, including the school with children from minority backgrounds. Thus, these children could also be included and motivated to continue their education in mixed schools. At events, parents from all ethnic groups should be purposefully included so that they gradually enter into close relationships.
- ▶ Such activities can also be organised in the school and should be aimed primarily at enhancing parents' motivation for inclusion in the school life that is part of their children's life. At the same time, it is possible to achieve another effect: mutual acquaintance that breaks the stereotypes and prejudices held towards others and which people carry within themselves.
- ▶ Development of the school board as a natural continuum of the Bulgarian tradition of education.²² Creating sustainability by including motivated people, regardless of their ethnicity, to contribute not only to financial stability but also to diversify the out-of-school activities of the school and thus increase the motivation of the students and parents to actively participate in its life.

Recommendations from the observation of the learning process in the school are as follows

- ▶ Additional work with Roma children in the lower and upper-secondary school could be organised in the subject that is obviously difficult for them, mathematics, in order to catch up with the unlearned material and prepare for the coming lessons.
- ▶ Financial support for extracurricular work should be provided and children from ethnic minorities should be more actively involved in amateur art activities.
- ▶ Funding should be found for the Roma children's lunch in the school canteen, amounting to 2.00 BGN per child.
- ▶ Additional remuneration should be introduced to maintain the enthusiasm of the teachers in their difficult and voluntary additional work with children from a minority background.
- ▶ Funding is needed to refresh the interior of the school.

Recommendations from the activities at the school

- ▶ The project draws on a recommendation for the introduction of peer-to-peer education in Human Rights in lower-secondary education, where the significant other is a peer rather than older people.
- ▶ Regarding civic organisations as stakeholders in the whole community approach, we recommend that the UN club take the initiative of carrying out its activities outside of the school, to aim at finding solutions to local community problems. A good practice from United Nations Association of Bulgaria's work in other towns is for the laboratories to be enhanced with workshops. The workshop is a place where older and younger students alike can discuss, decide on and execute a civil initiative in the search for a solution to an important local community problem. Potential areas for work include culture, ecology and transport. The key thing is for the pupils to exhibit imagination and creativity that awakens the interest of the community.

22. The school board is a public institution that was first established during the time of the Bulgarian Enlightenment period. It has been sustaining a democratic tradition in school governance for two centuries. It is based around the principles of electiveness, public control and independence. Currently the school board is a non-profit legal entity, an independent voluntary association which helps the development of the school and provides the materials the school needs, as defined by the school principal, parents, teachers and/or public figures. The functions of this entity are set out in Article 45v of the Bulgarian NGO law from 1991 and Article 309 of the Law for Pre-school and School Education from 2015.

Roma education in Hungary

György Mészáros, PhD (with contributions from Lilla Lukács and Boglákra Szondi)

The project's target group: the Roma or Gypsies (*cigány*) in Hungary

In Hungary, the Roma minority is an important part of society. It is difficult to know the exact figure for the Roma (Gypsy or *cigány*) population,²³ but according to different organisations, the estimated figure is around 500 000 to 600 000 (the whole resident population is 9 938 000) (McGarry 2009). In the 2011 census, only 315 583 people identified themselves as Roma (Romany, Beash).²⁴ The lower number is most probably due to bad connotations related to the word Roma or *cigány* in Hungarian, and to fears of prejudices. Roma (Gypsies) constitute the largest minority community in Hungary, having a long history in Hungarian society with different groups related to various languages and traditions and a stable (not nomadic) lifestyle. They have been present in Hungarian society since around the 15th or 16th century.²⁵ There are several historical sources indicating that exclusion, persecution and discrimination (in the form of policies and laws) started very early and continued during the centuries in different forms. The attitude of the majority was variegated towards them. The Gypsy musicians gained a certain reputation especially at the beginning of the 19th century. The *cigány* bands and orchestras won general acclaim and were seen as the representatives of Hungarian national music. This group of Gypsy musicians is still the most respected part of the Roma minority, and their living conditions are much better than the poorer majority of Roma people.

Culturally and linguistically, those in the target group fall into three main groups: the more assimilated Romungros, whose mother tongue is Hungarian (with some bilingual groups); the Hungarian and Romani-speaking Vlach (or oláh) group; and the bilingual of Beash (or Bea or Boyash in different sources) that speak an archaic dialect of Romanian. There are several different dialects in the groups. However, this linguistic landscape is continuously changing, and a lot of Gypsy people no longer speak these languages, but they maintain their cultural belonging to the group itself (Forray and Beck 2008).

Many different occupations were popular among Gypsies historically, like blacksmiths and some traditional trades and crafts related to agricultural production. In the 20th century different policies helped the population settle down. Between the two World Wars, a lot of traditional crafts cultivated by them became superfluous, so unemployment increased among Roma. During socialist times they were forced to work mainly in factories and agricultural co-operatives. There were programmes for eliminating the separated settlements, too. This “proletarianisation” is evaluated in different ways by scholars, but what is certain is that in the 1980s the social conditions of the Roma population increased more than ever before (Kállai 2002). However, this progress totally stopped and was frequently obstructed by the capitalist tendencies of the last 27 years (Farkas 2010). In fact, the Roma population is actively discriminated against in many different fields (Hungarian Helsinki Committee 2011; Canada 2012):

- ▶ employment (unemployment is around 70%, and many often suffer prejudice when applying for jobs or as employees);
- ▶ housing (many live in poor conditions and often in segregated settlements);
- ▶ education (segregated classrooms and schools, low achievement in schooling);
- ▶ health care;
- ▶ political participation;
- ▶ access to public institutions.

23. The term *cigány* (Gypsy) is more inclusive in Hungary, because the words *Roma* and *Romani* are only related to one language (and culture) of this minority population (*lovári*) while in Hungary there are also *romungros*, *beash* and other smaller groups (for example, *sinti*) speaking other languages. In the text I will use Roma, Gypsy and Romani (the more inclusive form from a gender perspective) interchangeably following the usage of studies in Hungary.

24. See the data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2011.

25. Historical data in this chapter are taken from Kemény (2005).

As the Hungarian Government official website states: “Over the last [few] years, the situation, the poverty, the life expectancy, the income and the public opinion on [Roma] has gradually deteriorated.”

The majority of Roma people live in very poor, rural areas, clearly disadvantaged regions with very low employment, social, cultural and schooling opportunities. Many of them are settled in separate “ghetto-like” parts of the villages and towns. These “ghettos” are an accumulation of an underclass population with a lifestyle that enhances social conflicts and often creates a niche for criminalisation. Because of the difficulties in finding jobs, some of the Roma population are frequently on the move; they come to the capital city for some periods, then they return to the countryside and neighbourhoods like the one in which the school presented in this study is located.

The attitude and behaviour of the majority population in Hungary is still very discriminatory towards Roma people, and according to several studies the situation is deteriorating (Hungarian Helsinki Committee 2011; Canada 2012), especially after the economic crises (Farkas 2010). According to several studies, prejudices against Roma are high among the majority population in Hungary (Timmer 2017); more than two thirds of Hungarians expressed unfavourable views on the Roma (Hungarian Helsinki Committee 2011; Pirro 2015; Váradi 2014). In 2008 and 2009 six Roma people were killed for racist reasons in planned terrorist-like attacks. Racist statements among the public and political discourse are present and normalised (Hungarian Helsinki Committee 2011). The far-right party Jobbik has raised and maintained the discourse on “Gypsy criminality”. By the beginning of 2015, Jobbik had become the largest opposition party in Hungary and now have a rebranding strategy that presents the party as less radical and more of a people’s party. While on the national level Jobbik has refrained from racist statements recently, the party’s concrete proposals and the rhetoric of the party’s local politicians has remained the same (Barna and Hunyadi 2015).

To summarise the above situation: in spite of policy efforts, the integration process of Roma into society does not seem effective: their socio-economic status and political representation are low, and the cultural integration is not successful (McGarry 2009). After 1990, the policies have focused on the establishment of Roma self-governments and on indirectly ethnic policies that help disadvantaged people in general. The latter policies have not been very effective. The self-government approach and other culturally based initiatives cannot obtain significant results either. One of the possible reasons of this ineffectiveness is that the policy discourses and actions directly related to Roma people are mainly based on a recognition paradigm and not on a redistribution one (Tremlett 2009). The Roma identity is presented as a form of national group identity. The values of tolerance, acceptance and non-segregation are promoted by some groups and policies, while other more conservative approaches, in the name of helping Roma people, favour school segregation and perceive integration as a sort of assimilation process. But the main social issues of their marginalisation are not targeted by the mainstream liberal and conservative approaches. The assimilative tendencies cannot answer the Roma population’s needs, and without redistribution, recognition is not possible either. In particular, the school segregation of Roma pupils, which is a clear consequence of the selective school system in Hungary, is very evident, and has devastating consequences for the population and for the future of the new generation (Rorke 2016; Kertesi and Kézdi 2013), worsening their situation, status and position in society.

There are several NGOs that make enormous efforts and various projects promoting Roma cultural integration. Their work is generally based on identity politics, tolerance and a human rights perspective. They carry out valuable and important activities, but we argue that without changing the deeper structures of marginalisation together with the systemic schooling situation of Roma, it is not possible to achieve significant transformation. As Timmer (2017) notes, their efforts are often hindered by circumstances and by their inability to go beyond the ethnic framework of the problems. However, while more structural changes will (hopefully) arrive, we should find actual, practical, functioning ways against the current marginalisation at the level of smaller communities, institutions and schools, as we have tried in this project.

Education policies

There are significant differences in school performance, proficiency and qualifications between the entire population and the Roma population (Forray and Beck 2008). There is a recurrent discourse in different studies and public statements that the key factor for the integration of Roma people in Hungary is their education. The NGOs also mainly target the education sector with their activities. Timmer (2017) expresses doubts about this ideology and we also contend that education alone cannot be the crucial factor without dealing with the wider problems of social inequality, social insecurity, disadvantaged regions, health care and labour market problems, or inequalities caused by neoliberal capitalism. All these should be tackled together in order to make a real, structural transformation. Nevertheless, education still has a pivotal role in enhancing integration among these sectors.

Many studies indicate that segregation is the main problem for the schooling of Roma children. Segregation is a crucial problem, but we argue that it is embedded in the wider context of the selective school system in Hungary.

According to the PISA 2012 and 2015 results, there is a growing tendency in the Hungarian education system for students' socio-economic status and the schools' position (with huge differences between advantaged and disadvantaged institutions) to be determining factors in students' school performance and achievements (OECD 2013, 2016). The Hungarian education system sorts students into different schools and programme tracks in the early years of schooling. There are significant differences as early as primary school. This selective system evidently favours students with a better socio-economic status. Most of the schools in the regions where Roma families live are clearly disadvantaged. Moreover, the system does not enhance the return of early school-leavers and flexible interoperability between schools. Moreover, the 2011 new Public Education Act reshaped Hungary's education system, lowering the compulsory school age to 16. This has had devastating consequences for Roma youth. "Primary school" is the period between 6 and 14 in Hungary. At 16, almost the entire population have obtained the primary school qualification, but only two thirds of Roma students manage to finish this 8-year-long primary school.

Segregation is part of this bigger picture. It is not only a result of the actual policies of the government, but has been a steady tendency throughout the last several decades. It was often targeted by the previous liberal governments as a "moral" issue and was promoted without changes to the whole education system. The previous policies could not prevent it. In particular, there existed a Hungarian version of "white flight", when middle-class families took their children to better schools in the nearest towns, and the small village schools were left with a huge majority of Roma pupils (Kertesi and Kézdi 2013; Kállai 2002; Forray and Beck 2008). However, it is true that the government does not see segregation as an important problem; recent policies have essentially legalised segregation, and the segregation index has risen further (Roma Education Fund 2017).

Some of the segregated schools show good student performance results (Forray and Beck 2008), because they manage to target the needs of Roma students (for example, the famous Gandhi High School in Pécs). But the majority of these schools just reinforce the students' social status, and do not promote their mobility. As we have argued, the problem is mostly at the level of the education system, and the selection-segregation problem should be targeted with adequate policies coupled with other social security measures and systemic interventions. Notwithstanding, we also contend that concrete solutions should be offered at a lower level, too, since this is the situation for many institutions. The whole school approach (Tibbitts 2015) is a valuable way to involve the different members of the community in order to improve the pupils' school performance and achievement in different schools.

The project's methodology

The context of the research site and research objectives

The whole school approach favours integration and inclusion. When we chose our research site, we were aware of the fact that the road towards integration is long for a lot of Roma pupils in Hungary. In the previous chapter, we criticised segregation, but schools with a majority of Roma students is the most common reality of Roma pupils, and we have chosen a representative example of the Roma educational experience in Hungary. Besides the segregated schools that just attract Roma students without any way out from exclusion, there are "second-chance" schools that try to respond to the needs of Roma pupils excluded from "normal" schools. In these schools the majority are Roma, but they target their social integration with a lot of effort, and they are often the only option for Roma children who were not accepted by or were excluded from their local schools (a common practice, for example, is a school may force Roma pupils to become home-schooled students without any obligation to attend classes). We have carried out an ethnographic study of a second-chance school which aims to promote processes of educational inclusion by using the existing educational context as the point of departure. The project's strategy is to "understand the micro-politics and overcome the existing system" of segregation by using the "whole school community" approach and critical pedagogy. Our conviction that this choice is in line with the wider values of democratic education is related to this perspective. Of course, our decision does not mean the approval of segregation, and during the process it was our important concern to identify the different ways out of segregation.

The "Calvin" School²⁶ is an institution of a protestant Church in Hungary. The school is situated very near a well-known poor ("ghetto-like" slum) area where poverty and criminality rule the population's everyday life. The school pupils (aged 6-18 across grades 1 to 8) are almost all from this area and have a Gypsy background.

26. This is a pseudonym for the school. The identity of the school remains hidden to protect the participants.

There are around 100 students, but with a lot of fluctuation due to the special circumstances of the families (some of them spend some months of the year in other parts of Hungary or in Romania or Transylvania). Some children sometimes have to stay at home for an extended period to help their mothers if the father is in prison, for example). These children (with these special circumstances) would not be accepted into the “normal” schools in this district.

The goal of our project was to help this school with our action-oriented research to target their identified difficulties, and to draw some extendible findings for other similar situations. This study serves as a case study for the implementation of the whole school approach.

Our main research questions were as follows.

- ▶ How can a whole community/school approach contribute to (democratic) education in a second-chance school with Roma students from a poor and criminalised neighbourhood?
- ▶ What kind of actions can be effective for promoting the whole community approach in such an environment?
- ▶ How can an action-oriented research process contribute to the development of a school community and a more reflective education in such circumstances?

During the process, we had to change our goals and methodology. Initially, we planned a brief action research, but we realised that it is not possible to facilitate the teachers’ own research activity: they did not have time and energy. We decided to facilitate common reflection and maintain an ethnographic approach to the research site.

Another important aim of the study goes beyond the school environment: it constitutes a case study that reflects on the possibilities and opportunities of the whole school approach in a specific context (Romani students in a second-chance school). This case study, which summarises the experiences of the participatory ethnographic (action-oriented) research, might offer a useful tool for other similar schools at regional, national and international levels.

Theoretical background

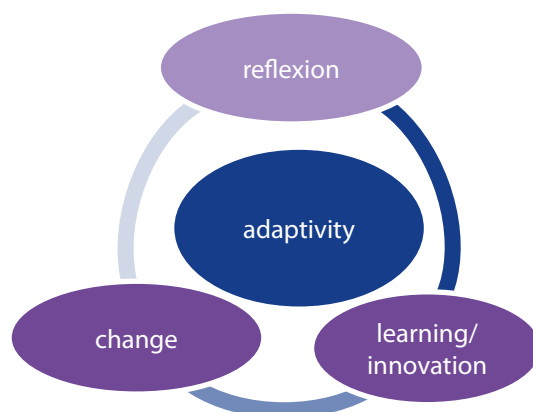
This research study draws upon different theoretical and methodological traditions combining the whole school approach with critical pedagogy, an adaptive school concept and an action-oriented participatory research paradigm.

The whole school approach (Tibbitts 2015) is a useful concept and practice in education for democracy that reflects on the school community as a whole, with all its different stakeholders, and promotes democratic practices that involve students, teachers, parents and the local context in collaborative and complementary processes for school community building.

Critical pedagogy (Freire 1970/2000; McLaren 1995) interprets schooling always in relation to and in the context of the wider society, and facilitates an empowered practice that leads to transformation through social awareness.

The adaptive school (adaptivity) concept was used in a previous study (Rapos et al. 2011) and it is interpreted as a complex notion that can be described by the relationship between three different concepts: changing, reflection and learning/innovation, as illustrated in Figure 1. It means adaptivity to the students, but to the social context, too.

Figure 1: The concept of adaptivity (Rapos et al. 2011)



Originally, we planned an action research process. Its paradigm conceptualises and activates the strong link between theory and practice deconstructing their distinction. In education, it can enhance the reflective practice of teachers by making them the protagonists of the educational process and the transformation of their school. The action is always accompanied by reflections and is conducive to modifications and new actions. Thus, action and reflection follow each other in a spiral way, leading to better practices. Action research generates collaborative practices where the researcher has the role of a facilitator and not a leader. This process could not be accomplished, so we changed the methodology. Participatory research is based upon the involvement of participants without the cyclical nature and fuller participation of action research. Notwithstanding, we have conceived an action-oriented inquiry by facilitating actions and activities with a view to a possible proper action research cycle in the future. From the beginning of our presence, we involved the participants in a dialogue about the school situation, problems and potentials, we considered them real participants, and enhanced their reflective practices in the community in order to transform it. This was embedded in an ethnographic inquiry focusing on the sociocultural interpretation by the ethnographers and participants together.

Methods

We pursued an ethnographic study with observation, presence and involvement in everyday school life. We spent around 100 hours in the school (partly together, partly separately). The main researcher was an experienced ethnographer who involved two MA and PhD students. We wrote separate field notes (diary entries), then in a common platform we shared them and commented on each other's notes. We analysed the data together, and this study is the result of this joint analysis.

We maintained a continuous dialogical attitude with the teachers and students in the school. We carried out three interviews with the headmaster and three with other teachers, but we had several conversations with teachers and students outside the framework of a traditional interview. We were involved in school life, and we enhanced reflection and planning through three meetings with the teachers. For this action-oriented process we used a previously adopted research method or model transformed for the purposes of this study. This method is called a reflective album or three-phase case study (Rapos et al. 2011). Its original form consisted of three phases:

1. in the first phase: observations, classroom observations, visual documentation (photos), introductory interviews with the principal and other teachers; being in and living with the school for a while;
2. in the second phase: further observations, classroom observations, visual documentation (photos), second interviews, focus group interviews with pupils; living with the school and engaging in dialogue with the teachers as critical friends;
3. in the third phase: on the basis of the two previous visits we devised a complex reflection on the institution, a "reflective album", and we discussed it with the principal and the other members of the community, and together we identified possible actions/interventions.

In this study, the whole process was more organic and not divided into clear phases, and we prepared a briefer reflective album combined with another form of feedback: an evaluation circle that described the specificities of the school.

We obtained the informed consent of the teachers at the beginning of the study, and we informed them and the students (and, where possible, the other stakeholders) about our goals. We have shared our main findings with the professionals, and we have developed our analysis by using their feedback and insights.

Analysis of the ethnographic data

It is difficult to separate the strictly observational data from our overall experience. We conceived our research project as a whole ethnographic study with an action-oriented and participatory character. In this section, we summarise our experience during the whole study in terms of school educational culture. It is a descriptive analytical interpretation that represents the school environment in its different aspects, particularly focusing on the dimensions of the whole school approach.

A positive school environment and the "street-like" school

Our first impression of the school was marked by the physical environment of the building. The court, the corridors and classrooms are creatively decorated by children, and they transmit the message that this institution

is inhabited by them; it is their “home”. We felt that we were not in a traditional school, but one which is in dialogue with the “street”: creative, vivid and friendly. This first impression was confirmed by our experience during the whole study. The communication between teachers and pupils is very friendly and informal in the school. Most of the teachers show friendly, caring and accepting attitudes towards the students. They often need to help them not only with learning but with other fields of life. Some of the teachers told us about their conversations with students that touched upon issues of future life, family problems, love, sexuality, everyday miseries of the families, etc. One 10-year old pupil said of his teacher talking about his school experience: “I like being here. Aunt Ilona is really cool, I like her ... She sewed my trousers when they got torn.” (It was clear that it was not a small accident, but his trousers were not repaired by his parents). The way he talked about Ilona had a tone of closeness and affection, and this gesture of the teacher revealed the caring dimension of their relationship. It is not usual in a school situation for a teacher to sew a pupil's clothes. We noticed a lot of different “unusual” gestures and moments: informal greetings between the students; a familiar tone that the children often used with the teachers though maintaining respect and the formal “you” form in Hungarian; teachers hugging each other after the successful completion of a programme, etc. In summary, the teachers managed to maintain a very positive, friendly climate in the school. This is very important in a school where the students come from a very harsh reality. We heard a lot of stories about alcoholic parents, criminalised families (drug abuse, prostitution, etc.), children taken away from abusive parents, and the inability of the child-care system to deal with the problems of these pupils.

In addition to this atmosphere we noted that the institution was characterised by a certain, unusual mobility in contrast with the traditional stability of school culture. A lot of programmes rescheduled classes and fixed timetables. Some of the students arrived late at school or left for home early, and several students just skipped school for certain periods. The school environment resembled the context of the streets, where people “just pass by”.

We also observed several small scenes of micro-aggression among the students. But it seemed that they were just “normal” parts of school life as they are on the street, in the pupils’ neighbourhood. Teachers usually intervened in these situations with patience and understanding. In rare cases, however, the children were left alone, and the aggression continued without intervention. The organisation of school programmes sometimes made it difficult for teachers to be present among the pupils during break times.

The school community involved us, the researchers, too. We were welcomed warmly. After our first visit, the colleagues greeted us almost as if we were part of the community. It was very easy to access the school environment. In previous ethnographic studies experienced by the main researchers it was a much more difficult process. We felt like well-accepted guests in a hospital village community. We have remained guests, but we were trusted. The teachers did not want to hide the problematic dimensions of their work. They were very open with us, and they considered us participants in school life. We were involved and were asked to help during different programmes. They invited us for the celebration of birthdays after the teachers’ meeting and for the traditional big school dinner at the end of the year.

And it was not just the teachers; the pupils were welcoming and open with us as well. They dealt with us with respect, but with a certain informality. They often approached us, asked questions or involved us in some of their conversations. They always answered our questions with kindness. It seemed normal for them that there are some new faces in the school, and they behaved as if we were part of the larger community of the institution. Sometimes, there are volunteers, or NGO representatives in the school, so they are probably accustomed to similar “guests”. And this just reinforced the image of the street-like school that developed during our presence.

Thus, summarising this experience, we used the metaphor of the street in our reflective album presented to the teachers. The street is a meeting point where people greet each other. In smaller villages or Mediterranean towns, people sit outside and talk to each other. They feel at home in the streets, and they build a community there. It has a positive connotation. It offers a creative space that people can use and inhabit, where informal relations and communication prevail. We perceived these features of the school as potential for developing an enriching and educative environment for these kids, especially because for them it is important that schooling comprises positive experiences and meaning. But the street metaphor expresses the problematic nature of this kind of schooling as well. The street means mobility, casual happenings, and a non-structured way of life that might impede learning in an environment that traditionally follows structured and well-ordered processes. It is not easy for the school as an institution and teaching and learning to mirror the reality of the “street”.

It is worth mentioning that the school has two different parts in different wings of the building: the primary school with its own courtyard, and the secondary school with another courtyard. There is a certain separation between the two parts (in the building, only the teachers can go from one part to the other), but through the courtyards the pupils also can move to the other side, they often mix with each other. There are familiar connections among the students.

Programmes and projects

The institution carries out a lot of different (extracurricular) projects and activities. This is due partly to the important presence of NGOs in school activities, partly to the need for engagement in various international and national projects that can bring sources and important connections to the school. The institution is perceived as part of a larger network.

During the months there, we witnessed several programmes:

- ▶ the celebrations for International Roma Day and Hungarian Poetry Day;
- ▶ a performance competition organised for all the Methodist schools in Hungary;
- ▶ one meeting of an international Erasmus+ project dealing with the issue of Roma integration;
- ▶ the “Garden Project” that brought together the pupils of this and another non-Roma school to build the garden of Calvin School.

We got to know the results of several projects on the past, too:

- ▶ a joint project with another school about the Holocaust, in which the students planted crocuses and cultivated them in commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust (they studied the Holocaust together with the students from the other school);
- ▶ a project in which the school’s courtyard was decorated by the pupils of this and another non-Roma school;
- ▶ a joint book-writing project with the pupils of another school.

It is evident that the school uses these projects to build networks and connections with other schools. It is a good practice that can mitigate the negative consequences of segregation. However, some doubts may be raised that sometimes these projects are useful more (or mainly) for the non-Roma kids that learn tolerance and acceptance from the interaction, while the pupils of the second-chance school represent just a field of education for the others. We noted this tendency during the shorter Garden Project, while other longer projects seemed to include more mutuality.

These projects and programmes constitute a good opportunity for enhancing students’ learning in non-classroom settings. They feel more empowered using their skills and knowledge that are often supplementary to those used for the official curricular content. They can perform, sing, dance, and creatively compose drawings and other products during these programmes. Moreover, they can develop their general skills through games and other non-academic activities. The programmes are organised usually with educational creativity, but sometimes they just follow the more traditional school celebration scenarios, as in the case of the Hungarian Poetry Day when the pupils recited some traditional poems and were encouraged to love poetry. These activities could be seen as good opportunities for the involvement of the students in school governance, but they were not used for this purpose. In addition to their positive effects, they created some tensions among the teachers, because of the uneven participation in the organisation of the programmes, and we saw that they can shift the school’s methodological focus onto the arrangement of these extracurricular activities and away from the everyday classroom practices. This is in line with the more mobile street-like functioning of the school, but it has a problematic effect on everyday teaching.

Classrooms

In contrast with the previous mainly positive impressions of everyday school life and programmes, we encountered a different and mostly difficult situation in the classroom. Teaching seems a continuous struggle, especially in the secondary school classes. We observed several classes. The students were disciplined, but they were generally very few with a lot of absent students, and sometimes they arrived late or left early for different purposes. The number of students in each class is very low, around 15, but they are almost never present altogether; every day there were different students absent. We heard some conversations about absence. One pupil’s mother was in hospital and the pupil had to take care of the whole family for a certain period. Another family went back to their village in Transylvania for the winter, and the student did not go to school there. It is difficult to develop continuous classroom activities in these circumstances. Moreover, the teachers, having put a lot of energy into extracurricular activities and dealing with students’ serious extra-school problems, do not seem to engage into innovative teaching. During the classes that we observed they used very traditional methods, like dictating and problem-solving using exercises in the schoolbooks. They did not use the particular knowledge and skills of the students, nor examine their interests, so the traditional curricular content appeared to the pupils as boring, strange and not useful for their life. This hindered the students from being involved in their own learning, which is an important element of democratic learning.

In part of the primary school we saw more alternative methods being used by teachers, but in the secondary school there was a lack of energy for being innovative. Quality teaching is further hindered by the fact that some teachers have to teach subjects different to their own specialisms, because a few teachers left the school during the year and were not replaced.

Involvement of different stakeholders and democratic school governance

There are no structured ways for the involvement of the different stakeholders in the school governance except for the teachers' meetings. However, we saw that there is a democratic climate with the students; they can express their opinions and they are in continuous dialogue with the teachers. The school atmosphere and the adaptive tendencies that try to consider the particularities of the students and of the context constitute an adequate basis for the development of more systematic ways of democratic school governance. Our opinion based on the research experience was that the teachers' involvement in the development of their community should be strengthened, and the students' self-government structures should be revitalised.

The most difficult part was the relations with and the involvement of the parents and families. The teachers recounted several initiatives that they had tried to introduce to make the parents participate more in school life and in their students' learning and school achievements. They faced a lot of difficulties in this regard. The parents often cannot be reached and they do not communicate with the teachers. They have a fear of institutions: for example, they do not want to take their children to the committee that examines their special education needs. Many of the initiatives that tried to involve them in school life failed. For example, one celebration organised for the families finished with a lot of parents being drunk. Many of the parents cannot see the importance of school qualifications, and they do not encourage their children's further education after secondary school. The lowering of the compulsory schooling age limit to 16 means that a lot of students do not continue their studies after this age, and some of them remain without any qualifications. Girls especially are subjected to family pressure to get married as early as possible. While the teachers are generally very caring and understanding towards pupils, they have a different attitude towards their parents. We heard a lot of conversations about their lack of care and responsibility and about their criminal and non-normative culture, and the few encounters we witnessed with parents in the school seemed tense. On the one hand, this attitude is understandable because the teachers see the families (with criminality, lack of responsibility) as the source of the children's problems that they have to deal with day by day without the parents' support. On the other hand, they seem to have little understanding of the determining factors in the social conditions for "underclass" people's behaviour, resistance, cultural patterns, and criminality and so on. Moreover, according to several studies (Forray and Beck 2008), many Roma families have attitudes towards schooling that are different from the expected and more usual ones. From their perspective, family life has absolute prevalence, school as an institution is only needed for the acquisition of some basic skills, and it is understandable how school is not seen as offering the opportunities valuable for the context of the "informal" economy they live in. It still remains a difficult but important task for the school to find new ways to improve relations with the families and to understand the hard reality of "ghetto".

The school maintains relations with a wide range of organisations and NGOs. The organisations are welcome, and they contribute to the educational activities of the school. There is a special place for Roma organisations.

The Roma community

Since practically all the students are Gypsies, it is crucial that the school establishes relations with the Roma community. As we have seen, however, it is not evident what the Roma community means in Hungary. There are different groups, and even among the students one cannot identify just one sense of belonging. Moreover, the hierarchies of the slum are represented in the school, too. The children of moneylenders and pimps have different positions to the others. Their district seems to be their community with its complex situations, and not an abstract Roma community based on identity definition. The school's relations are established with NGOs, music bands and other Roma organisations that primarily promote an identity-based approach. During the International Roma Day, this approach was represented very clearly. The speeches were about the large Roma nation that originated in India and travelled throughout the world, the students performed a Roma fairy tale with Gypsy songs and dances, and other fairy tale films about the origins of the Roma were screened to the students, all painting a clear ideological picture of what it means to be Roma. The Roma teacher asked the students after the screening what they felt after these stories. The students did not answer, but she gave the "right" answer: "I feel proud". This teacher teaches conscious identity education in the school involving other Roma people and organisations. She often repeated in our conversations that she wanted the students to

understand that they are Roma and Hungarian together. However, as we have already mentioned, we noticed that this national-like identity interpretation was often outlandish for the children. Their reality was the ghetto-like street with its harsh complexities, and the national pride of being Roma did not offer sufficient answers and interpretational tools to deal with their situation. By listening to and considering their voice (in the way Paulo Freire uses this term) in order to enhance their empowerment and social consciousness (necessary for their social integration), the identity-based approach could be integrated with a more socially oriented perspective that considers their situations and social position.

A note on the “second-chance” nature of this school

The problem of Roma students in Hungary has already been presented in general terms. It is worth analysing the concrete situation of this school in this regard. The nearby ghetto-like street is a concentration of poor families, and the designated local school in the district cannot accept all the children from this area because they would exceed the possible number of disadvantaged students per classroom. The other schools in the district are reluctant to accept the students from this street and they are not obliged to do so. But the families, too, would not send their children to distant schools that they do not trust. They feel more secure sending their children to a “Roma school”. As a result, the pupils of the second-chance school (especially those in secondary education) would most likely leave school even earlier were it not for this school, with its relatively flexible and friendly environment. This demonstrates how complex the situation of schools with a majority of Roma students can be.

Interventions

The concrete interventions constituted a smaller part of our research process than we had planned. We would like to continue our participatory study into the school with proper action research, so we considered this year as preparation for future projects. Nevertheless, we maintained an attitude of participation rather than intervention, although there were some special moments in the process that could be considered “more interventional”. We conceived our dialogical presence as a social-constructivist development process. We put aside the problems experienced by the teachers, and we tried to find ways to develop together. It was a co-construction of a conceptual framework for action, and a co-operative identification of ways to respond to the challenges. We used the dimensions of the whole school approach in proceedings; while they were already present in the interpretations of the teachers they offered challenges for their interpretation.

The step-by-step process of the whole research study, including the “interventional” moments, is presented as follows.

1. Three members of the research team initially contacted the school principal. After a first interview with her and her subsequent approval we started the process.
2. We gathered the teachers and social workers from the school for an initial meeting: three male and 14 female colleagues participated in the meeting. They understood our goals, and they expressed their willingness to participate in the project.
3. We spent five days in the school participating in different activities: classroom observation, participation in the Roma Day programmes, participation in the Poetry Day programme, and being and talking with the teachers in the teachers’ room.
4. We held an interview with the principal and with those responsible for the Roma programmes and student (non-working) self-government of the school (a Roma teacher). We had several informal conversations with teachers about the problems and situation of the school. (The informal way seemed more appropriate than more formal interviews.)
5. We wrote detailed field note diaries about all the experiences in the school with an ethnographic eye. We took photos of different activities, venues and noticeboards in the school. And by using this collected material, we prepared the “reflective album” for the school community.
6. After the first phase, we continued our visits to the school, and the dialogues with the principal and the teachers (two interviews and several informal conversations).
7. On 22 May (the school could not schedule this meeting before this date), we held a training day with some of the teachers (10 teachers, one social worker and one special education teacher participated, all women). We talked about their views on the school, we shared our reflective album and they reflected on it, and finally we tried to identify some possible interventions.

8. Being at the end of the school year, we could not continue with the interventions, but we simply remained in the school after the meeting for the rest of the school year, and tried to discuss the possible changes. At the closing meeting of the teachers (12 June), the main researcher participated in the discussion about the plans for the future school year.
9. The main researcher attended the final dinner of the year and handed in a letter to each of the members of the school community expressing our gratitude and offering some additional suggestions about how the work should be continued the following next year.

During the training day, we identified the main issues that required intervention by using an evaluation method (besides the reflective album). The teachers were asked to fill in a pie chart with various dimensions of evaluation, and then we talked about the results.

Below are the results of the pie chart, which have been used during the training.

Strengths

- ▶ Diversity – mindset – acceptance
- ▶ Openness
- ▶ Crisis management
- ▶ Emotional bonding
- ▶ Empathy
- ▶ Individual learning paths and curriculum
- ▶ Small class size
- ▶ Personal space
- ▶ The dominance of the students' own culture
- ▶ Tolerance

Opportunities

- ▶ Talented students
- ▶ Educational methods
- ▶ Great community
- ▶ Connections with NGOs
- ▶ The highlighting of the opportunities for further education
- ▶ Developments
- ▶ Raising the motivation level – with new pedagogical methods
- ▶ Introduction to new pedagogical methods

Challenges

- ▶ Effects
- ▶ “Small adults”
- ▶ Absenteeism, lateness
- ▶ There is a gap between the morality of the school and the family
- ▶ To teach for real life
- ▶ Values
- ▶ To attract students' attention
- ▶ To control the use of the mobile phones

We should pay attention

- ▶ To each other
- ▶ To the quality of the work

- ▶ To strengthen harmony between each other
- ▶ To the relationships between: teacher–teacher, pupil–teacher, parent–teacher and child–parent
- ▶ There are groups according to pedagogical beliefs: there is no discussion. There should be more attention on each other and fewer groups
- ▶ Unity of norms and pedagogy

Obstacles

- ▶ Discord
- ▶ Lack of common understanding
- ▶ Parental background
- ▶ Lack of attention
- ▶ Lack of specialist colleagues (teachers, psychologists and social workers)
- ▶ Pedagogical programme that reacts to needs
- ▶ Criminal backgrounds
- ▶ There are tasks and areas without an owner
- ▶ Inconsistency
- ▶ Mobile phones
- ▶ Lack of resources for discovering and developing talents
- ▶ Poor social conditions
- ▶ The school's and the family's financial background
- ▶ Lack of motivation – tiredness

Actions and ideas

- ▶ To maintain motivation
- ▶ To arouse interest
- ▶ To find the common “points”
- ▶ To make pupils interested: finding and developing new methods
- ▶ Strengthening and developing co-operation
- ▶ To pursue basic standards – there is no common vision now

Specific characteristics of the school and school climate

- ▶ Talents – Many opportunities: in sport, ceramics and drawing
- ▶ Social disadvantages
- ▶ Segregation: it is a segregated school (according to others: it is not proper segregation, but almost)
- ▶ Disunity
- ▶ Trust: attention, family-like atmosphere
- ▶ Discussing disadvantaged backgrounds
- ▶ Extreme absenteeism
- ▶ Behavioural problems and learning obstacles and disabilities

Summary at the end of the conversations (ideas for the future)

- ▶ Professional community (organisation) supervision
- ▶ Professional workshops
- ▶ Roma culture
- ▶ TIME: important factor (we need more time)
- ▶ Methods and motivation
- ▶ Peer support system

- ▶ School newspaper
- ▶ School competition
- ▶ Further education
- ▶ Artistic creativity: methods and lessons
- ▶ Student government
- ▶ Involving the pupils' parents and environment
- ▶ Answering the students' and parents' needs
- ▶ Family visits

During the meeting, it became clear to us that the main issue that should be targeted first is the teachers' professional community. The teachers expressed several concerns about the unity of the community, about internal tensions. The first stakeholders to be involved are the teachers themselves. Without the development of a community that pursues a professional reflection and works together to common goals it would be difficult to involve the other stakeholders of the whole school in an effective way. According to the professional learning community model, the school community is built up of concentric circles: teachers, other workers, students, parents and other stakeholders. They are all part of the larger community. This community then might be composed of different professional learning communities (like the Humanities teacher, or the teachers and students planning projects) and will always maintain a core group of people and, in other concentric circles, involves more people at different levels.

In the development of such patterns of community, the other dimensions of the whole school approach might be useful points for reflection and action. The teachers were open to new ways of involving students and parents, and this can be the basis for the evolution of the professional learning community (PLC). However, they need to address some internal tensions by using external supervision, too, as a very first step. In fact, our training might be considered as a first step on this road. The principal is totally open to the active participation of teachers in planning and school governance. She would like to motivate them better. A joint effort for finding solutions to some urgent problems seems a good way of motivating. Democratic and inclusive education in the case of these children means that the school makes efforts to avoid their exclusion and segregation. This includes high-quality teaching that is motivating for the pupils and helps them achieve school qualifications now and in the future. Because of this, the principal and some of the teachers have identified a need to find alternative ways and innovative methods that deal with the "street-like" nature of the institution. Thus, for the next year we proposed the following steps:

- ▶ teacher supervision and community building to soften some of the tensions;
- ▶ identifying some common goals to achieve;
- ▶ the development of structures that involve students in school governance;
- ▶ propose, plan and trial some new, alternative methods in the classrooms and connect classroom and extracurricular activities (for example, some projects related to cross-curricular content of school subjects);
- ▶ inventing innovative ways to involve parents and families as far as possible.

We would like to include some critical pedagogy elements regarding these activities:

- ▶ the students' involvement should not only mean their participation in school decision making and democratic processes, but some activities in this process should help them reflect on their own social position and act against oppression in their own way;
- ▶ the teachers should develop some methods of teaching and "dealing with" the parents, and move away from a reflection on their own social position to better understand the social conditions of the families that they work with; this may help them consider the reality of their teaching and change their primarily negative attitude towards and interpretations of parents.

It is worth noting that innovation does not always comprise the creative invention of totally new elements, but sometimes it is just the discovery of some old and already used, but abandoned or forgotten, methods. For example, during the training day, one of the teachers raised the issue of family visits. She presented it as a valuable way of maintaining relations with the families. Moreover, we think that the family visits can be useful for helping teachers' attitudes to transformation if they are accompanied by joint, professional reflection.

Points for consideration and suggestions for further action

On the basis of our participatory research process (the experience and findings), some more considerations and recommendations will be outlined about the application of the whole school approach in special contexts

that are similar to that of the school studied. We will combine these findings with previous knowledge, relevant literature and experience in order to offer recommendations and considerations that might be valid in other contexts. The recommendations are for researchers or other stakeholders who would like to facilitate the introduction of the whole school approach in similar institutions. They are not always directly related to the whole school perspective, but all are important to its initiation. Our conviction is that the whole school approach cannot and should not be separated from the other actual and relevant problems of the school. So, we will outline our recommendations according to the main issues that we discovered about the everyday life of the institution.

The main participants in the school's "whole community"

At the Calvin School, the different stakeholders are involved at different levels in school governance. Teachers can express their views, and the principal enhances their democratic participation, although it should be strengthened through the development of a PLC that can serve as the core community for the involvement of others.

The students are welcome in the school and their voice is heard, but some specific structures to enable their democratic participation are needed, accompanied by methods that facilitate responsibility for their own learning and help them to become active, transforming citizens in society.

The school is reflectively embedded in its context and seeks many connections, such as joint activities with NGOs or other schools of the same church, and with other state-run schools and institutions in the district. Some concerns might be raised about the power relations between the students of segregated and non-segregated schools, and about the identity-centred Roma pedagogy carried out with the NGOs. In addition, the school should build more direct relations with the area around the street where the families live.

The participation of families and parents was seen by the teachers to be the most difficult problem. Besides the invention of new ways and the revitalisation of old ways regarding their involvement, the facilitation of teachers' self-reflection and knowledge construction is needed to comprehend the social positions, conditions and oppression. Although they try to understand the situation of the children, their view of the families lacks this more sociological approach.

Democratic school governance practices and strategies of inclusion

The school operates in a political, economic and educational context (both at the national and local level) that is marked by marginalisation, exclusion, selection and segregation. Amid difficult circumstances, it tries to offer adequate answers to the challenges. It has managed to develop a positive school culture and environment that is a good basis for any democratic education. However, the concrete structures of democratic school governance are still missing. The principal and a core group of teachers are open and eager to carry on reflections and activities pertaining to teachers' supervision and community building, alternative methods, and the students' involvement and the parents' participation. The main obstacle to the process could be the tensions within the community of teachers, so this is the first issue to face and deal with.

There are examples in Hungary of how some second-chance schools help their students to become more widely included in society. First, schools could be more effective in this regard by building alliances with families and the wider context and by adapting the institution to the street-like, more mobile way of life and culture outlined above. This means that these second-chance schools would be working towards their own abolishment (as a separate institution) by stubbornly presenting to the authorities the difficulties of segregation, and by helping students find integration in other schools and different social settings. To aid in this process, the schools should seek out networks, partners and allies.

Transmitting theory

Since this project was related to the whole school approach, one of the tasks of this research process was to transmit the conceptual base of this perspective to an institution that has been unfamiliar with it. Because of the short time available and the participatory approach, and without the respective materials in Hungarian, we chose not to transmit the key theoretical, conceptual knowledge of the approach in a direct way. We departed from the problems experienced by the teachers and tried to find ways of development together. It was a co-construction of a conceptual framework. During the conversations we gave our input about the whole school perspective, but it was not simply the transmission of an unknown concept to the "tabula rasa"

of the teachers' mind. The teachers were already aware of different elements of the whole school approach through their interpretations and implicit theories. With our presence, conversations and meetings with the teachers, a knowledge-construction process developed that started to create new dimensions of common understanding and meaning. These new dimensions were embedded into the already existing frameworks of socially constructed knowledge about schooling, but they were also challenged in a dialectic way. This social-constructivist approach that departs from the problems and interpretations of the stakeholders and encourages a joint effort of dynamic interpretation seems an appropriate method if we want to make people familiar with conceptual frameworks in school settings.

Nevertheless, the new dimensions can be challenging, especially when they represent a different interpretation of schooling from the usual ones, and they can meet some resistance too. Since it is not an indoctrination process, resistance is not a problem, but instead an opportunity to discuss, raise questions and maintain the process of dynamic interpretation. Changing fundamentally teachers' individual interpretations is not the goal of such a theory construction practice. The aim is more to engender a communitarian interpretation that is open to the challenges of new dimensions.

We have not experienced serious explicit resistance against the concepts of the whole school approach. This is maybe due to the specific "alternative" context of the school where everybody feels the need to involve the participants. The opportunity to explore co-operative interpretational processes was perhaps welcomed by some of the teachers because some of the tensions that exist within the professional community have not been directly addressed. Nevertheless, we noticed that some of the teachers, although they may embrace dimensions of the whole school approach, were reluctant to apply their practical implications, because they felt that they had already tried many methods and no longer had the time and energy to discover and try new ways. This kind of understandable unwillingness can be targeted more by facilitating actions rather than explaining and seeking verbal reactions. This needs time.

Action research as a tool and its limitations

In transforming school environments (into being a democratic space involving everyone, among other things), actions and action research seem to be effective tools according to the literature, if one follows the above-mentioned approach for transmitting concepts and values. Action research responds to the needs of the community and introduces changes not from above but with the involvement of the participants. It is more than a collection of simple actions, because it is followed by an intensive reflective process. That is why our original plan was to continue with an action research process that may help the school to apply the whole school approach. Finally, we revisited our plan, because it was not possible to accomplish the initial goals. We pursued a participatory ethnography that can lead to a more action-oriented research process in the next school year. The main difficulties were that:

- ▶ there was not enough time for the whole process of the action research cycle;
- ▶ the teachers expected more concrete answers from us, and they did not want to engage in new actions and monitoring towards the end of the school year;
- ▶ it was not easy to find and to gather the relevant stakeholders for more meetings.

These elements represent the limitations of action research as a tool for transformation: time, different expectations and a resistance to becoming engaged. The participants and/or facilitators should be aware of these factors concerning action research; nonetheless, we still recommend it in appropriate circumstances. If it is not possible to pursue a proper action research (cycle), research methods that involve the participants and are conducive to certain actions are recommended.

Alternative ways and traditional structures

One of the main findings of the research study was that because of the school's unique situation it should employ more alternative ways and it should change its structures in favour of more effectiveness and of a more democratic whole school approach instead of a more traditional framework of schooling. The children's continuous fluctuation and the street-like way of life of the families are in clear contrast to the traditional, normative and quite strict structures of schooling. It is not easy to go beyond the usual concepts and change certain structures (for example, with more flexible teaching and learning activities, more connections to the life of the street), but it seems necessary if the school wants to respond to the serious challenges of a mobile, street-focused lifestyle in this deprived district.

It is important that the school community reflects on the specific situation and circumstances of the institution and that they are helped to find new ways together that go beyond some of the traditional structures and functions of schooling in order to introduce the whole school approach.

Roma students and their families: identity and inequality

Based on our findings interpreted in the light of the literature (Tremlett 2009), we argue that the identity-based approach to Roma students is not enough. While it is important to reinforce their Roma belonging and identity, their main problem is less recognition-based, but concerns more their social exclusion. A national-like identity interpretation is often outlandish for them. In addition, the difficult process of involving families cannot be accomplished without the critical understanding of their perspective in relation to their social conditions (the culture of poverty in a “slum”, the underclass perspective, family-centredness and willingness to be involved in the “informal economy”).

It is important to help the school community reflect on the dynamic relations between the complexities of identity and social inequality. A critical pedagogy approach that considers students’ class position might integrate well the whole school approach in this regard.

The development of a professional learning community

From the process of the interventions it was clear that if there are tensions among the teachers, and the teachers’ body cannot function as a professional learning community involved in the development of the institution, it is very difficult to involve other participants or stakeholders in the whole school community.

The development of a dialogical and reflective professional learning community of teachers (that can involve in this community the other participants using the concentric circles approach) is the fundamental basis for the implementation of the whole school approach.

Networking and integration

For such a small, second-chance school, it is crucial not to remain isolated but to search for professional connections with other organisations and schools. It is important that they work hard to reduce the negative consequences of segregation. One useful way to do this is to seek collaboration with other schools and organisations. The Calvin School offers a good example of this. It has established and maintains a wide network with different organisations and schools. For example, they have carried out several joint projects in which the students worked together. However, it is important that these kinds of joint activities and projects are mutually enriching and do not take place solely for the benefit of the majority students in terms of teaching tolerance.

At the level of national policy making, it would be important to reconsider the structural reform of the selective school system and the promotion of integration and inclusion (instead of legitimising segregation). At the local level, the district should enhance the inclusion of students from segregated settlements, support the respective schools and gain the trust of families. They could use the knowledge of the second-chance school that has worked with Roma for several years in the preparation for this process, and they should offer jobs to the teachers from this school once the second-chance school has been closed.

Part 3

Children at risk of exclusion and special needs children

Children at risk of exclusion in the Montenegrin educational context

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The project's target group

The target group of the project is children at risk of exclusion. But, having in mind that the list of vulnerable groups at risk of exclusion from the educational context is long (neglected children, children exposed to poverty, children from families with history of domestic violence, children exposed to violence, children with disabilities, children from vulnerable social groups, children addicted to drugs or alcohol, vagrant children, children begging), the focus of this project is on children with disabilities and Roma children. This was especially determined by the fact that many studies point to a multitude of obstacles for them to continuously engage in the education system, and these obstacles are mainly reflected in the unwillingness to accept individuals from different cultures and traditions, as well as those who are of atypical psychosocial development. This is another issue which is strategically important for achieving inclusive education and building a democratic society ready to understand, support and accept differences.

Various studies deal with the issue of inclusion of children with special educational needs into the education system and therefore with the definition of the concept of inclusion. The guide for children with special educational needs contains the following entry:

Inclusive education entails that all children should receive quality education in regular schools, regardless of their gender, ethnic, religious and socio-economic background, abilities and health. At the same time, this means that schools and preschool institutions need to adapt to the educational needs of all children, not only of those who fit the existing educational process (Ombudsman 2011).

This Guide is intended for professionals and the general public, all those working with children and for children with special educational needs, and provides a comprehensive picture of the rights of children with special educational needs, through the existing international and domestic legal framework.

Inclusion is defined in the documents of the Save the Children and Ministry of Education (2016) in a similar way:

Inclusion starts with a recognition of the differences between pupils, and this diversity becomes a resource for support. An inclusive school provides support and provides incentives for employees, parents and community members. Supporting diversity includes all those activities that increase the ability of schools to respond to diversity among students. This is a part of the overall educational process and it should involve all the staff, students and the local community.

Montenegro is in every sense a multi-ethnic and a multicultural community, and therefore one of our key research questions concerns the extent to which the school supports diversity with its climate and culture. Thus, it is important for us to see how much the observed schools and local communities are sensitive to the needs of children at risk of exclusion. More precisely, we look at the extent and manner in which the school administration, professional services, teachers, students, parents and decision makers in the local community act together towards improving the democracy of schools and the readiness of its individuals to accept differences.

The commitment to this target group was also motivated by the data obtained in the studies listed below.

Within the OECD's project entitled "Education Policies for Students at Risk and those with Disabilities in South Eastern Europe", countries (including Montenegro) which in some way have been exposed to various forms of conflict since the early 1990s have been monitored. The study indicated that, just as in many countries covered by the study, there are many groups in Montenegro who are in a disadvantaged position when it comes to education and integration into the wider social community (OECD 2007a). Therefore, at the level of the Bureau of Educational Services of Montenegro, teams have been formed whose task is to monitor children at risk of exclusion. The project "Promotion and protection of human rights of Roma, Egyptians and other vulnerable groups" is underway as part of the continuous promotion and protection of the rights of these vulnerable groups.

UNICEF's "Study on the obstacles to education in Montenegro – Focus on Roma and Egyptian children" analyses the key factors that encourage social exclusion and inequality of Roma and Egyptians in the education system. Although according to the last census in 2011, 95% of school-age children attended school, when it comes to the population of Roma and Egyptian children the primary school attendance rate was significantly lower (51% and 54% respectively). An informal assessment indicates that the rate of primary school enrolment of Roma and Egyptian children is 25.2% and the rate of completion of the first cycle of compulsory education is 32% (compared to 98% of the general population), while the corresponding rate for the second cycle is 7% (compared to 86% of general population) (UNICEF 2013). Recent research indicates that the rate of early school-leavers is decreasing.

In Montenegro, there is no record of the number of children with disabilities, which is probably due to the unwillingness of the community to face up to the problems of these children and the fears of their families that they will be labelled and isolated. The problem is particularly pronounced in the rural areas of Montenegro, and the data from the Ministry of Education indicates that the number of children with disabilities is constantly increasing within the education system. This is supported by the fact that, for example, in 2006/07 there were about 1 500 students with special educational needs attending primary schools, while in 2016/17 this number was 4 692. For this reason, an individual developmental education plan (IROP) is being developed in order to enable children with disabilities, with the assistance of experts, to attend classes alongside their peers.

The key principle of the strategy for inclusive education suggests that society needs to nurture the values that promote the acceptance of diversity, starting with the obligation to respect the rights and characteristics of children with special educational needs whose developmental and educational opportunities ought to be met through quality education in order to prepare them for an independent life (Ministry of Education of Montenegro and Bureau for Education Services of Montenegro 2014).

In spite of continuously working on the development of a democratic culture and although progress is being made on many fronts, the data from recently conducted research into the values and challenges of young people (Forum MNE in co-operation with the agency DeFacto Consultancy, with the support of the Directorate of Youth in the Ministry of Sports) show that it is necessary to continue working in order to improve the democratic culture. A survey, conducted from November 2016 to January 2017 among high school students in seven Montenegrin towns, shows that young people in Montenegro display the highest degree of social distance towards homosexuals and the Roma. The majority of the surveyed high school students think it is unacceptable to date members of other faiths.

Within the project "Through education to social inclusion" (European Training Foundation 2009), the Center for Democratic Transition conducted research on the issues of Roma education by carrying out interviews with professionals and skilled workers working directly with Roma in the education process.

The survey results indicate that the presence of social deprivation, social marginalisation and segregation is still an obstacle to the realisation of continuing education. Several general characteristics have been identified, which in the opinion of the interviewees are also present in the wider sociocultural context and hinder the process of Roma education, such as: a lack of empathy, selfishness, a lack of true communication, ethnic distance, prejudices/stereotypes and the presence of a patriarchal/traditionalist system. From the perspective of institutions, a different system of values for both the Roma and non-Roma population is mentioned, as is a lack of understanding among the general population of the problems the Roma children face and a lack of communication between these two groups.

Education policies

Montenegro initiated a comprehensive reform of the education system in 2000, which resulted in legislative changes at all levels of education. Some of the basic principles have led to the introduction of quality indicators

and standards, an increase in participation of parents and the local community in the work of schools, the introduction of open and flexible curricula and the promotion of a child-centred instruction approach. Strategies and reforms related to inclusive education and the training of teachers for its implementation should be observed within the wider context of general education reforms (European Training Foundation 2009).

The Ministry of Education and Science started with the implementation of the programme “Inclusive education” in the school year 2003/04, in co-operation with UNICEF, Save the Children and the Pedagogical Center of Montenegro. The project included 21 schools and 81 children with disabilities. The idea of inclusion of children with disabilities in the formal school system was launched in 1998 when the Ljubica Popovic kindergarten started a pilot project, “Integration of children with special needs in regular kindergarten groups”. The Finnish project “Towards inclusive education” was implemented from 2006 to 2008 and it included 40 school principals and their deputies, 38 advisors for the improvement of the educational process from the Bureau for educational services, 39 teachers and other professionals.²⁷

As part of the Council of Europe and the European Union’s project, inclusive school (SchoolNet), teacher (TeacherNet) and policy networks (PolicyNet) have been created in order to promote the development of inclusive policy and practice. The Constitution of Montenegro guarantees the right of every individual to education, and the Law on the Education of Children with Special Needs was first introduced in Montenegro in 2004. Therefore, among other things, mobile teams are being organised nationally to support the upbringing and education of children with disabilities and, in 2008 local steering commissions were formed. In co-operation with UNICEF, the project “Education for the Commissions for Orientation of Children with Special Needs in the Educational System” is being implemented with the aim of facilitating the inclusion of children in the educational process.

In addition to the general education reform, significant efforts have been made towards the development of strategies and legislation in order to create an inclusive education system. The concept of inclusive education is more focused on different strategies for the inclusion of different target groups (Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (RAE) and children with disabilities) in the majority classroom instead of creating classroom diversity in general. The aforementioned principles of educational reform support the strategies of social inclusion in Montenegro; combined, they generate positive initial results, especially through the increased enrolment of students with special needs and RAE students into the majority schools and through the use of inclusion monitoring indexes in regular kindergartens and primary schools in Montenegro (Booth and Ainscow 2002; European Training Foundation 2009).

Besides the more general set of laws which regulate this area, such as the General Law on Education, the Law on Primary Education, the Anti-Discrimination Law, the Law on the Ombudsman, the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms, the Law on Education of Children with Special Educational Needs and the Family law (with recent changes and amendments), three strategic documents are now closely involved with setting and meeting the goals of improving the position of RAE children in the educational system of Montenegro. These are the “National action plan for children 2013-2017”, the “Strategy for improvement of the situation of the Roma and Egyptians 2012-2016” and the “Strategy for social inclusion of the Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro 2016-2020”, as well as parts of the “Action Plan for Chapter 23”, which is periodically updated.

Based on a government report, two projects have been realised in co-operation with the Roma Education Fund and the Help foundation. The first one, “School clubs for helping Roma and Egyptian children”, took place in the Bozidar Vukovic Podgoricanin school in Podgorica. The second project, “Urgent support in the early development of Roma and Egyptian children”, was conducted in the Ćina Vrbica kindergarten in the settlement of Konik, through social and educational activities for an additional group which consisted of 90 children.

The Ministry of Education and the Bureau for Educational Services, the primary competent institutions for the inclusion of children with developmental disabilities, have established an “inclusive team” which continually encourages inclusive education, provides continuous teacher training and co-operation between schools and resource centres, and co-ordinates and monitors the results of the work of mobile teams that implement the integration according to the individual developmental education plan (IROP).

The analysis of the situation of inclusive education in Montenegro shows an unambiguous quantitative progress. When it comes to preschool education, in 2012 13.87% of RAE children in Montenegro were enrolled in a preschool institution, compared to 26.65% of children at the national level. At the beginning of 2015/2016 this percentage had increased to 21.5%, with only a 2.2% dropout rate. As for primary education, the number of RAE children who are involved in the education system is much larger and has shown constant growth from

27. For more information see: www.zavodzaskolstvo.gov.me.

2001 to 2011, from 536 to 1 582. However, from 2014 to 2016, this number fell to 1 438, which can be explained by the migration at the time. Nevertheless, this number represents 76% of the total number of RAE children, unfortunately accompanied by a dropout rate of 11%. It is very important to reduce segregation in primary schools, which is being implemented by the gradual abolition of classes with exclusively RAE children (now there are only two such classes, but they too will be transformed in the next school year). One of the significant indicators of progress towards a better RAE inclusion in the education system is the systematisation of the Romani language and issuing of Montenegrin-Romani and Romani-Montenegrin dictionaries, which makes it easier for children to overcome the language barrier where it exists.

The context of the research and methodology

The research was carried out at the Blazo Jokov Orlandic primary school and the Niko Rolovic grammar school, both in the city of Bar.

The city of Bar is located in the south of Montenegro. It has a population of 40 000 and it is considered a multi-ethnic environment because its population comprises 20 different nationalities (Lutovac 2012). As this is a port and an economically developed city, migration is frequent (immigration of people from the north of Montenegro and immigration from other countries). All these things may have significantly affected the organisational climate of schools.

The largest city elementary school has been included in the research. The school has 995 pupils, out of which there are nine with special educational needs (with a decision on orientation), and six students who are still waiting for their orientation plan. As children are not expected to declare their nationality when enrolling in a school, there is no precise statistics on this, but there are 20 declared Roma students (in addition to those who are native to Bar). The observed grammar school is the only one of its kind in the city and it best reflects the structure of the city's population – it numbers 605 students, of which 32 are not citizens of Montenegro. This school year, a student with developmental disabilities has been enrolled in the grammar school for the first time and she attends classes according to an individual educational plan. This grammar school has been included in the project, among other things, because in order to support the development of the democratic culture, the idea was to use senior student educators from the school for the interventions that would follow. Therefore, during the very process of action research, the plan was to empower the grammar school students to act as promoters of inclusive values in the primary schools involved in the research, but also in other primary schools in the city.

The data on the extent to which the school is inclusive, whether it systematically provides support to children at risk of exclusion and what is the communication of the school like with other stakeholders (parents, responsible state institutions, etc.) was obtained through interviews with school management and professional associates. Through systematic observation of classes (30 hours of work), the following phenomena were observed: communication of all the participants in the teaching process and their sensitivity to the needs of others; frequent team work; existence of practices which seek to form positive attitudes; and social and emotional skills necessary for acceptance of diversity. All these activities have been described in the observation logs. Four focus groups were held through which the participants described the atmosphere in the class, to what extent they identified with the school, what helped them in that regard and what they would change. Focus groups were conducted by pedagogues and this has been covered in the reports. All this was aimed at determining to what extent schools support diversity by their culture and climate, to what extent the school stakeholders are able to provide support to children at risk of exclusion, whether there are obstacles to involving children of other nationalities and those with developmental problems, and whether there are strategies which strive to engage them in a wider social community.

Analysis of the observation data

First of all, it was important to find out how much the climate and the culture of the observed schools support the values of accepting diversity. It has been noticed that the interior of the grammar school is pleasant and bright, that some of the walls are decorated with replicas of works of famous painters painted full-size by the students of the art group. However, the school interior does not have too many messages that promote respect for diversity. Therefore, during the research, the idea was born to create a "wall of tolerance" and produce posters with convenient messages. This activity was successfully accomplished. Through the interview with the school management it was reported that the grammar school the previous year was involved in the project "Through Index to Inclusive Culture" and that a survey was conducted with teachers to assess three aspects of inclusiveness: culture, policies and practice.

The data obtained from the survey indicates that teachers gave high marks to all the indicators related to the field of culture. For example, the indicator “The school environment is safe and promotes the values of mutual respect of differences” is given a score of 4.6 (the maximum rating is 6). The lowest score (3.7) in the assessment of culture was received for the indicator “School staff, parents and students share a common vision, mission and values”. Based on the analysis of surveys and self-evaluation conducted at the school, weaknesses and areas that need to be improved have been identified. Among other things, it has been identified that in the process of planning and improvement of work, parents and other stakeholders are not sufficiently involved. Also, one weakness of school that has been recognised is that of the focus of the teaching process being on the content of the courses, while there is a lack of activities aimed at developing the personality of students in general.²⁸

The walls of the Blažo Jokov Orlandic primary school are decorated with students’ works, various billboards and messages. Thus, on entering the school, one gets the impression of a warm welcome and inclusion of children in the decoration of the interior.

During the interview, the school’s pedagogue states that this school year a detailed self-evaluation of school work was carried out, including the school ethos. The results showed that the majority of students, teachers and parents have a sense of belonging to school. The atmosphere and relations among students are described as positive by 63% of students (“we support each other, help each other, we look forward to the success of others”), while 37% of students believe that jealousy, competitive spirit and frequent quarrels dominate. The grammar school focus group participants (representatives of the student parliament) point out that the school does not support the development of socio-emotional skills, especially not in the secondary school. This is especially reflected in the comments that only a few teachers are willing to talk about extracurricular topics and that they must be aware of the specific nature of their profession and the impact they have on generations. There were also objections to the fact that the school does not support team work.

From the conducted interviews it was learned that in both schools, either independently or with the support of other institutions, the projects aimed at developing a democratic culture are periodically implemented.

When researching to what extent the school stakeholders are open to accepting and supporting the children at risk of exclusion, it was noted that in 2015 the NGO Children of Montenegro in partnership with the GNRC (Global Network of Religions for Children) carried out a project called “Through Education against Prejudice” at the Blažo Jokov Orlandic primary school. The goal of the project was to increase knowledge and competence in schools in order to improve the quality of work with children in the field of social inclusion, reduce prejudice and study the needs of pupils with special emphasis on children with special educational needs. Within the project the children conducted interviews with peers, teachers and parents. The received data indicate that there is a significant number of teachers and students who believe that children with special educational needs should be educated in special schools or special classes. A large number of children have a positive attitude towards inclusive education, but children often report discrimination among students, mostly against those who find it difficult to learn, but also against the best students. They found that the disadvantaged are treated badly. They often encountered mockery and derision of those students.

The interviews with associates in the Blažo Jokov Orlandic primary school gave a striking example that illustrates the problems and emphasises the need for a whole community approach in solving such situations. Namely, a few years ago, in a first-grade classroom, there was a boy with special educational needs. From one side the child was exposed to mockery suggesting that he was an idiot; from the other side, one parent wrote to the school and asked that his child be transferred to another class. His reasoning was that too much of the teacher’s time was devoted to the boy with special educational needs and thus the other children were neglected. He also claimed that this boy interfered with the other children’s study. After talking with a psychologist, pedagogue and teacher, as well as the introduction of personal assistants into classes, the parent was convinced and finally gave up. Still, prejudice is slowly breaking down.

From the notes taken during the observation of classes in the Blažo Jokov Orlandic primary school it could be concluded that the lower-grade teachers do more work with children on the formation of positive attitudes and are more concerned with the development of social and emotional skills compared to teachers in higher grades. In the higher grades, teachers are almost exclusively focused on the content of the subject. In the younger grades, teachers are more concerned about the inclusion of children who are at risk of exclusion and their integration into the group.

The following are some other observations from classes.

28. Data taken from “Plan for Inclusion 2016-2020”, Niko Rolovic Grammar School.

- ▶ The organisation of space in the classrooms does not encourage students' interaction because they sit in pairs and the benches are set up in such a way as to face the front of the classroom. The Roma children sit alone and the other students approach them less, and thus they are only physically present in the group.
- ▶ Children with disabilities are also isolated and focused only on work with their assistants. Teachers only formally address the issue of an idiographic approach to teaching and it was noted that they favour certain students.
- ▶ During breaks nobody interacts with the Roma and the children with disabilities.

From the notes taken during the class observations in the Niko Rolovic grammar school, it was concluded that group and team work are not used enough. Regular classes are not used enough as a resource for developing the social and emotional skills of the students or for forming positive attitudes and values.

From the observed classes including students with special educational needs and some students who had recently enrolled in the school, the following were noted.

- ▶ In their literature class, the students were given excerpts from their school reading, which directly presented them with questions of growing up with diversity.
- ▶ The observed students with special needs sat on their own in every class and were not included in the group work because the teachers did not prepare special material for them and did not ask them any questions.
- ▶ In the music class, the potential of this class was not exploited to promote its universal language.
- ▶ During the debate class, a strong student resistance towards gay marriage was observed. The way in which some teachers (de)motivated students and did not encourage them to work together was also problematic.
- ▶ According to the student who had recently moved to the city, nobody was unfriendly towards her, but was not overly friendly either, and for that reason she was sitting on her own.

On being given the fact that 30% of students in their school believe that there are students in the class with whom no one wants to socialise, the focus group participants (representatives of students' parliament) from the Blažo Jokov Orlandic primary school produced some interesting views. All their comments have one thing in common: students most often exclude from their group those with unusual behaviour and appearance; they oppress those who do not react to aggression and do not pay attention to their appearance. Not even the excellent and neat students are spared the harassment, so that they are branded as "geeks" and teachers' favourites.

- ▶ "In our class nobody wants to hang out with one boy because we are all afraid of him. He keeps threatening us, cursing and coming up with all sorts of things. Sometimes he smells of cigarettes and he brags about it."
- ▶ "We have two girls who are very fat and who are poor students. No one wanted to be in the same room with them when we were on a school trip."
- ▶ "In our class, even good students are sometimes harassed; if you study, you're a nerd and if the teachers praise you, you're their darling and even worse."

When asked to evaluate (on a scale of 1 to 10) the atmosphere in their class (unity, rejection of individuals, conflicts, violence, respecting the classroom rules, and the like), the following were noted by the members of student parliament.

Lower grades were attributed to the classes when they observed a lack of respect for a member of the community, existence of clans or unwillingness to have a dialogue. They gave higher grades to the classes when they perceived unity within the group, (even when it was absent in relation to other classes), when there is jealousy only about grades and when the only problems are absences of some students from classes. They noticed that the following emotions and reactions are most common in their class: concern, happiness, indifference, fatigue, dullness, sleepiness, fear, fun, concentration, relaxation and boredom.

Students also noted that many teachers should change the way they communicate with the students and that they should have more patience for those who do not understand the subject material.

When asked about the obstacles to inclusion of Roma pupils, students with special needs or those who are foreigners in the school community, the perception of professional associates (psychologists, pedagogues) is that most teachers think that the inclusion is not applied adequately. A difference was noted in the efficiency of classroom and subject teachers, in that the classroom teachers try harder and, by patiently talking with their students, they encourage the children to take positive actions towards those who need support. Such positive examples indicate how powerful teachers can be.

The student parliament representatives who took part in the focus groups concluded that children with disabilities face many barriers: prejudice, a lack of acceptance, discrimination, and a lack of appropriate conditions and opportunities for education.

It was interesting to see how the situation at school is perceived by immigrant students. The Russian students who took part in the focus groups pointed out that school in Russia is more demanding, requires more discipline and that one has to be constantly studying. For all the opposite reasons they liked the school they came to and stated that their schoolmates were very helpful. They point out that the biggest obstacle to adaptation to the needs of teaching and the environment is the language barrier. The participants of the mixed focus group (domicile, Russians, Ukrainians), when comparing their cultures, conclude that: the Montenegrin culture is more open than the one from which they came; penal measures are different; the insecure and poor students mostly face problems; it is necessary to introduce more cultural and extracurricular activities; and the students do not respect their teachers enough.

It is interesting to compare the focus groups with the children from Montenegro and Russia. Both the primary and secondary school students from Russia blame the disrespectful students for a bad atmosphere in the class, while the students from Montenegro are less self-critical and often have objections to the work of teachers.

When it comes to the strategies for inclusion, the research associates pointed out that there is no developed system of support for the enrolment of the new students. In schools, support plans for students are written; however, often due to other obligations, they cannot all be realised. From the analysis of the observed classes, interviews and focus groups one can conclude that appreciable progress has been made in breaking the prejudices towards children with special educational needs, but continual work is needed when it comes to developing tolerance and empathy.

In a publication prepared by the Blažo Jokov Orlandic primary school, "The state of the parents", the parents' attitudes are illustrated by the following quote:

We need to educate the public and create the appropriate conditions for inclusion in schools (training of the teaching staff) and adjust the school equipment to the needs of children. The number of classes in which students are presented with their role in the process of inclusion and how they can help their peers should be increased. The inclusion is not only important for children with special educational needs, but also for other children because it affects their socialisation, the development of humanity, a sense of responsibility, understanding of diversity and skills to help others. Today's children do not know how to socialise and play. The computer is their friend and interlocutor.

Focus group participants from the grammar school (representatives of the student parliament) think that the position of children with disabilities is improving, that the campaigns that are conducted contribute to raising the awareness of people, that there is less discrimination and that in every respect more work is done in this area. They also think that children often acquire prejudices from their parents as well as the tendency to discriminate against certain groups of people. The grammar school students feel that to produce change in society, changes need to be introduced in schools; i.e. the school has the power to generate change.

Presentation of the project's intervention

Within the framework of the project Understanding Children at Risk of Exclusion in the Montenegro Educational Context, in April 2017 students and teachers from the Niko Rolovic grammar school, with the support of the local community, recorded a video for the song *Don't laugh at me*. The idea was to use the music video in educational workshops in the city of Bar's primary schools. The workshops sought to encourage the co-operation of the entire community in creating a stimulating environment for the acceptance of diversity. Among other things, it was discovered that the students of the Niko Rolovic grammar school (which was also involved in the first cycle of the project) found themselves playing the role of educators and promoters of values of acceptance of diversity. They were trained for this role by Slavica Vujovic, a pedagogue at the observed school. Student educators (6 male and 11 female students) were introduced to the content and purpose of the workshops as well as the specifics important for the work with lower-school graders. They were each produced with material that contained a short motivational text to be used to start conversations with participants, scenarios for the realisation of workshops and a short minute-taking protocol.

The work was carried out according to the pre-established schedule, in the period 12-19 May 2017. The sample was made up of seven primary schools and 169 students (90 male, 79 female), while the working groups had 20 to 30 students (from grades 6 to 9).

The general impressions of the student educators were positive; they expressed their satisfaction at achieving the goals of the workshops in all the schools and a feeling of pride of being a part of the project. They were particularly satisfied because they had the opportunity to teach others and work on things that are socially useful; it was for them the first experience of this kind. All the student educators expressed a willingness to continue to participate in projects of this type. The following comment made by one of the students speaks volumes about the general impression of the participants.

High school students were thrilled with the idea of taking part in the recording of a video, as evidenced by an extremely large response from students who wanted to take part in the recording. During the recording, what connected the students who participated were the messages conveyed by the song's lyrics, whose verses the students pronounced in unison. After completing the recording, students were not only connected by the song's messages but also by the pleasure of having been a part of a beautifully designed scenario and a milestone that marked the beginning of participation in many activities of this type. The beauty of this project lies in the knowledge that what makes us beautiful is inside ourselves and that the differences between us only produce empathy and understanding which drive and unite us. (A third-grade student at Niko Rolovic grammar school)

In the initial phase, there were slight differences in the levels of participants' enthusiasm, which is possibly one of the indicators of the differences in the schools' organisational climate (educational style) and something that points to the importance of a systematic approach to these topics. All the participants went through four segments of the workshop in a pleasant and open atmosphere. In the introductory part, the student educators presented themselves and described the project. Then, the other participants introduced themselves, describing their emotions at that moment. To a small number of participants, this activity was uncomfortable because they were not used to displaying their emotions openly. In this way, an introduction was made to the discussion of the complexity of emotions and situations in which they emerge. The student educators set up 10 problem situations that the participants identified with and reported back on how they would feel if they found themselves in those situations. The participants successfully distinguished between positive and negative emotions and emphasised that in the situations of oppression of others, they recognised the emotions which are characteristic of loneliness, humiliation, shame and abandonment.

However, instead of identifying a feeling, children often spoke about what they would do in the given situation. This fact justifies educational activities aimed at identifying one's own emotions and those of others.

After this, they all watched a video depicting an example of co-operation between the school and the wider community with the aim of strengthening democratic values and with an emphasis on respecting diversity. All the schools were delighted with this action and expressed a wish that the video be shown again. Its content encouraged everyone to talk about empathy and its importance for the development of a democratic society. Some students did not know the meaning of the word empathy, so this produced some humorous comments. There were also those who tried to express their opinion on this phenomenon through artistic expression.

The above-mentioned content encouraged the participants to cite some concrete examples of peer violence that had occurred in their environment. Nonetheless, one of the quotations that the students chose is the best example of how they perceive the one who excludes and insults the other: "Roughness is an attempt by a weak person to be strong." They also noticed that some of these acts were motivated solely by the need to amuse the group. The respondents recognised and sympathised with the predicament of the injured party, but they also reported their lack of intervention, prompted by the fear that they themselves would be subject to mockery and exclusion from the group.

In their final considerations, the participants agreed that positive experiences are important in the creation of a democratic climate at school, while family and cultural values are also crucial. The participants also emphasised the importance of upgrading their own knowledge and personality, especially through looking up to the role models whose work brings important lessons and encourages them to reflect on their own and others' actions. In one of the schools, as an encouragement, they demonstrated hugging and the communication of words that are seldom openly communicated (*I love you*). Everybody shared a strong desire to take part in such projects again, which is illustrated by the following comment.

Workshops held in seven primary schools in the city of Bar are also of great importance in the realisation of the project's idea. The work with the primary school pupils significantly contributed to the realisation of the project, since the youngest pupils were identified as the target group. Through these workshops, as one of the moderators, I realised that it is not enough to just let the participants see the recorded video. It is necessary to talk to them about whether they feel empathy and how they can transfer their understanding of empathy to everyday situations, when socialising with their peers. As this workshop contained such activities, I believe that the main goal of the project has been achieved. All the participants, both through shooting the video and the workshops that followed, emphasised the importance of accepting differences and nurturing true values. (A third-grade student at Niko Rolovic grammar school)

Our environment contributes significantly to the formation of our experiences, and for this reason it is important that we are exposed to clear messages of tolerance, positive examples and support from practice. At Blažo Jokov Orlandić primary school the interior abounded with messages of tolerance, while the interior of the grammar school, in spite of it being decorated in a creative manner, did not contain explicit calls for tolerance of diversity. Because of this, the grammar school students and their teachers, within the project activities, came up with the idea to paint the “Wall of Tolerance” at a spot which is very visible and is located in a central part of the school. This work was entrusted to the school’s art group who worked as a team, while the material was provided by teachers and parents. The beauty of this type of activity is reflected in a female student’s statement that what makes us beautiful is what we carry inside of us, and that differences between us only stimulate the empathy that drives and unites us.

The final activity was to promote the procedures and results of the project. Dissemination was realised through four groups which acted in different Montenegrin municipalities (Bar, Nikšić and Podgorica). School directors, teachers, representatives of pedagogical-psychological services, university professors (from different fields), NGO representatives and parents took part. The group numbers did not exceed 20. Among other things, this activity served to provide teacher training, and everyone was given the task of drafting and presenting a model in which his or her institution and environment allows a whole community approach to understanding children at risk of exclusion from schools. They also identified the factors important for a democratic school climate. They accepted suggestions for future actions.

Discussion of the project’s findings and results

Montenegro has long been strategically striving towards an inclusive education community. With this as an aim, a holistic approach to education should be nurtured at all educational levels, from preschool education to university, as well as through all school subjects, adult education programmes and lifelong learning, with the aim of involving everybody in the educational system and social community. The laws of Montenegro have enabled these rights, but there are frequent examples when they are not applied in practice.

In this sense, it is essential that the current and future actions work towards: understanding the problem of prejudice and discrimination; increasing sensitivity to the specific needs of children from the minority and marginalised groups; developing interculturality and respect for diversity; improving the knowledge of adults about the consequences of a biased approach in education and ways of overcoming them; respecting laws and the sanctioning of discriminatory behaviour. The school in which a high inclusion of all students is achieved is based on values such as equality, solidarity, reciprocity, respect, respect for differences, co-operation, understanding and equal opportunities. It encourages learning how to live with diversity and how to learn from diversity; how to build a community; how to share with others and how to help each other. Speaking about the inclusion of certain groups, it is necessary to ensure that the individual differences of its members are not lost and that everyone is not seen solely through the prism of those characteristics usually attributed to a group (for example, not all the Roma are poor, uneducated and unemployed).

Inclusive education is at the same time an indication of the general inclusiveness of a society and an incentive to increase inclusiveness. One of the basic goals of quality inclusive education is to influence on the one hand a reduction of all forms of discrimination, and to increase social cohesion on the other.

One way of achieving cohesiveness and engagement of the entire community is the example of activities from this project: how, with the support of the school, parents, prominent individuals and the wider local community, the acceptance of the values of diversity can be promoted.

In the earlier stages of this project, a low level of empathy among students was observed, as well as a lack of competences in certain emotional and social situations. Therefore, through the pre-planned activities carried out in co-operation with the grammar school’s students’ parliament, which had a strong influence on the student population, and through direct peer communication, success was achieved in developing empathy and promoting the acceptance of diversity, as well as in confronting the students in the observed schools with concrete examples of exclusion. It also turned out that it was important that the students were entrusted with the role of educators in order to acquire responsibility and to better identify with others. At the same time the students understood the importance of the teaching profession and the challenges that teachers face while doing the job. “Being in someone else’s shoes or skin” is one of the mechanisms, which encourage compassion, understanding and support. It is therefore necessary to create such community-based activities in which participants can successfully identify with the needs or social status of those who, for some reason, are at risk of rejection.

All this suggests that in preventing the observed problems, it is important to engage more students, to give them a significant place to work with younger students, to use the capacities (contents) of the subject teaching and, before all that, to instruct the teachers and motivate them to organise extracurricular activities directly devoted to the tolerance of diversity.

It is important to constantly work on the development of a democratic climate in the school, through the whole community approach, and to assess the capacities of all the participants who can make their contribution and assign them responsibilities in terms of strengthening co-operation with the wider social community. More precisely, we should remember that our responsibilities towards others do not stop once they leave our field of activity. It is necessary to increase the number of activities related to socially useful work (humanitarian causes, thematic celebrations, days of role exchanges, talks and psychological workshops for the public, etc.) in order to give more space to the practical promotion of democratic values and exchange of interinstitutional experiences (ranging from those who create educational policies and those who implement them to those who are their ultimate beneficiaries). This project suggests that pupils should be entrusted with an active role in educating and motivating their peers, that any educational content can be used to foster democratic values, and especially the content of those subjects which are directly concerned with humans and their experience (literature, music, psychology, etc.). Education should not predominantly focus on cognitive achievements, but it is important for it to be dedicated to the development of emotional and social skills aimed at enhancing co-operation with others, civic activism and willingness to accept differences.

Students with disabilities and special educational needs in the Polish educational context

Marlena Fałkowska, Mikołaj Jednacz, Marzena Rafalska and Olena Styslavska

The project's target group

With its ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and European Union membership, Poland is at the forefront of states where the legal framework, at least in theory, guarantees respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms of people with disabilities. These rights include the right to education. According to the CRPD, a state policy towards people with disabilities should support their independence to a great extent and implement various forms of support that will enable people with disabilities to participate in all spheres of social life and use available services and public institutions.

Inclusive kindergartens, primary schools and lower-secondary schools or classes started appearing in Europe at the beginning of 1960s. This trend reached Poland in the 1990s. The country had to build a relevant and coherent system of support for citizens with disabilities, which would reflect international commitments made in legal acts. Open schools offering inclusive education are one of the main elements of the practical implementation of international legal commitments.

It is easier to change legislation than practice. According to estimates from the Central Statistical Office, 18 to 20% of all learners in Poland are learners with different kinds of special needs: ADHD, dyslexia, chronic diseases and others. This group has increased (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Learners receiving decisions on their need for special education (data from the National System of Educational Information)

School year	General number of students	Students with disabilities	Students with paired impairments	Students with Asperger's syndrome or autism
2010/2011	5 468 502	159 524	19 721	5 951
2011/2012	5 294 000	158 226	20 512	7 817
2012/2013	5 283 714	158 748	21 880	10 238
2013/2014	5 084 953	159 971	23 883	13 299
2014/2015	5 130 176	165 631	26 144	17 137
2015/2016	5 267 419	174 338	28 517	21 883

In the school year 2015/16, there were more than 174 000 students in Poland eligible for and in need of special education. This number constitutes 3.3% of the general student population in Poland. What can we learn about their current situation in the system of education?

According to research conducted by Dr Agnieszka Dudzińska, in 2010 in Poland there were 58 013 kindergartens and schools (primary and secondary). A total of 6.5 million learners were studying in these schools. Only 19 234 educational institutions (33% of the total amount) were also offering education to students with disabilities. The total number of students with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions was 159 600. This is only 2.4% of the general student population in mainstream schools. Among all educational institutions that were giving education to students with special needs, 13% were special kindergartens and schools.

These numbers indicate a significant concentration of students with disabilities in special schools. At the same time, two thirds of Polish educational institutions do not have any contact with learners with special educational needs. More than half (53%) of the schools are in cities with more than 5 000 inhabitants, 44% of the institutions are in villages and only 3% in small towns.

It becomes evident that in reality the concept of inclusive education is not widely spread in the Polish education system. The goal of increasing the number of learners with disabilities and special educational needs in mainstream schools has still not been achieved. The potential and experience of education professionals employed in special schools is still not used for the benefit of inclusion and improved inclusiveness of mainstream schools.

Another study was conducted in 2014 by the Polish Institute for Educational Research (Grzelak, Kubicki and Orłowska 2014). Three thousand parents and directors of schools that provide education to students with disabilities took part in the research. The results, published in the report "Educational pathways of children, students and graduates with disabilities" are concerning.

- ▶ Segregation is still dominating integration. That means that more students are moved from mainstream schools to special schools than in the opposite direction.
- ▶ There are cases when schools do not accept students with disabilities or special education needs, even though this is illegal.
- ▶ The vast majority of parents would prefer to move their child to a special school rather than demand relevant conditions in a mainstream school.
- ▶ Mainstream schools are afraid of accepting students with disabilities and sometimes they simply exclude them.

The report concludes that, as the result, students with disabilities do not use their potential fully, they do not have the chance to confront the outside world with their disability and they do not integrate with society. In the future, such people will have little chance in the labour market. Society creates barriers for its weaker members.

The education system plays an important role in removing barriers for students with special educational needs. Proper organisation and inclusive education will ensure active participation of people with disabilities in social and professional life. Schools need to be supported in that sphere. The aim of the project is to develop recommendations for schools and showcase practical examples of their implementation following the whole school approach.

Promoting inclusive education based on democratic and human rights values is significantly important in societies that have been becoming more and more diverse. The whole school approach promoted by the project assumes that educational goals of schools should be defined and supported by the entire local community.

Educational policies

Educational policies concerning students with disabilities and special education needs have been changing and improving over the last 20 years. Before, the main approach was to provide learners with education in special schools; nowadays, the priority is inclusion and education of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. Classes in mainstream school, where students with disabilities learn, are usually smaller – up to 18 students, in comparison with up to 25-27 students in classes that consist only of students without disabilities. It is possible to recruit up to five students with disabilities to one class. Almost all lessons are conducted by two teachers, one of whom is supporting the aspect of inclusion in the learning process.

State policy focusing on the target group

All these amenities are possible because of the relevant legislation and financing. A major emphasis on inclusion has been reflected in the School Education Act of 2015. Additionally, there are six other important executive acts that regulate the issue of the education of students with disabilities/special education needs (Rafał-Luniewska 2015).

It should be mentioned that the Polish government allocates relatively large resources to financing the education of students with disabilities. They constitute 8.8% of all resources from the central education budget. For example, in 2010 this amount was 3 000 000 000 PLN (approximately 790 million euros). Financial resources intended for students with disabilities depend on the nature of the disability. The minimum amount is 140% of a standard subvention; the maximum amount is 950% of a standard subvention.

Civil society initiatives

With regard to the role of civil society, one should mention the Coalition for Persons with Disabilities, which unites more than 40 organisations and associations in Poland and whose main aim is to support the development

of and assistance for people with disabilities and special educational needs. One of the biggest organisations in this sphere is called the Association of the Friends of Integration. For more than 20 years, the association has been implementing various activities aimed at developing social awareness of the issues of inclusion and encouraging positive attitudes towards people with disabilities. Some of their famous nationwide initiatives include "The Great Gala of Integration", "A Person without Barriers", "Friends of Integration" and many informational and educational social campaigns.

The Public Educational Association for helping maltreated people and people with disabilities, known as Educator, is an example of a successful civil society initiative. Since 2000, it has been taking over small rural schools and other educational institutions which cannot be maintained by local governments because of demographic and financial reasons. The association believes that these schools are important centres of social life for local communities and play a crucial cultural and educational role. That is why the association has been constantly implementing joint projects and actions for local development in these schools. One special area of attention of the association is dedicated to ensuring equal chances and eliminating barriers for children with disabilities and special educational needs, as well as their families. It is remarkable that the association has learned from its own practical experience, which is almost 20 years now, that citizenship and human rights educational initiatives are the best ways to promote inclusion.

People with disabilities in public opinion

Two Polish social attitudes surveys towards people with disabilities were carried out in 2000 and in 2007 by the Centre for Opinion Research. The results show that there have not been essential changes in contact between the whole of society and persons with disabilities. Neither have the attitudes of Poles towards persons with disabilities changed. In 2000, the majority of respondents believed that people with disabilities should be taken care of mainly by the members of their families and there should be some help available from health and social workers. In 2007, fewer people declared their readiness to help disabled people living in the neighbourhood than seven years before. Similarly to the previous survey, the readiness of Poles to help depends on the kind of disability. But the opinions and attitudes towards the employment of people with disabilities has changed. More respondents expressed their opinion that people with disabilities should have a right to employment and work in the open labour market, together with employees without disabilities than did so in 2000.²⁹

Methodology

The context of the research site

According to research commissioned by the Ombudsman in 2012 and published in the report "Equal chances in the access to education for people with disabilities" (Barbara Ewa Abamowska et al. 2012), the percentage of students with disabilities is higher in small village schools and in schools in towns with less than 5 000 inhabitants, in comparison to the percentage of students with disabilities in cities with more than 5 000 inhabitants.

That was the main criteria for the selection of a school for the research. The school setting should represent a learning environment in a mainstream school, which is experienced by the majority of students with disabilities and special educational needs in Poland. According to the report "Equal chances in the access to education for people with disabilities" and taking into consideration the fact that Poland is a rural country, the project team decided to focus on a small village school. It is a school with no more than 70 students and with only one class for each grade.

The following points were taken into consideration when choosing the research site.

- ▶ There were 6 934 small schools in Poland in the school year 2014/2015. More than 56% of them (3 888) were mainstream primary schools.
- ▶ Approximately 24% (1 650) of small schools were lower-secondary schools.
- ▶ Small mainstream primary schools with no more than 70 students make up 30.5% of all primary schools in Poland.
- ▶ Almost 92% of small primary schools are village schools.³⁰

29. Source: communication from the survey, Centre for Opinion research, BS/169/2007.

30. Source: official website of the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Poland.

The situation of small village schools is unique. On one hand, it is a big challenge to manage a small school because of insufficient budgets, and it would be much easier for local authorities not to own the schools. On the other hand, those schools are very often the only centres of social life, education and culture in local communities and it is a very important social issue for a village to have such a school.

A primary school in Lutostań, where the observation was conducted, is a typical small village school. The running of the school was transferred to the association Educator in 2000. There are six classes in the school (from grades 1 to 6) and a kindergarten group. The school is attended by local children from two nearby villages, and by two boys with special education needs that live in a nearby town. The reason why the boys do not attend schools that are closer to their place of living is quite typical. When parents of students from the schools local to the boys and where they were supposed to study learned about their potential inclusion, they expressed strong opposition. The main argument was that the presence of children with disabilities/special educational needs in the classroom would decrease the quality of education. The parents were also concerned by the boys' hypothetical behavioural disorders, which they feared might put the safety of their children in danger. The law allows for the families of children with special education needs to insist on attending the school of their choice, but taking into consideration the negative attitude of the school community, especially the parents, they decided to look for other schools that would be more favourable and accepting.

It was not an easy task though. Even though the primary school in Lutostań is run by an association that aims to support children with disabilities and special needs, the school director and teachers were not enthusiastic about teaching two boys with Asperger's syndrome. In addition, being uncertain of the reaction of parents of their students, the teachers decided not to inform them before the beginning of the school year. As a result, the other parents were surprised when at the beginning of the new school year they saw two new students with signs of disability.

The local environment is a typical agricultural environment, which is quite well developed. Parents of students work on their own farms and raise dairy cattle. All families consist of two parents. They co-operate with the school willingly and help with minor repair work or cleaning. The parents also like attending artistic events, organised by the school on the occasion of bigger holidays. The school is the only place in the village suitable for local meetings, training events and discussions about local issues.

This type of school is rather typical and common in Poland. The relatively small number of students, teachers and parents would allow us a deeper insight into processes that are typical for the whole country – regardless the size of a school. We wanted to observe and study mechanisms at play in situations where “the other” appears in a school community. Apart of observing and describing the mechanisms, we aspired to develop a supportive intervention plan that, through democratic governance and the whole school approach, will transform the school into an inclusive school. The plan should be simple and flexible enough to implement in any other school.

Aims of the observation

1. To describe the situation for students with disabilities/special education needs in the school, taking into consideration a wider school and local context.
2. To formulate recommendations for intervention activities, aimed at changes in school governance and culture to make them more inclusive.

Methodology

The target group of the observation was the whole community of the school: students, teachers, the school director and parents. The research questions were as follows.

- ▶ What attitudes towards diversity do the teachers, parents and students have?
- ▶ Is the school ready to teach students with special educational needs?
- ▶ How did teachers and other students react to the appearance of students with special educational needs? What emotions did they feel?
- ▶ Is the school climate favourable to inclusive education? What are the relationships in the school community? What is the level of communication?
- ▶ Is the school governance favourable to democratic processes? How does the school co-operate with parents and the local community? How open is the school to the local community? Does the school develop citizenship and social competences of students?

Since the selected school was small enough to conduct a thorough research, we decided to use several methods and techniques.

- ▶ Questionnaires – for teachers, students, parents and the director
- ▶ Participatory observation (Shaughnessy et al.)
 - A meeting involving parents and teachers
 - Lessons
- ▶ Non-participatory observation
 - Workshop for parents and teachers
 - Community event
- ▶ Interviews
 - The focus group with parents and teachers
 - Individual interview with the school director

Four experts participated in the research and several research tools were developed.

- ▶ Three interview questionnaires (one for parents, one for teachers and one for the director)
- ▶ Five questionnaires for written answers (parents, teachers, director, students of classes I-III, students of classes IV-VI)
- ▶ “Draw and write” research card
- ▶ Lesson observation card
- ▶ Meetings observation card

All members of the school community were informed about the aims of the project and of the research. The observation itself was conducted in the primary school of Lutostań in the period between 17 February and 10 March 2017. There were five visits to the schools site, two visits to the association that runs the school, telephone conversations and constant contact with teachers, the school director and the authorities via e-mail.

Analysis of the data

Attitudes towards differences and diversity

From the analysis of the information collected from parents and teachers, we can assume that there are significant differences between declared and real attitudes of teachers and parents towards differences and diversity. Here are some examples.

On being asked “Do you think you are a tolerant person?”, 100% of teachers said “yes”. This result differs from the answer of parents, where 54% regard themselves as tolerant and 46% are tolerant depending on the situation.

There were also differences in the answers to the question “Do you think that everyone is unique and has the right to be different?” All teachers responded “yes”, 54% of parents also answered “yes”, while the rest of the parents (46%) chose the answer “somewhat”.

The question “Do you think that the school staff are tolerant?” received the following answers: 80% of teachers and 46% of parents answered “yes”, 20% of teachers and 46% of parents answered “somewhat” and 4% of parents answered “no”.

The same question about students was answered positively by 40% of teachers and 31% of parents; 60% of teachers and 69% of parents answered “somewhat”.

The next question concerned the phenomenon of intolerance of students towards other people in the school. Some 40% of teachers and 23% of parents experienced this phenomenon in the school. It is often exhibited towards people who look different (who are obese, underweight, short or who have disabilities) or have lower intellectual abilities. The intolerant behaviour is more often manifested by bullying.

The results indicate that the school needs to initiate activities aimed at understanding and developing positive approaches towards differences and otherness, especially among parents and students. According to our observations, attitudes of parents are mainly defined by a lack of knowledge and experience and a stereotypical approach to otherness.

School readiness to offer inclusive education

We asked our respondents to assess whether the school is prepared to accept students with disabilities and special educational needs. Several components were subjected to assessment: preparation of teachers, students, supportive staff, co-operation with a local psychological and pedagogical support centre, and co-operation with local authorities and local community. The answers to this question were contradictory. The teachers declared that they were the least prepared and expressed the opinion that the support staff were the most prepared. The opinion of the parents was exactly the opposite. They thought that the teachers were the most prepared, while the support staff were the least prepared. Co-operation with the local psychological and pedagogical support centre and local authorities was well assessed by both groups of respondents.

Furthermore, we wanted to understand how the teachers perceived the social dynamics in a new situation. We asked them to describe the reactions of parents, students and themselves when students with special educational needs started learning in their school. The table below contains typical examples of their answers.

Table 2 – Reactions of teachers, parents and students to students with special educational needs at school

Teachers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fear, but also a challenge to deal with the new situation. 2. Fear, anxiety: how will students and their parents react? 3. Openness, empathy and kindness. 4. Curiosity: what will be different in the course of teaching and learning? Will they manage? 5. Generally, OK. Although with a certain anxiety, as a result of a lack of previous experience of work with students with special educational needs. 6. It was something new, everyone was curious, how would it work out? 7. Without anxiety, but also without enthusiasm. Teachers are always open to new challenges.
Students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Astonishment. They did not know how to behave. 2. Fear of the unknown – of people with disabilities, but also of people outside their small local community. 3. Fear. They were afraid of new students. They did not know them. They were surprised by their strange behaviours. 4. Positively. 5. This situation was new for them, so they were surprised by their behaviour. 6. Surprised, but the majority had a positive attitude.
Parents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fear. They were worried about their own children. 2. They were not happy, because they thought that students with special educational needs will influence the quality of education negatively. 3. They were disoriented. They were worried that the process of education of their own children will be disturbed. They claimed that the new students distract their children during lessons. 4. Positively. 5. Surprised. The majority was positive, except the parents from the IV form (which included the children with special educational needs) – they were not happy.

Fear, anxiety, surprise, astonishment, disorientation and curiosity – these were the most frequently described emotions provoked by the presence of the new students.

The school director thinks that teachers were well prepared to work with students with special educational needs, while the students and parents were not so well prepared. The rhetorical question arises: who, according to the school director, should prepare students and parents?

The problem here might be in the understanding: what does the “work with a student with disabilities/special educational needs” mean? Somehow, the role of a teacher did not embrace the social context of teaching

and learning. Neither the teachers nor the school director felt responsible for the development of attitudes of other students and parents towards the students who were different.

We believe that the understanding by teachers and school directors of their responsibility to not only transfer subject knowledge but also develop citizenship and social competences of the learners is crucial for the success of inclusion.

School climate

A positive school climate is an important factor that facilitates democratic processes and inclusive education. It is formed by relationships, co-operation and governance.

Relationships

At the beginning of the project, observation was intended to be the only research method. However, after a couple of days of observations, we understood that if we wanted to see and describe a real situation in the school, we needed to add other methods of research.

Much of what we observed appeared to us to be rather unnatural. Teachers were over-friendly and supportive, the school director was over-attentive and helpful, the students quite disciplined and helpful. They were even wearing smart clothes.

There was an impression that the school community was trying to show themselves in the best possible way in front of strangers who were not part of their normal daily life. This is natural and the behaviour is understandable. However, the observations could amount to an ineffective research method in the context of a small village school and did not bring anything new to our knowledge about the situation in the school.

The exception might be some observations carried out during the meetings with parents. First of all, only mothers come to school. This situation, according to the school director and teachers, is traditional. Everyone explained that fathers have to work on farms and do not have free time. This explanation is rather unclear, because both men and women work on farms, especially the small family farms that are typical of the region.

During the meetings we observed several tendencies.

- ▶ Parents wanted to remain polite, which seems to indicate that they did not want to contradict and wanted to accept everything the teachers said.
- ▶ Parents of the children with special educational needs did not integrate with the parents of the rest of the children.
- ▶ Parents of the children with special educational needs seemed to try to explain to the others the everyday difficulties they and their children have to face. At the same time, they seem to monopolise the discussion with their problems and emotions, which caused negative reactions (and probably irritation) on the part of the other parents.
- ▶ Other parents did not express their irritation verbally, but they withdrew from communication.
- ▶ Teachers did not make attempts to establish an open discussion. They seemed (or pretended) not to notice the tension and hidden conflict. They referred to the verbal level of communication, which is polite, positive and correct.
- ▶ At the same time, parents of children with special educational needs seemed to be happy that they and their children were accepted and taken care of in this school. They expressed gratitude to teachers and said that their children were happy in that school. It is evident that the parents appreciated the attention and care their children received in this school.
- ▶ The relationship established between the teachers and parents could be described as polite, but we could not describe it as a partnership.
- ▶ Both teachers and parents understood “co-operation with parents” as meaning technical, organisational and financial help from parents for the school, when parents were asked for it.

A lot of information was received from the student questionnaires.

Younger students said that they liked the school and attended it willingly. They also said that they were treated well, the teachers were fair and everyone could expect support if faced with problems. Teachers encouraged the students' positive self-esteem and helped them when they needed it. Students liked spending time with their classmates and schoolmates; they did not bully each other and did not play nasty tricks on their mates.

From older students we wanted to know their opinion on eight issues: the level of satisfaction with the school; the opportunities for active participation and decision making; the support from teachers; external motivation; students' rights; the relations between students; violent behaviour; and the levels of stress.

Almost all of the students thought that teachers encouraged them to express their opinion, helped them to discover their talents and motivated every student to achieve success. Most of respondents thought that their classmates accepted them as they are but 25% of students felt different and unaccepted.

Only half of students said that teachers discussed classroom rules with them. But at the same time, almost 90% of students answered that they know their rights and obligations. What is more, the same number of students declared that they did not notice situations when their rights were violated and according to the respondents the other students did not break the established rules. If we compare 90% of positive answers to the question if students know their rights and responsibilities with 50% of positive answers to the question if rules are discussed at all, we may assume that either "knowledge of rights and responsibilities" is a certain unspecified concept, or that rules are not discussed and negotiated because "everyone knows" what the rules should be.

The answer to one of question deserves special attention. Three quarters of students declared that they felt stressed at school. But at the same time, all students declared that they enjoyed being together, and being kind and helpful to each other. These answers, in combination with observations made by the experts, give a completely different perspective on the situation at school.

From the information received, we concluded that the sphere of relationships at the school needs improvement, especially between parents and between teachers and parents.

Co-operation

Co-operation leads to meaningful connections among group members. It also influences their identification with a group and ensures the sustainable and effective achievement of common aims.

Both teachers and parents were satisfied with the level of co-operation. It is interesting to compare arguments of the two groups of respondents. Teachers were positive in their comments: for example, "they are willing to co-operate". Among the positive comments from the parents, one came across opinions like "there are good times and bad times" or "when they need us, they treat us nicely".

Parents need better co-operation with the school to be able to support their children better.

It is evident that the parents are a great resource for the development of a small village school. Open discussion, active listening, constructive communication and common problem-solving may help to activate this hidden resource, which contains a lot of potential. But parents will not activate themselves and declarations of co-operation or invitations to co-operate will also not help. It is in the power of teachers to start this open dialogue with the parents and to moderate the process. The process should help both sides to define common problems (not only the problems, as defined by teachers), think of possible solutions and plan concrete steps.

Based on the received information and our observations, we concluded that understanding of co-operation in this school community is a long way from how it would normally be defined. It is too narrow. Teachers generally define co-operation as the actions of parents for the school or to help the educational process of their children. A lack of democratic governance in the school is evident. Parents are not included in the decision-making processes.

Co-operation with education authorities, support centres and in-service teacher training centres is adequate.

"Safety zone" – the pitfalls of a small school

The parents stressed many times that they expect the school to help their children to be more free, open and brave. Parents admitted that their children were shy, especially in new situations and outside their local community. Parents said that, as a rule, children from villages are shyer than children from big cities. They also regard it as a big disadvantage, because even if the quality of education in cities and villages is equal and the atmosphere in small village schools is more favourable, village children are disadvantaged in the higher education system and in the labour market because of their shyness. From our point of view, the phenomenon referred to by the parents is rather more about a lack of social and citizenship competences, which are naturally better developed among children from big cities who are more exposed to diversity and various challenges. We would assume that a "safe family atmosphere", which is a matter of pride at the school, also has hidden threats. It creates a constant "safety zone", where everybody knows his/her place and all the right and wrong

answers. This “safety zone” does not challenge students and does not create space for the development of their social and citizenship competences, which are very important for successful functioning in society. In this regard, we would recommend schools to pay special attention to the development of pupils’ citizenship and social competences, through various project activities, going out beyond the classroom walls and reaching the outside world as much as possible.

It is also remarkable that the parents expressed the need to learn more about disability. This is a very good sign, showing that the parents are ready to confront themselves with this problem. If we remind ourselves of the reactions to the presence of students with disabilities at the school, most of the feelings were connected with the fear of the unknown, “the different”. We can assume that the role of the school in this case is to try to make this issue familiar. This task might be challenging for the teachers because, according to the research, they are incompetent in this issue themselves. An additional difficulty is that in the issue of disability and special education needs, it is not enough to be emphatic and open-minded. Each kind of disability/special educational need requires a certain professional approach and a lot of knowledge of the subject. The analysis of teachers’ answers show that because of the lack of knowledge about relevant approaches to children with Asperger’s syndrome, teachers treat these students the same way as they treat the other students, thinking that this is the essence of equal treatment. This is a mistake. Equal treatment in this situation will be an adaptation of working methods with the students with Asperger’s syndrome to their special needs. As a result, a lot of tension and stress, as mentioned by the students in the questionnaire, will be released. We see an urgent need for training for all the school’s teachers in how to educate pupils with Asperger’s syndrome. At the same time, teachers need to ensure that additional workshops for parents (run by specialists) are also available. The best solution would be to contact one of the non-governmental organisations that support people with Asperger’s syndrome and their families.

The respondents to our questions imply that the school presents itself as an open, friendly and inclusive place. However, it seems that it is mostly a superficial claim, with no authentic respect for diversity. The results of the surveys in both age groups are similarly very positive, which creates an almost utopian picture of an ideal school. This picture contradicts with the fact that according to the survey, 75% of students feel stressed at school. Does it mean that giving positive answers to the direct questions about friendly and inclusive school climate most students were driven by the desire to give “the right answer?” The subconscious gap between the authentic and free self and the desire to “fit in” in order to be accepted creates cognitive dissonance, which is expressed by tense and shy behaviour (that was observed during visits to school) and high levels of stress.

It seems that teachers are not competent enough to “open up” difficult subjects and touch upon controversial issues. That is why they prefer not to notice “uncomfortable issues”. If we want to create a genuinely inclusive environment, we have to learn how to address controversial issues as well.

Conclusions from the first phase

Generally, we can conclude that the school is rather open to new challenges, or at least, teachers and the school director declare their openness. Teachers also said that they make a lot of effort to ensure a safe family atmosphere at school, so the learning process is smooth.

However, we would like to make several comments about the understanding of a “safe family atmosphere”. If safety means a lack of controversy, a social pressure to fit in and a lack of opportunities to leave the “comfort zone”, it leads to a lack of self-esteem and a lack of initiative and active participation – to what is called, according to parents, “shyness”. As the result of underdeveloped citizenship and social competences, children have fewer chances in higher education and in the labour market, which is a big concern expressed by their parents. That is why it is very important for the school staff to rethink the concept of a positive school atmosphere and to include new active methods of teaching and learning, project work, community work and discussions on controversial issues.

Lack of previous experience in teaching students with special educational needs is a challenge not only for teachers but also for the non-pedagogical school staff and for parents. We observed a friendly attitude towards the issue from the side of the teachers; however, we did not notice any serious attempts to learn more about the disability of their students and special educational approaches that should be implemented in their case. It might be the role of a school director and the institution that runs the school to motivate teachers to use available learning resources (for example, consulting associations for people with Asperger’s syndrome and national and regional in-service teacher training centres, or reading literature on the subject) in order to adjust their teaching and communication style to the special educational needs of their pupils. At the same time, teachers should raise awareness of Asperger’s syndrome among parents of other students, especially since many parents requested more information.

There is a tension between the parents and the teachers caused by a lack of open discussion about students with special educational needs. In theory, everybody knows that everyone should be accepted, but the subject of disability should not be a taboo. Unable to voice their concerns, unaware of how others feel or left to rely on themselves, parents can be frustrated or confused about the situation at school. At the same time, subjects that cause strong feelings and divided opinions should be dealt with with care and attention. Teachers should learn how to engage in dialogue with different people whose values might be also different. The parents were very clear in their questionnaires and interviews that they expected an open dialogue with the school about the new students. A lack of confidence and competence to address controversial issues is the most probable reason why there is no dialogue between teachers and parents.

While designing a plan of intervention for the selected school, we would recommend taking into consideration the following activities.

- ▶ To include the local community in school life and vice versa.
- ▶ To strengthen co-operation with parents.
- ▶ To raise awareness of autism in school and among the local community.
- ▶ To include students in the decision-making processes.
- ▶ To develop democratic school governance.
- ▶ To develop a school policy of inclusion (all school stakeholders should be involved).
- ▶ To develop teachers' competences (especially teaching controversial issues, collaborative methods, value-based education, education of learners with Asperger's syndrome).
- ▶ To develop students' social and citizenship competences (especially empathy, conflict solving, co-operation and emotional awareness).

But first and foremost, teachers have to understand and accept that their responsibility is to equip learners with subject knowledge, and also, perhaps even more importantly, to be responsible for the development of citizenship and social competences of pupils. It is crucial for the success of inclusion. The Council of Europe has developed a conceptual model of the competences that need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully with others in culturally diverse societies. It is called Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) and was launched at the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education in 2016. It becomes evident that there is a need to include the CDC framework competence in the pedagogical design of the school.

Presentation of the project's intervention

Preparation phase

According to the results of observation and research (questionnaires given to teachers, parents, the school director, students and community partners) at the primary school of Lutostań, the main spheres of school culture, where the project's intervention should take place, were defined as follows.

1. Communication (between students, between students and teachers, between teachers, between teachers and parents, between teachers and the school director, between the school director and parents).
2. Teaching controversial issues and expressing personal opinions.
3. Collaborative methods of teaching and learning.
4. Project work.

At the same time, there was a need to test recommendations, formulated by the project partners in the previous phase of collaboration within the "Addressing Violence in Schools through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education" project (Council of Europe 2016a).

Those recommendations were used as a theoretical background for the intervention plan.

The general recommendations were as follows.

1. To encourage dialogue between all school stakeholders.
2. To strengthen co-operation between all school stakeholders.

3. To organise events that unite all school stakeholders and give them space to interact and participate in the process of common decision making.
4. To attract local resources to strengthen dialogue and co-operation in schools.
5. To develop empathy, conflict resolution skills and emotion management skills.
6. To replace competition with collaboration.
7. To involve students in constructive and creative activities.
8. To reflect inclusion and collaboration in school policies. The process of school policy development itself should become participatory, open to everyone and ongoing.

The main approach used for the intervention was to address teachers first, offering training and support and encouraging them to collaborate in order to define and solve school problems in an analytical and planned way.

However, it was also very important that the teachers did not regard intervention activities as an external intrusion into their routine. For this reason, they were included from the very beginning in the discussion, planning and design of all events. So, the first training for teachers, which took place on 22 March 2017, was to present the concept of democratic school culture, the Council of Europe resources for teachers and to plan intervention activities together. That would ensure teachers' ownership of the intervention activities and their better motivation during the implementation phase.

The intervention plan that was developed as the result of the training included five training sessions for teachers, one training session for teachers and parents, a whole school event, five community events and 10 lessons for students. Two Council of Europe publications were selected for work with students: "Compasito – the Manual on Human Rights Education for Children" and the "Teaching controversial issues" training pack. The plan was made for three months, from 22 March to 22 June 2017.

It is important to mention that the intervention plan was not only based on the general recommendations of the "Addressing violence in schools through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education" project. There were seven specific recommendations formulated in the project report.

1. To include all school stakeholders.
2. To improve democratic school governance (share your power as a school director with teachers, students and parents).
3. To encourage students to be involved in school governance.
4. To develop teachers' awareness, professional autonomy, responsibility and motivation.
5. To develop a school inclusive policy.
6. To teach how to address controversial issues and how to mediate.
7. To constantly communicate with parents to get their understanding, acceptance and support.

All of them were addressed by the intervention activities. The last column in Table 3 shows which specific recommendations were addressed by each activity in particular.

Table 3 – Intervention activities for the primary school of Lutostań.

No	Event	Date	Specific recommendations
1.	Community event "Day of Spring"	22.03.2017	1,2,3,7
2.	Teacher training – Democratic school climate and democratic governance of a school	22.03.2017	4
3.	Teacher training – Collaborative teaching and learning, controversial issues, conflict resolution and Council of Europe teaching tools	29.03.2017	4
4.	Teacher training – learners with AS at school and kindergarten	30.03.2017	4
5.	School celebration of World Autism Awareness Day	03.04.2017	5,6
6.	A lesson from <i>Compasito</i> /Controversial issues	03.04.2017	6

No	Event	Date	Specific recommendations
7.	A lesson from <i>Compasito</i> /Controversial issues	10.04.2017	6
8.	A lesson from <i>Compasito</i> /Controversial issues	19.04.2017	6
9.	Community event "International Earth Day"	21.04.2017	1,2,3,7
10.	Teacher training – Value-based teaching, learning and school governance	22.04.2017	4
11.	A lesson from <i>Compasito</i> /Controversial issues	26.04.2017	6
12.	A lesson from <i>Compasito</i> /Controversial issues	08.05.2017	6
13.	A lesson from <i>Compasito</i> /Controversial issues	17.05.2017	6
14.	A lesson from <i>Compasito</i> /Controversial issues	22.05.2017	6
15.	Community event "Mother's Day"	26.05.2017	1,2,3,7
16.	Teachers and parents meeting – Presentation of the concept and benefits of an inclusive school	26.05.2017	5, 7
17.	A lesson from <i>Compasito</i> /Controversial issues	29.05.2017	6
18.	Community event "International Children's Day", development of an Inclusive School Code	01.06.2017	1,2,3,5,7
19.	A lesson from <i>Compasito</i> /Controversial issues	06.06.2017	6
20.	A lesson from <i>Compasito</i> /Controversial issues	20.06.2017	6
21.	Teacher training – Evaluation of intervention	23.06.2017	4
22.	Community event "End of the school year", focus group with project stakeholders and evaluation of intervention	23.06.2017	1,2,3,5,7

Implementation phase

The programme of intervention was implemented according to the plan. There were three main directions of intervention – community events, training for teachers and parents, and training for students.

Community events

These events were opportunities for all school stakeholders to come together, communicate and participate in the decision-making process, share responsibilities and contribute to the common interest. The organisation of such events integrates school stakeholders: students, parents, teachers and representatives of the local community. It also influences democratic school governance, activates students, teaches them to work in a group and improves communication at all levels: communication between students, students and teachers, teachers, teachers and parents, teachers and school director.

These events brought a new energy to the routine of the community and were the highlight of the project in Lutostań. To give a general impression about the perception of the events by the project target groups, the text below contains quotations from the participants in some of the events. All text comes from the school website.

Mother's Day

"Before this day, we were making special presents for our mothers – we painted their portraits and put them on the walls of our school corridor."

International Children's Day

"That was a very big family picnic. We invited our neighbours from the village of Koty, partners from our school, representatives of the local authority, the local fire brigade and a representative from "Educator" ... After the performances, there were many different games for everyone. Children and parents took part in games together, as teams. We laughed lot."

Training for teachers and parents

Although training sessions for teachers and parents were not as joyful and well promoted as the community events, they were a no less important part of the intervention programme. Community events themselves, without a constant reflection on what is done, how it is done and what the outcomes are, would not have brought about the desired changes. They would have only strengthened the traditional patterns we wanted to change with the help of an intervention programme. That is why all five community events were followed and preceded by a training session. Each training session followed Kolb's cycle: it consisted of reflection on a new practice, conclusions and new inputs and further planning. Community events were a space for practical experiences and were the remaining element of Kolb's learning cycle.

Four training sessions were organised for teachers only, and one training session was organised for teachers and parents together. There was also training where the peer-learning approach was used – mothers of students with Asperger's syndrome shared their experiences with other parents and teachers. This common training for teachers and parents was a first attempt to bring parents and teachers as learners together, which was quite challenging from the perspective of both groups – teachers and parents – but it was very important to give it a try from the perspective of partnership and inclusive school climate development.

The training for teachers and parents focused on the understanding of children with Asperger's syndrome as learners and as society members.

It was also an opportunity for a very important discussion. Teachers and parents were able to confront their stereotypes, that students with special educational needs reduce the educational opportunities of other students and general quality of education. We were able to show the other perspective to the participants and to make the participants aware that children with special needs, if they learn in an inclusive school climate, are a big opportunity for schools, because they foster development of socio-behavioural and citizenship competences of students and other school stakeholders, which prevent bullying and violent extremism and improve life chances for everyone.

Both teachers and parents were learners during this training. This situation was difficult for both groups at the beginning of the training. However, by the end of the training the situation changed. Teachers understood that they can learn from parents. Parents were encouraged to share their experience and saw teachers as partners in learning.

Training for students

It was not only adults who were learning during these three months. Training was also given to students. Every week, from the beginning of April until the end of June, students of the primary school in Lutostań participated in one lesson that was selected by their teachers from *Compasito – the Council of Europe Manual on Human Rights Education for Children*. The lessons were selected to achieve concrete aims: to develop empathy and conflict-solving skills, to teach them how to manage emotions and to involve students in constructive and creative interactions.

There was no special preparation for the teachers' work with the *Compasito* material. First, we wanted to test whether the manual is easy enough to be used by teachers without prior external training. Second, we wanted to encourage regular peer learning among the teachers of the school. That was one more opportunity for teachers to collaborate, share their experience and develop their competences. Both expectations were fully met. *Compasito* appeared to be easy to work with and weekly lessons soon became very popular among students and teachers. Teachers invited each other to see how the selected scenario worked in practice, while students became very enthusiastic, active and collaborative during the "different" lessons.

Results of intervention activities

For students

The main positive emotions and impressions of students were connected with their experiences with *Compasito*. They said that these lessons gave them the "ability to speak out", which is very important feedback, especially if we recall the opinion of parents and teachers at the beginning of the project that children are "too shy to express their opinion". Most probably, the methods that were used in school did not give children the opportunity to speak. Children said that they wanted more lessons where they are invited to express their opinion and speak with each other.

Students also enjoyed community events, especially the preparation for these events, the participation in the decision-making process, sharing responsibilities and co-operation.

An important observation from parents concerned the change in their children's attitude towards their classmates with special educational needs:

at the beginning, when they came home from school, they were saying that the new students are impatient, that they do not understand certain things. Then they stopped. Now, they tell about how they helped their "new friend", how they were happy together, that they managed to do the task. Their hearts grew bigger.

Parents understand this phenomenon as an indicator of a better school climate.

Students with special needs were participating in the focus group. They seemed not to take active part in the discussion, but at the end of the focus group one of them said: "I will be missing my friends during the summer". We see this as very important feedback that brought a lot of satisfaction to all project's participants.

For teachers

The proposed activities had an essential influence on the emotional and intellectual integration among teachers. Their pedagogical cognitive curiosity was also awakened. We found out that the teachers were very attentive in observing changes that were taking place in the class where students with special educational needs were studying. First of all, they wanted to come to their own conclusions on how the presence of students with special educational needs influence the educational achievements of other students. According to the teachers, there is no connection between the presence of students with special educational needs and the educational achievements of other students in the class. From our observations, this conclusion influenced the positive self-esteem of teachers. It reinforced their professional self-confidence, especially with regard to inclusive education. If we compare this with the needs assessment at the beginning of the project, where teachers indicated themselves as the least prepared to work with students with special educational needs, we can regard this fact as one of the important pieces of proof that the tested approach is efficient.

All teachers agreed that intervention activities were very engaging. They all noticed positive changes in their work; for example: "We started supporting students to formulate questions, not statements"; "We noticed that the role of teachers is to organise and support a learning process for students". What is more, the teachers said that the idea of democratic school and an inclusive school climate enhanced their interest in issues connected with a child's development in general.

One more sphere that was positively influenced by the project intervention was the relationship with the school director and parents. According to the teachers, a common concern for children connected parents, teachers and the school director. Community events and common training were especially helpful in this respect. Constant interest and encouragement from the educational authorities were additional motivating factors: "All of us participated responsibly in the organisation of common events. This improved our relations."

For parents

First, parents said that they noticed that teachers put a lot of effort into creating a friendly environment for all students. Parents of children with special educational needs said that their children "are more satisfied, when they come back from school" and that they "see their names in the school newspaper and on exhibitions of students' achievements".

Parents admit that at the beginning they were worried that students with special educational needs would cause chaos during lessons and absorb most of the teachers' attention. Now their opinion has changed. At the same time, children with special educational needs also became more relaxed and easier to communicate with. Parents appreciate that parents of children with special educational needs are actively engaged in all school activities and share their knowledge about their children. That helps to understand their special needs. A parent also shared a very interesting observation that "empathy coming from teachers helps other parents deal with their fears and start trusting each other". According to us, this is a very nice description of an inclusive school climate.

The participation of the fathers in school events had also increased. Before the intervention, they were rare guests at school. Women were supposed to be responsible for "contact with the school". Community events were the occasions for all parents to co-operate and to improve relationships. Meetings with teachers are different now. They feel that they are partners with teachers and meet to solve problems of teaching, learning and everyday life.

The other positive change is improved contact between parents of children with special educational needs and parents of other children. One of the mothers even started sharing her experience with other parents and teachers on the issues of Asperger's syndrome. Teachers said that they learned a lot from her and the knowledge was very helpful.

Parents' engagement in general has increased. Parents understood that they are welcome and can influence school life. They started suggesting their own initiatives.

Discussion of the project's findings and results

Democratic governance of an inclusive school, which is widely promoted by the Council of Europe, is an approach that is aimed at active engagement of all school stakeholders and representatives of the local community in order to maximise from their potential and achieve common goals. This approach was piloted in a small village school for three months in order to develop its inclusive climate and make it better prepared for the needs of students with special educational needs.

At the school community level, which was the focus of this research project, the main participants in inclusive education governance at the specific site were the students, teachers, parents who were at the same time the representatives of the local communities, the director of the school and local authorities.

Observation activities at the beginning of the project revealed a lack of democratic governance at the school, which is mainly conditioned by relations and co-operation. Co-operation itself was understood by the teachers as the activities of parents for the school or to support the achievement of academic results for their children. Parents were not involved in the decision-making processes. The sphere of relationships among school stakeholders also needed improvement. There was tension between the parents and teachers, caused by a lack of open discussion about students with special educational needs. Teachers should learn how to engage in dialogue with different people whose values might be also different. Lack of confidence and competence to discuss controversial issues was the most probable reason why there was no dialogue between teachers and parents.

A lack of previous experience in teaching students with special educational needs was a challenge not only for teachers but also for the non-pedagogical school staff and for parents. It is the role of a school director and the institution that runs the school to motivate teachers to use available learning resources (contact with associations helping people with Asperger's syndrome and with national and regional in-service teacher training centres, consulting literature on the subject, etc.) in order to adjust their teaching and communication style to the special educational needs of their learners. At the same time, teachers should raise awareness about people with Asperger's syndrome among parents of other students, especially since many parents had requested more information.

The school director demonstrated a lack of competence in the democratic governance of a school. She was sincerely concerned about creating a friendly school atmosphere and wanted to create a safe environment for all students, but she was not taking actions aimed at the active involvement of all school stakeholders in open dialogue, problem-solving and decision-making processes at the school.

At the beginning of the intervention activities, we suggested to teachers a framework of activities to improve problem areas at the school and invited them to decide themselves on concrete actions and timeline. The framework defined the main spheres of school culture, where the project's intervention should take place.

- ▶ Communication (between students, between students and teachers, between teachers, between teachers and parents, between teachers and the school director, between the school director and parents).
- ▶ Teaching controversial issues and expressing personal opinions.
- ▶ Collaboration among stakeholders and collaborative methods of teaching and learning.
- ▶ Project work.

The main idea was to create opportunities at school that would consolidate all school stakeholders and representatives of the local community around activities that were meaningful for everyone and simple enough so that everyone could participate and contribute.

The beginning of the intervention was quite challenging, because we had to deal with hidden resistance from the side of almost all school stakeholders, when they were invited to come together at the beginning of the project. During the first few meetings for joint planning of the project's intervention activities, parents and teachers demonstrated a reserved attitude. For this reason, the project team decided to change the approach

and suggested the general structure of intervention, giving the school stakeholders freedom to choose tasks and methods of planning in accordance with their own area of proximate development. The experts monitored developments through constant contact with the school director and one of the teachers, ensuring that the main aims remained the same. That is why the events that were selected by school stakeholders seemed to be quite traditional – performances, celebration of days, training events for teachers and students – but the difference was achieved by methods, approaches, the inclusion of all school stakeholders (democratic governance) and a human rights values-based approach.

All activities from the intervention plan were very helpful for developing a democratic school culture and an inclusive school climate. The project ensured the active participation of parents, teachers and the school director. It appeared that common planning, discussions, collaboration and organisation of events for the local community had a positive influence on interpersonal relationships and on the level and quality of co-operation among all school stakeholders. It has also given a good start to defining and developing democratic governance at the school.

In addition, changes were observed in four main areas.

First, teachers, parents and community members started to pay more attention to the needs of students, not only to the needs of students with special educational needs, but to all students in general. Each student started to be treated more individually, as an individual personality with all her/his diverse attributes. Second, school stakeholders tended to see the presence of students with special educational needs not as a threat but as an opportunity for the whole school, an opportunity to develop socio-emotional and behavioural competences. Third, as a result of different and new forms of teaching learning, the intervention helped to reduce barriers in the organisational structure of the school's functioning. The school director and teachers were more open to experimenting with new forms. Finally, teachers understood the need for constant professional development, which is not typical for rural territories.

At the beginning of the intervention we thought that the very limited time we had would not allow us to see changes. Although time was very limited, and the resistance of teachers and parents at the beginning was noticeable, the results proved to be positive.

However, although the change is evident within all project target groups, three months is not sufficient time to make the changes sustainable. Because of time limitations and the short duration of intervention activities in the school, the effects of some activities will be visible in the longer term. In order to sustain the positive changes initiated by the project, the school stakeholders should continue their work on democratic school governance and on inclusive school climate in the following year. In this respect, the crucial role belongs to the school director, who should offer strong leadership to lead the process of change.

Part 4

Conclusions

Points for consideration

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Methodological considerations

Any attempt to conduct and interpret comparative research is confronted with unsettling epistemological questions related to social and historical specificities and contextual differences among the different countries (Schriewer 2003; Cowen 2006). The six countries that participated in this project have followed different historical and political trajectories, five of them being post-communist states (Bulgaria, Hungary, Montenegro, Poland and Romania), while one of them (Greece) has always been part of the Western political and economic alliances (NATO and the EU). Today they are all EU member states with the exception of Montenegro, which has been in EU accession negotiations since 2012. Although all the states respond differently to recent global challenges, most notably to the contemporary migration and refugee crisis, they are all committed to the promotion of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Even though the charter does not constitute a legally binding document, it contributes to the development of a shared framework of principles and rights that ought to prevail in educational settings. While taking into consideration the aforementioned condition, this project has studied processes of educational inclusion in the six different national contexts, since inclusion should represent an unconditionally endorsed democratic principle in European education systems.

The six national case studies differ in terms of the nature of the focus target group. Two cases focus on ethnic minorities with a long history of presence in the specific context, such as Roma students in Bulgaria and Hungary, while Greece and Romania study people on the move, i.e. refugees and newly arrived migrants. Moreover, the study of disability in Poland and the concept of children “at risk of exclusion” in Montenegro diversify even further the dimensions of heterogeneity and social discrimination, alongside the analytical category of ethno-cultural origin.

The research represents settings of different degrees of urbanisation, varying from inner-city areas of high density and complexity (in Greece and Hungary) to suburban and rural areas (as in Poland). While most of the case studies have been conducted in ethnically and socio-economically mixed schools, some rather distinct and socially isolated institutions have been studied as well (the segregated Roma school in Hungary and the transitional structures for refugee education in Greece).

In all cases fieldwork has aimed at understanding the context and the challenges for educational inclusion by using methodological tools of action research. The scale of interaction between the researcher and the research subjects varied from participant observation to more participatory and interactive methods of ethnographic research.

Conceptualisations of the “whole community” may also differ. The notion of the “whole school community” refers to a mode of education governance that embraces stakeholders who act within the schools, basically students, teachers and parents. It places particular emphasis on the internal relationships, bonding mechanisms and modes of engagement of those within the school. It stresses the importance of a good school climate and draws attention to a school culture of collaboration, participation, non-discrimination, egalitarianism, tolerance, respect and recognition of any type of difference. Diversity, however, is not a necessary condition of a “whole school community”, since the emphasis on the internal unity and cohesiveness may discourage representation of multiple identities and could potentially facilitate monoculturalism. Social closure strategies on the part of certain groups, aiming either at safe environments for what are conceived as vulnerable identities or at the systematic exclusion of otherness, tend to develop apparently harmonious but socially isolated school communities, which do not contribute to social integration and inclusion. The whole community approach, on the other hand, represents a mode of governance that seeks the holistic involvement of the various social actors who are materially or intellectually affected by educational institutions and are interested in participating in school governance. It emphasises the openness of the school to the wider community and civil society. The whole community approach draws attention to the links between the school and the wider social environment and it rejects excluding practices. In this sense, the whole community can be a form of social involvement and deliberative democratic school governance. Thus, the term “whole school community” should not be interpreted as identical to that of the “whole community”. While the “whole community” could be perceived as a notion broader than the “whole school”, under certain circumstances the two terms might represent mutually conflicting strategies. However, as the Hungarian case study clearly reveals, the positive school climate and consequently the development of the whole school community is a necessary condition for the opening of the school to the wider community to include otherwise deprived and segregated social groups. In this respect, building the school community is a major challenge both for openness and for inclusion.

The contribution of this project is the exploration of conditions for educational inclusion in real contexts, representative of the existing reality prevailing in the different European education systems. Instead of creating idealised schemes as pilot models, this project attempts to understand contemporary challenges and experiment with procedures of democratic school governance situated within the reality that European teachers deal with in their everyday work life. However, a significant limitation of the project is its short duration. Inclusion is a long-term process while action research interventions are based on relationships of trust among the participants. The researchers’ presence in any context may perturb the internal routine of the target institution and the interaction of those within it, while sustainable relationships of trust need time to be built.

The challenges of inclusion

Segregation and power dynamics

Segregation strategies represent a major challenge for inclusion. Segregation is not only an educational policy construct, i.e. designated separate structures for specific social groups and established segregated schools. Social discrimination, xenophobia and prejudice against social groups that do not adhere to or challenge dominant hierarchies and identities represent broader social practices enacted within educational contexts, thus leading to segregation. The systematic isolation and social segregation of certain social groups are visible in all case studies, but most notably in the case of the Roma. Social closure strategies may be developed both on the part of the powerful and of the disadvantaged social groups. On the part of the more powerful ones, practices of systematic exclusion can lead to patterns resembling those of “gated communities” that develop territoriality and deny access to newcomers or those who are perceived as socially inferior or culturally different. Fear of contamination of identity, ethnocentrism and demonstration of supremacy usually lie behind parental complaints formulated as “why in our school” in relation to refugee education in Greece and Romania. On the other hand, in situations of imbalanced power dynamics, some marginalised social groups tend to deploy strategies of self-protection, creating safety nets and areas of trust within socially isolated structures. For example, while Roma people are associated with negative and derogatory social representations, they tend to live in ghetto communities and attend segregated schools. The educational and social segregation of Roma students in Hungary and Bulgaria could be interpreted as the combined outcome of the above two-way processes and not necessarily as a passive response of the disadvantaged to their social subordination.

The intersection of socio-economic disadvantage, ethno-cultural difference and social segregation results in the low educational achievement of Roma, which is often unjustifiably followed by the assumption that “Roma are not interested in education”. Similar prejudicial assumptions are mentioned with regard to refugees in Greece. Educational inclusion of potentially vulnerable social groups, such as the Roma, newly arrived migrants,

ethnic minorities or people with disabilities, should address rather than ignore the specific material conditions of the respected student population, thus allowing recognition, respect and, subsequently, diversification of curricula and educational provision. A possible danger, however, is the potential legitimisation of segregating policies and practices on the grounds of diversification and, allegedly, respect towards difference. Thus, it is of the utmost importance to acknowledge the need for diversification, while at the same time rejecting social segregation as the outcome of imbalanced power relations.

Contextual and case-specific challenges

Overgeneralisation can lead to simplification and triviality. The major challenge of any attempt at educational inclusion is the in-depth understanding of the social context in question and the specificities of the focus group. Any “model” and “tangible scheme” can become obsolete when transferred to another context. For example, educational inclusion of populations who perceive themselves as being on the move and who reside in camps (such as refugees in Greece) implies entirely different challenges compared to established ethnic minorities (for example, the Roma in Bulgaria and Hungary). While irregularity of school attendance happens to be a shared practice among these groups, their attitudes towards school knowledge and especially towards the official languages of tuition differ significantly. Transit refugee students seeking relocation may be less keen to acquire communication skills in Greek, but more interested in learning English, German or other northern European languages. Temporality of abode, a mobile existence and expectations of “dreamland” disrupt connectivity to the present social space.

The fluidity of a student population, interrupted attendance and, in some cases, a lack of any previous school experience, are basic features of transitional identities such as those of the refugees, but attributes inherent in educational practices performed by other special social groups as well. Systematic observation of student flows, consolidation of attendance and educational attainment are the major challenges for these groups and Roma students in particular in all national contexts.

Gender

Gender becomes an interesting analytic variable in its intersection with other parameters of social hierarchies (for example, refugee adolescent girls are represented as unwilling to attend mixed classes in Romania, fathers rarely participate in school activities in the rural Polish school, but similar patterns are observed in urban contexts in all case studies). On the other hand, Romanian teachers seem unprepared or embarrassed to communicate with refugee fathers. It should be noted however, that fathers’ school involvement is regulated by class belonging and cultural capital. Refugee girls, who participated in the education scheme in Greece, in several cases, became valuable mediators between the school and the refugee children: willing to attend school, they spread the importance of school attendance to other kids either through encouragement or through close co-operation with project members. This is an issue that needs further investigation, since gender dynamics likely to affect attitudes towards education are neither static nor homogeneous to all populations. As far as refugees are concerned, gender dynamics interfere with life plans and expectations. In-depth qualitative research could unveil differentiated patterns of girls’ and boys’ school attendance and practices.

Impediments to and failures of democratic governance

Inclusion is a social process enacted within and far beyond schooling. Nonetheless, schools are gatekeeping institutions playing a pivotal role in regulating and facilitating access to public goods and the common social heritage. Therefore, democratic governance largely depends on a series of parameters related to educational provision, which have been revealed in this project.

Human resources and social awareness

The educational inclusion of special social groups such as populations on the move, Roma, minorities or people with disabilities is a highly demanding task requiring a multiplicity of attributes: professional knowledge, social awareness and personal commitment. Motivated teachers, consciously engaged in their job, determined to overcome established practices as well as traditional pedagogies, on the alert and ready to innovate on the spot according to constantly new challenges, are the ideal catalysts in the inclusion process.

The inclusion of special groups such as those studied in this project presupposes an in-depth understanding of power relations, segregation strategies and social prejudice embedded in politics and practices in modern European societies. Hence, teachers' professional knowledge should not be limited to pedagogical skills and competences, but it should incorporate indispensable knowledge in social sciences, most notably sociology, sociology of education and education politics. In several countries these subjects are not an essential part of teachers' education and professional training.

Teachers' professional habitus, governance mentality and professional ethics interfered with inclusion processes in all this project's case studies. In several cases, teachers' disinclination to collaborate and their lack of openness to the school community and the wider environment have resulted in communication failures and fragmentation. Territoriality in defining professional spaces of jurisdiction and social closure strategies on the part of the teachers have been impediments to developing democratic school governance practices. The projection of teachers' prejudices onto the parents and the invocation of a school's community conservatism have been discursive strategies that generate social inertia and hinder innovative and inclusive action. By contrast, highly motivated and specialist education professionals, prepared to open up their professional space and provide for visibility in the school and the wider community, have been key to the educational inclusion processes.

Institutional configurations and funding

Teachers' recruitment procedures should take into consideration the specificities and professional requirements of the educational context, otherwise they may result in unsuitable teaching personnel for the respective posts. Thus, differentiation and exemplification of teachers' qualifications and recruitment criteria are prerequisites for establishing new teaching posts for educational inclusion. Moreover, distinct transitional structures designated for special populations with unspecified relationships to the mainstream classes and among the teaching personnel could result in marginalisation by established governance mentalities.

Language is mentioned as a potential barrier to communication in Romania and Greece. However, innovative pedagogies and professional commitment can overcome these barriers. Furthermore, economic recession and insufficient financial resources put limitations on the whole venture of inclusion, as is mentioned in Greece and Bulgaria. European humanitarian aid is of course a major facilitator of refugees' educational inclusion in Greece, a process supported also by the contribution of civil society activism.

Good practices

Several good practices aiming at educational inclusion have been observed during the implementation of this project. These practices may not be coherent and universally applied or applauded, while they are of a different scale and impact.

At the macro level

- ▶ Sustained education policy co-ordinated by the central state for the educational inclusion of refugees, involving national, international and local stakeholders has been put forward in Greece.
- ▶ Diversified curricula, especially with regard to language teaching, have been implemented in Greece and Romania.
- ▶ General institutional frameworks provide for rules and objectives with regard to the educational inclusion of special social groups (in Bulgaria and Montenegro, for example).

At the micro level

- ▶ Small communities can be more susceptible to collaborative and inclusive practices (as in Poland).
- ▶ Constructive training can facilitate community involvement (for instance in Bulgaria, Poland and Romania).
- ▶ Fathers' involvement in school life can be encouraged through action research (as in Poland).
- ▶ Successful pedagogical interventions can facilitate communication among students of different social groups (as in Greece).
- ▶ Art can be used as a communicative practice for the recognition and celebration of diversity (as in Montenegro).
- ▶ A collaborative school culture can develop a positive school climate and facilitate a whole school approach (as in Hungary).

At both macro and micro level

- ▶ Civil society organisations can influence inclusive policies, in some cases despite a school's disinclination to open up to the community (in Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland, for example).

The challenges of democratic governance and the whole community

Despite a school's disinclination to open up to the wider community, several social actors have been involved in processes related to the educational inclusion of the project's target groups. The basic stakeholders involved are:

- ▶ international bodies (such as the UNHCR, IOM and the EU);
- ▶ national governmental bodies;
- ▶ students (independently of their school records or country of origin);
- ▶ teachers;
- ▶ parents belonging to what are considered the "dominant groups";
- ▶ parents whose children are "at risk", Roma, immigrants and refugees (independently of their legal entitlements);
- ▶ local authorities and local community members;
- ▶ civil society (NGOs, activists, etc.).

Civil society has played an important role in some processes, especially in the case of the refugee crisis in Greece. Undeniably, collaborative internal relationships among those in the school and a democratic school climate are the perfect catalysts for opening up to the community. As the Hungarian case has shown, the entire school community can facilitate Roma students' educational inclusion at the micro level, while at the same time it presupposes the opening up of the school to the wider social environment, thus encouraging the involvement of external actors.

However, schools tend to be closed systems, disinclined to open up to the community and civil society. Disrupted communication among the different stakeholders and power relations embedded in this interaction accounts for failures in democratic school governance and the inclusion process. Segregation and social closure strategies are deployed among various groups:

- ▶ among teachers as a strategy for negotiations on professional identity, as a form of protection of their professional territoriality and in the field of jurisdiction;
- ▶ among parents as a strategy of control of the school's socio-economic and ethno-cultural identity;
- ▶ on the part of the school towards the parents as a strategy for imposing professional control over the school organisation.

Competitive relationships, especially among the crucial sectors within a school community, impede a whole community approach to school governance. In the project's activities, the teachers' professionalism has been the main focus of attention for encouraging collaborative and inclusive practices (in Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania and Poland), while the Bulgarian case study focused on students through training schemes and action research.

A democratic school governance mentality is something that needs to be consciously adopted and is not a given social condition. Interrelations among the various interest groups involved, indirectly affected or interested in educational institutions are by no means harmonious. Consensus on the aims, principles and priorities of education is hard to reach, not only because of the competitive relationships among the various stakeholders, but also because of the significant contradictions among entrenched social attitudes and value systems. Polarisation among conflicting views is not uncommon in various educational settings, especially with regard to contentious social issues such as sexuality, religion and ethnocentrism. In some extreme cases certain social groups demonstrate furious reactions in order to impose their policy over schools (for example, groups of parents "locking" school premises to prevent refugees' attendance in a small number of Greek schools). These uncompromising practices of exclusion that deny access to public goods, potentially violating human rights, raise critical questions and dilemmas for democratic governance. Should a democratic governance model disregard those groups that develop phobic and social closure strategies? In principle, no group should be excluded from the democratic process, not only because of their legal entitlements, but also because participation and deliberative negotiation of opinion and interest is the only way to reach a social

consensus. On the other hand, it must be recognised that deliberation and dialogue cannot guarantee the implementation of democratic principles in all circumstances (such as those mentioned above). In this sense, a democratic governance model should seek a balanced combination of deliberative processes and governance by constitutional principles.

In modern complex, urbanised and multicultural societies, "multi-level governance" based on both types of the democratic process (deliberative and representative) present at the national and the community level could provide answers to contemporary democratic dilemmas. A representative model of democracy at the national level is often criticised for limited legitimacy and democratic deficit, since it is enacted at levels that are unreachable by the citizens and stakeholders (with or without legal entitlements). Moreover, constitutional principles cannot materialise unless social actors enact them in real contexts, which means at the local level. In this sense, the social appropriation of constitutional principles by the various stakeholders is essential for their implementation. Likewise, a "multi-level" mode of governance could mediate and minimise conflicting strategies at the community level, while at the same time it could safeguard basic constitutional principles and human rights.

Democracy is a learning process of "self-reflection" and "self-correction" in Bob Jessop's (2002) terms. Enhancement of a democratic school governance culture and its associated mentalities is a major learning project for European societies. Democratic cosmopolitan citizenship should not be perceived as a curricular subject, but as an ongoing learning process towards a school culture of participation, civic engagement and deliberation.

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Appendix – Action research intervention activities and methodological tools

Objective	Activity/tool	Parties involved	Brief description
BULGARIA			
	Classroom observation	Students	<p>Observations in the classroom were made based on a “Criteria and indicators for observation” form and a protocol form was prepared based on the criteria and indicators describing the impressions during observation, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ spatial location of students ▶ classroom – interior ▶ the teaching process ▶ teaching methods ▶ educational content ▶ teacher–student relationship ▶ student–student relationship <p>Every observation protocol was signed by the observing teacher.</p> <p>For the purpose of the study, a total of 15 observations were made, five in each of the three levels of study, respectively in the primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary levels of schools.</p>
	Stakeholder survey	Parents Local authority representatives Students	The survey consisted of interviews and group discussion with the stakeholders targeted. It provided systematic information on the effort and work of each stakeholder regarding integration and dealing with relationships and communication among different groups in society.
	Training for young trainers	Students Peers	The training for young trainers was organised by the UN club co-ordinator and members, while trainers from the youth section of the United Nations Association of Bulgaria prepared the methodology and carried out the sessions using a variety of non-formal learning methods. Aside from teamwork skills, the participants were also trained in observing, note taking and reporting on the target group’s social integration into the school environment.
	Peer-to-peer education	Students	Peer-to-peer education is a method that provides the effective dissemination of results by engaging the newly trained young trainers in passing down everything they have learned to their peers. Peer-to-peer education uses the emotional and psychological connection that peers have with one another to contribute to a better understanding of the topics among the young trainers themselves and the rest of the students in the school.

Objective	Activity/tool	Parties involved	Brief description
BULGARIA			
	Social laboratory	Students Teachers Parents	An activity that encompasses the definition of a “good practice” was organising a social laboratory for problem-solving. It enabled parents, students and teachers to get to know each other better, to learn to work together and to rely on each other, to share expectations, and to “get into the shoes of the other”. The social laboratory is a method that aims to build connections between the teachers, students and parents and contribute to engaging everyone in building a community of shared values.
	National simulation game	Students	“Passages” is a simulation game that consists of 10 modules and is specifically designed to put the participants through an experience similar to the one refugees go through. The modules take the participants through the experience of fleeing one’s country, losing one’s family, crossing the border of another country, filling out documents in a foreign language, talking to the authorities and the locals. By going through such simulations young people develop attitudes of deep understanding and empathy towards refugees and migrants.
	Toolkit	Teachers Ministry of Education	The toolkit publication gathers information on every phase and activity of the project and the results from them. The approaches and good practices provided in the toolkit can be easily used by other schools and local authorities in engaging the whole community and building a democratic society.

Objective	Activity/tool	Parties involved	Brief description
GREECE			
Understanding the context of the research site	48 hours of observation at the school premises	Two researchers Teachers of refugee classes Refugee students Morning (non-refugee) students from the extended afternoon programme A few morning teachers	The researchers visited the school two or three times per week, observing interactions among those in the school, the teaching process, students’ school performance and the physical environment of the school.
Communication between the morning school students and the refugees	Freinet’s little books	Students from a refugee class (RSARE) Students from the morning programme A researcher/teacher who acted as facilitator and supervisor A morning teacher, who also works in the extended afternoon programme	The two groups of children created personalised books introducing themselves to the other group, by using Freinet’s technique.

Objective	Activity/tool	Parties involved	Brief description
GREECE			
Collaboration between mainstream classes and refugee classes	Project on Children's Rights I	Students and teacher from one mainstream class Students and teacher from one refugee class The project's facilitators	A video on children's rights was used as a stimulus for joint art crafts.
Joint activities of the two groups of students and teachers	Project on Children's Rights II	Students from a refugee class Students from the morning programme A researcher/teacher acting as facilitator and supervisor A morning teacher, who also works in the extended afternoon programme Another morning teacher (deputy principal)	The children worked on the concept of children's rights by using the phrase "All children want..." and collaboratively created a banner picturing themselves and surrounded by words such as "support", "love", etc. and their signatures in their language of origin.
Teachers' training on working with groups	Training seminar organised by the area's school advisor	19 RSARE teachers from the area The school advisor One supervisor Three refugee education Co-ordinators Three representatives from the Institute of Education Policy (IEP) One member of the Scientific Committee One researcher/teacher	The training included experiential methods for building collaboration and trust in groups, kinetic activities, and linguistic and mathematics games.
Raising the visibility of the refugees; opening up of the school to the refugee parents	A small ceremony at the end of the school year	RSARE and a few morning teachers One class from the morning school students The school principal Refugee and non-refugee children Refugee and non-refugee parents Refugee Education Co-ordinators IOM guards and drivers Farsi and Arabic-speaking interpreters	In this relatively small ceremony, the refugee children had an active role (with an arts exhibition, a song, the children's rights banner and games in the yard) and their parents came to the school premises for the very first time and addressed the school community with the assistance of interpreters.

Objective	Activity/tool	Parties involved	Brief description
ROMANIA			
Knowing the situation in the country, the needs and experiences from teachers working with refugees/ migrants	Seminar/ group discussions/ survey for schools	Teachers from different parts of Romania participated at the first meeting held in Bucharest ("getting to know one another") Researchers from the Institute of Educational Sciences An NGO representative Migration Authority representative	The Institute of Educational Sciences, Bucharest, held a seminar with the participation of school inspectors and teachers from many counties where refugee children attend schools. We were able to select where the pilot school plan would be implemented based on this discussion and data presented by each participating school.
To track the specific teaching process in classes with refugee children	Classroom observation/ Observation sheet and interviews	Researchers from the Institute of Educational Sciences Teachers (teaching Romanian language to pupils) School principals (from Gymnasium School No. 145 in Bucharest and Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium, Brăila) Pupils	Researchers from the Institute of Educational Sciences went into the two schools (Gymnasium School No. 145 in Bucharest and Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School, in Brăila). The main points of observation were to see how pupils and teachers communicate (classroom climate), speak and understand the Romanian language. How newcomers are seen in the public schools.
To learn the point of view of the main stakeholders	Individual interviews/ group interviews/ focus group discussions	Teachers Parents Pupils Researchers	Interviews and group discussions at Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School, Brăila .
To provide methodological support for the teachers for democratic interventions in the educational system when it addresses children who belong to vulnerable groups	Seminar/ Training interactive methods	Trainer (from Budapest) Teachers (Romanian language teachers, school inspectorates and school deputy principals) Researchers from the Institute of Educational Sciences	Teachers' training on working with groups and on Restorative Practices (held by an international expert).

Objective	Activity/tool	Parties involved	Brief description
Use of proactive circle method in order to prevent escalation of tension and group separation	Discussions within the community (parents and teachers)	Trainer (Budapest) Teachers who have refugee pupils in their class, school inspectorate and school deputy principal Refugee and non-refugee parents Researchers from the Institute of Educational Sciences	Restorative seminar with community members (parents) held in Braila (Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium, Brăila School).
Raising the visibility of the refugees; opening of the school to the refugee parents	Organising the first cultural sessions attended by several Syrian mothers	Mothers (Syrian mothers) Teachers (Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School, Brăila)	"The mothers' cultural evening" with the participation of Syrian pupils' mothers (Alexandru Ioan Cuza Gymnasium School, Brăila). Discussion about traditional Romanian or Arabian dishes, sewing of Romanian popular shirts, etc. Traditional sweets were offered from both cultural areas.

Objective	Activity/tool	Parties involved	Brief description
HUNGARY			
Giving feedback and facilitating dialogue about the school community with and among the teachers	Reflective album based on the observations	Principal Teachers Pupils (in the initial stages) Social workers	The researchers prepare an album with reflections and photos about their impressions of the school, then the teachers offer feedback and reflect on it.
Constructing knowledge about the whole community approach and its applicability together with the teachers	Continuous knowledge construction with the teachers	Principal Teachers Social workers	We did not simply transmit knowledge about the whole community approach, but with our presence and continuous dialogue with the colleagues we constructed knowledge relevant for this particular school community in the perspective of the whole school approach.
Reinforcing the professional learning community of the teachers, giving and receiving reflections of the process, and offering some tools to promote democratic education	Training event for teachers	Principal Teachers Social workers	We talked about the school and teachers' reflections as a professional learning community by using pie charts and other methods. We talked about the problems and possible solutions, offering some methodological tools, too, in an interactive way.
Drawing conclusions and planning future actions	Final meeting with the teachers	Principal Teachers Social workers Representative of the school owner	We drew some conclusions from the project with the community of teachers and we planned some further actions for the next school year.

Objective	Activity/tool	Parties involved	Brief description
MONTENEGRO			
Research into the educational context	Analysis of documents and legislation	Project's team of experts	It was important to research the legislation and educational context in order to define the target group, as well as to project the possible ways of engagement for the community stakeholders.
Co-operation between researchers and schools in order to identify the school climate	Interview. Systematic class observation	School principal Employees in professional services (psychologists and pedagogues, for example) Teachers Students Our research team	They assessed the school democratic governance and atmosphere, and identified the students who might be at risk of exclusion.
Promotion of human rights in the local community	Video: Don't laugh at me	Niko Rolovic grammar school (students, teachers and management) Delta Foundation Stage manager Screenwriter Musicians and cameras Parents Local community (sponsors)	In April 2017 students and teachers from the Niko Rolovic grammar school, with the support of the local community, recorded a video for a song which promotes acceptance of diversity.
Creativity in the function of fostering a democratic climate	"Wall of tolerance"	Students who attend the art section and their teachers. Artists (painters) from the community	The appearance of the school's interior is essential for fostering a democratic climate.
Motivate younger people to empower the idea of sharing and accepting differences through education	Students as educators	Students (grammar school) Pedagogue Teachers	Training students to become educators for their peers and younger classes. Through various activities they were empowered to encourage the others to think about how they would feel if others excluded or mocked them because they were different in some way. It is very important to give the young a significant place in the work with younger students, to use the capacities (contents) of the subject teaching, and, before that, to instruct the teachers and motivate them to organise extracurricular activities directly devoted to the tolerance of diversity.

Objective	Activity/tool	Parties involved	Brief description
Co-operation between students in creating a stimulating environment for developing and accepting diversity	Workshops	Students (grammar school) Students (primary schools)	The students of Bar's Niko Rolovic grammar school (which was the focus of the pilot version of the project) found themselves in the role of educators and promoters of diversity-accepting values.
Promotion of the project results. Exchange of experiences	Dissemination (four seminars covering south, central and northern Montenegro)	Research team Teachers Representatives of the pedagogical and psychological services School directors	Affirmation of examples of good practice, working more on their dissemination among schools and the wider community. Involvement of as many community stakeholders as possible.

Objective	Activity/Tool	Parties involved	Brief description
POLAND			
Evaluation	Research before and after intervention activities	Students Teachers School director Parents Representatives of the education authority Experts	Observations, questionnaires and focus groups.
Development of teachers' competences for an inclusive school climate	A series of training for teachers	Teachers School director Representatives of the education authority Experts	Subjects of the training: Democratic school culture and the Council of Europe educational concept and practical tools; Collaborative teaching and learning and the Council of Europe manuals for teachers in primary schools; Teaching controversial issues; and Value-based teaching, learning and governance. One workshop was intended for teachers and parents together: Autistic children and children with Asperger's syndrome at school.
Development of empathy, co-operation and conflict resolution skills of students	<i>Compasito</i> techniques	Students Teachers	A Body of Knowledge, Blindfolded, Boys don't Cry!, Bullying Scenes, Capture the Castle, Dear Diary, From Bystander to Helper, The Battle for the Orange, Words that Wound, Zabderfilio – 10 lessons from <i>Compasito</i> – one lesson every week for the three months of intervention activities.

Objective	Activity/Tool	Parties involved	Brief description
Development of co-operation skills and democratic decision-making mechanisms of all school stakeholders	Community events	Students Teachers Parents Representatives of the education authority Local community actors	Day of spring (22.03.2017), World Autism Day (03.04.2017), Earth Day (21.04.2017), Mother's Day (26.05.2017), Children's Day (01.06.2017) end of the school year (23.06.2017).
Dissemination of results	Presentation of lessons learned and examples of good practice	Education professionals Education decision makers Representatives of the local authority	Two dissemination seminars: 08.09.2017 and 20-21.10.2017.

This publication aims to help teachers, education practitioners and school directors in implementing the whole community approach for social inclusion in their schools. Used as a reference, this publication can guide them in making informed decisions and in taking concrete steps towards the building of a democratic school culture.

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