School Governance in the European Cultural Area

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ABSTRACT

This article brings forward aspects of governance in the school education systems and it starts from the idea of approaching the governance in a culture of active participation democracy in which the decisional process presents more steps, a reevaluation of governance influencing the thinking and the perception. The matrix of democratic principles interaction with the scholastic fields takes us to the conclusion of the inversion of the proportion between responsibility and assuming, restriction and freedom.

Keywords: school governance, decision influence, the process of taking decisions, limits in governance, interactions in governance.

WHAT IS GOVERNANCE?

The concept of governance is not new. It is as old as the human civilization. Governance means: the process of taking decisions and the process in which decisions are put into practice. Governance, in its wide meaning, refers to the way in which any organization functions, including a nation (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific).

Governance consists in the traditions and the institutions in which an authority from a country acts. The three key dimensions are: (1) the process during which the governments are chosen, made responsible, checked and replaced; (2) the ability of the governments to efficiently manage the resources and to state, put into practice and impose solid regulations and politics; and (3) respecting the institutions which govern the economical and social interactions.

The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project analyses six dimensions of governance: 1. Voice and responsibility, 2. Political stability and the absence of violence, 3. The government efficiency, 4. The quality of regulations, 5. The democratic state, 6. The control of the corruption. (Kaufmann, D., Kraay A. and Mastruzzi M., 2010).

Why is governance important?

During the governance, the citizens are in a right way preoccupied by the government reaction to their needs and by their rights protection. Generally, the problems of governance refer to the capacity of the government to develop an efficient and responsible process, which is open towards the citizen participation and which strengthens rather than weakens a democratic system of governing. (USAID) According to the Institute of Governance, the need for governance comes whenever a group of people get together so that they make up an activity with a certain purpose. Basically, “it’s about power,
relationships an responsibility: the one who has influence, the one who decides and the way in which those in charge with responsibility assuming are taken into consideration.” (www1)

Pierre de Senarclens presents the idea that governance suggests the solution between a balance of agents under the conditions of major changes of games, endings and rules. For him, governance interprets the idea that the governments of states don’t hold the monopoly of legal power, that other institutions and actors who contribute to the order maintenance, taking part to social and economical adjusting. The governments are in the situation of negotiating with these networks those solutions for the main regional problems for own civil societies (Ivan, 2003).

“The governance of one single nation, of one institution and one physical person is not possible, through economical and administrative regulations only through legislation … the societies can’t be ruled from a certain point, the government” (Foucault, 1994).

The multiplication of the relationships between people, as an effect of global union, the technological progress, the urbanization and polarization – the four changes that affect contemporary society – will make the ways of living and thinking of people come together (Dowbor, 1990). Andrei Marga draws the attention towards the fact that globalization…is more than international movement and it doesn’t lead to solution standardizing (Marga, 2005).

“The governance is seen as an alternative to the governmental classical action, it aims the redistribution of power in the public area through renegotiating of authority and decision taking within partner networks” (Mântăluţă & Blendea, 2013).

Is Governance Unlimited?

This rhetorical question belongs to Andrei Marga and his conclusion is that it is not. He uses both Moses Mendelssohn’s evidence who said that: “there is no power on Earth to be able to rule people’s beliefs” and Charles S. Pierce shows that no institution can control all the opinions of the people, and on the other side he tells us that “not all the interactions within society belong to the governance” only the rules which assure the management (Mântăluţă & Blendea, 2013).

“MULTI–LEVEL“ GOVERNANCE INSIDE THE EUROPEAN UNION AREA

The White Book of the European Governance suggests collective negotiating in decision taking and lays the basis for a new point of view upon power, a sharing of public authority through interactive networks and it is based on the control of collective action without compulsory interference of member states, the involvement of the institutions and actors that do not belong to governmental sphere, the involvement of networks of local actors, especially to civil society, business and beneficiary environment (Munteanu, 2006).

“The participation of the citizens to the decisional process supposes the opening of the process for creating politics to any kinds of changes in the sphere of interests and actors’ preferences, the acceptance of deliberation and persuading as ways of speech creation of their opinion and will and reconsideration of the decision legitimacy from the majority democratic or parliamentary patterns, towards deliberative democratic shapes” (Munteanu, 2006).

The most important consequence of the new perspective of deliberative process is the movement of decisional competencies “downwards” and the creation of the mechanisms of production of “synergy” (Marga, 2013).

Wallace and Pollack show that the researchers in the field of multi-level governance field are preoccupied not only by authority distribution between the national state and EU, but generally by the authority transfer from the national governments to super-national and under-national actors. (Rep 1, 2018)
THE SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

The final report of ET2020 WGS of the European Commission “Ideas for better learning: the governance of school education systems” states the main principles of the process of governance in school systems based on: clear vision, common values, approaching focused on the pupil, cooperative decision taking processes, faith and dialogue, interested parts, co –decisional feeling, responsibility and assuming, efficient decision process, the teachers as key change agents, promoting leadership, cooperation and improvement, investing in continuous professional development, generating and using of different types of data, identification of strong points and improvement fields, the stating of strong politics at the level of schools.

We notice a high frequency of the word decision – making, central process of making of new educational politics not only in the previously mentioned article, but also in all the documents regarding educational politics of OECD.

We will get help in our study from the research made by Leif Moss (Moss, 2009) in the examination of the governance of school process starting with “decision making” as process of influence.

L. Moss places the process of decision – taking in an environment of communication which begins with premise building, continues with decision taking, ending with the way in which communication is perceived, understood, interpreted, dealt with or connected with “the other agent” , underlining in all the phases of the process – premises, decisions, connections – the important aspects of the “soft governance” and “hard governance” pattern.

During the phase of building the premises, influence is present due to the way in which decisions are defined, produced and also by who. Who defines the situation or the problem? How is the speech or action on which decision is based built or how is the definite reality built (“definition of reality” appeared in March & Olsen, 1976; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The taking decisions phase is a procedure which involves selection and acceptance of some premises which are important and influential enough to be taken into consideration: decisions can be taken by persons or group of agents. Moss sends us to Dahl who called this phase – “direct power”. Sometimes decisions can take to a new “agenda” for discussing or taking decisions, or to “the description or regulation of new behaviors”. The actual decisions build patterns for new decisions (Moss, 2009).

The connection phase, the third step of the process of influence as process of decision and communication is influenced by Thysse n’s theories regarding communication. For him, communication is efficient if it “irritates” another pole in a certain measure so that this one chooses to interfere, to stop and to reflect and eventually to change the actual way of reflection and practice. Some reactions may appear long after the “irritant”, but it is “useless to speak about influence without effects”, “if the law doesn’t change anything in what regards the behavior of the citizen” (Moss, 2009).

In the ET2020 Working Group Schools report on 2018, the idea of institutional transparency and of set of democratic basic values as the beginning of governance of schools for which organizations should assume responsibilities, occur.

Schools should answer a series of different responsibilities, Moss tells us: responsibilities imposed by the rules of the market, formal responsibility, political responsibility, professional responsibility and moral responsibility.

Schools should answer simultaneously to all these responsibilities, creating in response numerous dilemmas for schools and school leaders. OCDE and European Commission were not forced to use direct forms of power in what concerns education and governance but national politics are influenced by super- national politics of EU “which creates, filters and sends the globalization process” Both agencies distinguish between “hard governance” and “soft governance”. The choice of the terms is interesting, as “hard rules” means rules that “influence the people’s behavior”, while “soft rules” influences the way in which people perceive and think about themselves and their relationships with the exterior world. Soft governance influences the agents in more profound ways.
“An optimal educational governance, stimulated by its functioning, but especially of a superior quality, would be built not only from restrictions: constraints, but also from liberties: permissions, openings containing pro-quality responsibilities, under an ethical emblem. First of all from the simple reason of production through involvement: the core of school governance is the inversion of the actual relationship between obligation and assuming” (Marga, 2013).

The term of governance is used to express the opening of the school and of the educational system – Halas said that we govern those things or human beings whose behavior we cannot foresee on the whole (Halász, 2003).

L. Moss, at the beginning of his article, notices that “isomorphic forms” of governance appear at all levels, as we can see a tendency of substitution of “hard” governance forms, compulsory from the legal point of view, with “soft” forms based on persuasion and advice. Elisabeth Bäckman and Bernard Trafford, authors of “Democratic Governance of Schools”, conclude that school “instead of censorship and restrictions, which are useless anyway, develops the critical thinking better”of students (Bäckman, E., Trafford, B., 2014). Other analyst’s idea is that “governance” is a “guide of future behaviors orientation in social relationships.”

THE MORPHOLOGICAL MATRIX OF IDEAS

We intend to study the interactions between the principles of school governance using the technique of matrix – rights and responsibilities, active participation and the revaluation of diversity – and the key fields of school – education based on values, cooperation, communication and involvement, and students’ discipline. We will use these elements in a matrix chart (Lijphart A, 2006)

Figure 1: The interaction between democratic principles and the fields of school life

The relationship between rights and responsibilities – students’ discipline (A1B1). We notice positive results in the development of the pupil as an individual and of school as an organization where the discipline is treated as a real problem of school and the creation of the behavior of the responsible student, owner of a critical thinking is being studied. The consciousness, responsibility for his own actions, the influencing of the motivation have great success in the development of the student rather than imposing. Such an education in which determination replaces strictness, the power of the example and the way of treatment and solving situations of rights violation becomes a way of profound influencing with an educational message, in which the worry and the respect for the other are present. The pupils and Pupils’ Council are trained in this way of participation learning rules in
an active way, understanding their meanings and their deep reason beside their perception as simple interdictions.

The relationship between active participation – cooperation, communication, involvement (A2B2). The lack of democratic values leaves a too large space in the middle of the scene. In the logical mechanism of the speech which influences the decision taking, we need a guide, a fair judgement, a “piece of advice from the wise men” to correct, to slow some ideas. The advantages of interaction stand in practicing inter-human competencies, experimenting democratic values, encouraging cooperation and the evaluation of the results, auto - reflection, creatively solving the problems, getting over difficulties, strengthening the self - confidence, gaining respect from the other one and knowing each other. Lack of examples and illustrative activities lead to poor or modest results, to a cautious behavior, to lack of confidence, isolation and rejection.

The revaluation of diversity – Cooperation, communication, involvement (A3B2). In a culture of democracy, school governance is placed today under the European slogan "Unity in diversity!“. The convergence and the isomorphism of the school governance placed under the sign of values take forms which can be discovered in all systems that assume education as a mission. The various phases, games of role, suggested solutions and tested through practice, the discovery of the truth under various aspects, the validity of the simultaneous solutions lead to reevaluating of the basis, the revaluation of the results and responsibility through action. In this survey we can come across problematic situations due to some damaged values but deeply rooted, destroying the meaning, overlapping of the values, the double meaning with negative impact, lack of valuing endings.

Rights and responsibilities – Education based on values (A1B3). The school is a laboratory in which active citizenship is being experimented, practical example of democratic values are based and consolidated. Where the school governance functions guided by democratic values, the intern regulations which is normally assumed in total agreement, without difficulties in putting it into practice. The advantages of this interaction are the setting of the unity starting from meaning and significance, the inversion of the relationship utility/value, proving the necessity of overlapping the axiological over practical in checking the solutions leading to the idea of transparency, responsibility, auto-reflection capacity, the deceleration of the influences and strategic thinking. The dangers can be the keeping of the supremacy of knowledge without ethical value, the replacement of social values with own values usually narrow and limited.

Active participation - Education based on values (A2B3). The change of cultural vision can be obtained only through active involvement of the person, in his own becoming and grounding of the values using continuous practice. Democratic education is a preparation for getting over obstacles and for finding “good“, “correct“ answers for crisis situations. We know there are states with strong democratic tradition which were in the situation of stopping their democratic way during their modern history22. Qualities such as perseverance, determination, daring, sincerity, impartiality, firmness, not negotiating the law, setting the quality standards lead to social visibility, cohesion of the group and the action of transparency. Not being sure, doubt, discontinuity, stopping, giving up, lack of the ending in actions and activities lead to lack of agreement, blaming of the action, damaging of authority, getting over time limits for a successful activity or project, lack of transparency.

The revaluation of diversity - education based on values (A3B3). The process of revaluation of diversity starts with the other one’s tolerance and ends with the overcoming of conditionings and differences in a normal way and without prejudices. School should offer the students the freedom to choose what kind of projects they find more suitable and which seem to be more challenging in the way of training the mind and the soul. The visible influence during the decision taking process involves widened agreement, a feeling of membership, satisfaction and fulfilment. The real dangers are redundancy, lack of vision and agreement, the atomization of the whole building anti-social and discriminating attitudes, intolerance, radicalization, hatred and contempt.
CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing all the interdependences created one can notice starting from the point A1B1 going to A3B3 an action of school governance from “hard” forms – imposing as a compulsory specification, noticeable in written rules and standards – to a “soft” action – built on larger basis and founded on assumed values and ancient unwritten laws. Positive aspects, but also aspects that should be avoided due to their unfortunate consequences are included in the analysis. The polarization of the values is not a bad thing as long as we have a balance based on integrating knowledge and a culture of scientific type. Dangers occur when the lack of knowledge, cultural experience and reflexive exercise are not shields to take the pressure that appear during the phase ”direct power“ in the taking decision process. The objectives of the research suggested are:

- the determination of the level of development of consulting culture, of dialogue and of assuming public responsibilities for getting results at school level;
- the optimizing and the efficiency of taking decisions process through the involvement of all interested factors and a better usage of experts’ recommendations;
- the identification of some examples of good practice in school governance and their practice.

The creation of educational politics in a culture of governance would raise their efficiency and success, these could be measured with the help of some indicators regarding access in deliberative processes, the transparency of taking decision act and the public access to information, such as including the majority of requirements and preferences of all actors involved in the process of stating the alternatives.

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