THE IMPACT OF THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS WITHIN THE PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM. A CASE STUDY OF GYMNASIUM SCHOOL NO. 1 MILEANCA FROM BOTOSANI COUNTY

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THE IMPACT OF THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS WITHIN THE PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM. A CASE STUDY OF GYMNASIUM SCHOOL NO. 1 MILEANCA FROM BOTOSANI COUNTY

Irina BILOUSEAC¹, Daniela AZAMFIREI (DUMITREL)²

Abstract

The article deals with the problem of the impact of applying decentralization in education that is, of the decision autonomy, in some areas, offered locally, having as model the Secondary School no. 1 Mileanca, from Botosani County. In recent years there has been much written about decentralization, different solutions have been issued for a successful implementation of this process, all of which are limited to encouraging the continuation of this form of administrative organization. The state pre-university education is part of the decentralized public services, while remaining and subordinated (for aspects regarding educational policies, evaluation of the educational process and compliance with the legislation) to the Ministry of National Education, through the county school inspectorates. Decentralization gives the school the role of main decision-maker, ensuring the participation and consultation of several factors in the education process: family, local authorities, representatives of civil society, business environment, church, police, health units etc. But one of the most important aspects remains the financial one, an administrative decentralization, unpublished by the financial one, being doomed to failure. Therefore, the focus in this article is on highlighting the aspects related to the financial implications of decentralization within the Gymnasium School No.1 Mileanca, from Botosani County.

Keywords:

Decentralization in education; public services; local community; financial implications of decentralization.

JEL classification: H10, H83

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the priority areas, which have been subject to decentralization since December 2005, is the education system. The school is an institution that operates locally, within a community, several factors being involved (directly or through consultation) in the decision-making process in education: family, local authorities, representatives of civil society, business environment, church, police, sanitary units etc. For this partnership between the school and the local community to work, the application of the decentralization process is absolutely necessary. In this case, decentralization gives the school the main decision-making factor.

Thus, decentralization is a system in which the decision-making power no longer belongs to the center, but is transferred to the local community. This transfer of decision, within the education system, from the central to the local level has been carried out in different stages, aiming at aspects related to the curriculum, responsibilities, financial resources, materials, the administration of the educational establishment, personnel policies etc.

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS IN THE PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the implementation of the decentralization process in pre-university education, various strategic documents have been designed to support the implementation of the decentralization process, of which we will mention only a few:

- National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania - horizons 2013-2020-2030;
- The strategy of decentralizing pre-university education adopted by the Memorandum of the Government of Romania in December 2005 - update March 2007;
- Ministry of Education and Research Strategy for 2006-2008;
- Development Strategy for pre-university education in 2001-2004 - update 2002 - Prospective planning until 2010.

The current Romanian government remains concerned about the decentralization process, so that the adoption of a general decentralization strategy that aims to transfer new competences from central to local level, in
order to create the premises for increasing the quality and efficiency of the public services provided to citizens, as well as for the development, local is more than necessary and is materialized by the adoption of GD 229/2017 [1] regarding the approval of the General strategy for decentralization, the text of which was published in the Official Gazette of Romania and entered into force as of April 19, 2017 [2].

Pre-university state education is part of the decentralized public services and is subordinated to the Ministry of National Education through the county school inspectorates. These ensure at the local level the observance of the legislation and the evaluation of the educational system and process, as well as the implementation of the educational policy established by the Ministry of National Education.

III. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE GYMNASIUM SCHOOL NO.1 MILEANCA, FROM BOTOȘANI COUNTY

The first documentary attestation of the school in Mileanca village dates from 1802, the courses were taught by the church servants in a peasant’s house. In 1894 the first premises of the school are built, which later will be used for the Mileanca Cultural Center, and after the 1980s the space is destined for the Mileanca kindergarten, sometimes marked by moments of retreat. The first reports on the education in the commune are dated from 1886, and then there were a teacher and 60 students.

Over time the number of students increased, the peak was reached in the 1975-1976 school year when 565 students were enrolled in the Mileanca School in the 9th grade, some of them being from the villages Codreni and Scutari, where the schooling cycle was shorter. After this peak, the number of students has always decreased for objective reasons (the decrease in the number of births, the departure of the young families from the village), so that in the 1991-1992 school year a number of 248 students were registered.

Currently, the Gymnasium School no.1 Mileanca from Botosani County is independent, having the status of a school with legal personality and has subordinated schools and kindergartens in the other villages of the commune. The unit is public property, operates in one shift schedule and, according to DLC Mileanca, no. 87 from December 21, 2018, the school network of the Gymnasium School no. 1 Mileanca, for the 2018-2019 school year, is as follows:
- Gymnasium School No.1 Mileanca - PJ Ward A – building built in 1956, rehabilitated in 1998 and undergoing rehabilitation following a project of UAT Mileanca through PNDL 2 and Ward B – building built in 1977, rehabilitated in 2009;

- Level of education Mileanca Kindergarten with Regular Program – Ward C – demolished, a new building is under construction, following a project of UAT Mileanca through PNDL 2. It was the first location built specifically for education;

- Educational structure Primary School Nr. 2 Codreni – building built in 1956, demolished in 2009 and under construction, following a UAT Mileanca project through PNDL 2. In the 2018-2019 school year, the courses were held in the Cultural Center;

- Level of education Codreni Kindergarten with Regular Program, in the same premises as the school;

- Educational structure Primary School no. 3 Scutari, building built in 2006;

- Level of education Scutari Kindergarten with Regular Program in the same premises as the school;

- Educational structure Primary School No. 4 Seliştea, building built in 2006;

- Level of education Seliştea Kindergarten with Regular Program in the same premises as the school.

Starting with September 1, 2006, by decision no. 570 of 30.08.2006 of the School Inspectorate of Botoşani County, Gymnasium School Nr. 1 Mileanca [3], Botosani county becomes a coordinating school, in article 2 of the decision specifying that "from September 1, 2006, the principals of the rounded school units are released from office", and another article specifies that "from September 1, 2006 the Authorizing Officer is set up Gymnasium School No. 1 Mileanca, a unit with legal personality ". Thus, the decentralization process begins at the Mileanca Gymnasium School No.1, in Botoşani County.

At present, the Mileanca School ensures the preparation of students and pre-schoolers in the commune as follows:

- 5 kindergarten groups – 1 kindergarten with 2 age groups in Mileanca and one mixed in the other villages;

- 8 primary classes - 3 individual classes in Mileanca and simultaneous in the other schools;

- 6 independent gymnasium classes in Mileanca.
THE IMPACT OF THE DECENTRALIZATION

Distances between schools: Mileanca - Codreni - 9km, Mileanca - Scutari - 6km, Mileanca - Seliște - 8km.

We present below an evolution of the school population in recent years, the figures indicating a decrease of this demographic indicator, which should have implications related to the implementation of decentralization.

**Table no.1** Situation of the school population of the Gymnasium School No. 1 Mileanca, Botoșani County for the last 4 school years

| School year | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 | 2018-2019 |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| **Total school population** | 377       | 314       | 310       | 303       |
| **Preschool education** | 89        | 84        | 82        | 84        |
| **Primary education** | 134       | 115       | 113       | 111       |
| **Gymnasium education** | 154       | 115       | 115       | 108       |

Regarding the teaching staff, the 2018-2109 school year offers us the following formula: 5 kindergarten educators, 8 primary teachers, 13 teachers.

If we made a comparison between the beginnings of the Romanian school and our days, we would notice that, in fact, in its beginnings, the school began its existence in a decentralized way, being in the care of the local priest and, later, in that of the mayor and of the priest, the school institution was part of the society that time, too. The communist regime created a centralized system, which, while leaving the school in the middle of the community, did not give it much chance in making personalized community decisions.

Thus, the decentralization of the education system has become a priority, the school having to become the main decision-maker, provided that all the decision-makers in the educational system are involved and consulted. However, the accelerated decrease of the school population, determined by various factors, results in the limitation of the material and financial expenses for the maintenance of the school units, sometimes making the investments profitable.
IV. ASPECTS RELATED TO THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF DECENTRALIZATION WITHIN THE GYMNASIUM SCHOOL NO.1 MILEANCA, FROM BOTOȘANI COUNTY

In the following we will exemplify the way in which the financing per student is realized, according to the legislative provisions of the Government Decision no. 72/2013, with the subsequent modifications and completions, regarding the approval of the methodological norms for determining the standard cost per student / preschooler and establishing the basic financing of the state pre-university education units, which is ensured from the state budget, from amounts deducted from the T.V.A. through local budgets, based on the standard cost per student / preschooler.

According to the function status of the Gymnasium School no. 1 Mileanca, issued on April 30, 2019, detailing the salaries of the staff employed at the Gymnasium School no. 1 Mileanca, in the 2018-2019 school year, for the financial year 2019 was allocated to the Gymnasium School No.1 Mileanca with funding source the state budget (MEN) a budget for salaries of 1,513,835 lei, compared to the standard cost per student at which is added 85.912 lei for meal allowance, 71,050 lei for holiday vouchers and 9000 lei for paying court decisions. If we compare with the financial year 2018, the situation would be according to the table below.

Table no. 2 Personnel expenses between 2018 and 2019 for the Gymnasium School no. 1 Mileanca, Botoșani County

| Personnel expenses  | Indicator       | 2018       | 2019       |
|---------------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| Total               | 1.689.121      | 1679797    |
| Salaries            | 1.648.521      | 1.513.835  |
| Meal allowance      | 0              | 85.912     |
| Holiday vouchers    | 40,600         | 71,050     |
| Court decisions     | 0              | 9000       |

The amounts lowered for salaries in 2019 compared to 2018 derive from the decrease in the number of students and implicitly the financing per student. As for the amounts for the holiday voucher chapter, they are much higher due to the fact that, in 2018, many school employees refused to receive it. All these amounts follow, in order to reach the school, the following route: MNE - CSI - Gymnasium School Nr. 1 Mileanca.
On the list of own incomes, the Gymnasium School no. 1 Mileanca can only write the amounts from the Lease Agreement no. 02 of January 20, 2012, which aims at leasing the area of 88,675 sqm arable land with the amount of 300 lei for one hectare per year. This year it was modified, by a decision within the Board of the Gymnasium School no. 1 Mileanca, the lease amount for 1 hectare, being considered appropriate and in legality, respecting the clauses of the lease agreement.

However, according to the legislation, these amounts obtained from the lease of the land are transferred to the accounts of the TAU Mileanca, and cannot be recovered separately.

Regarding the coverage of the financial resources for the operation and development of the school, the financing comes in two ways: the first way is the Ministry of Public Finance - the General Direction of the Public Finance of Botosani - TAU Mileanca - Gymnasium School Nr. 1 Mileanca, and the second is TAU Mileanca - Gymnasium School no. 1 Mileanca, for the financial year 2019, Gymnasium School no. 1 Mileanca receiving a total of 286,500, divided as follows:

- Operation: 186,500 lei out of which 118,000 lei are financed from VAT deductions for financing decentralized expenses and reach the schools budget on the route: MPF - GDPF - TAU - Gymnasium School Nr. 1 Mileanca, 17,000 lei represent the rights of children with SEN and follow the same route, and 51,500 lei are from the local budget of the UAT and destined for the functioning of the school;

- Development: 100,000 lei reach the budget of the school for certain objectives proposed in the Board of Directors of the Gymnasium School Nr. 1 Mileanca and presented Cl Mileanca. Usually, the school has several objectives, but depending on the priorities and the elasticity of the local budget, one or two objectives are approved each year. For example, for the year 2018 the amount of 45,000 lei was approved to ensure the envelope of the B-body of the school, and for 2019 the amounts were approved to change the electrical installation of the B-body of the school and to obtain the sanitary authorization for the same body.
Table no. 3 Operating and development expenses between 2018 and 2019 for Gymnasium School no. 1 Mileanca, Botoşani County

| Financial year | 2018     | 2019     |
|----------------|----------|----------|
| Total          | 236.100  | 286.500  |
| Financial source |         |          |
|                 | 2018     | 2019     |
| Operating       | 119.000  | 118.000  |
| Development     | 0        | 0        |

If we look at the amounts deducted from VAT to finance the decentralized expenses received in the two years, we will see that they are lower in 2019, the cause being the decrease of the number of children, which are distributed by respecting the financing per student, but, as can be seen, the Development indicator increased considerably, the Performance indicator being adjusted considerably. Starting from these aspects, one can see how a community knows its priorities and tries to achieve its goals.

About the amounts granted to support children with SEN (learning difficulties) we can only speak from the point of concern, finding that, in recent years, the case has increased greatly.

Beyond the legal aspects of the functioning of the Romanian pre-university school, the reality of these types of organizations is unsatisfactory in terms of covering the expenses of a school from the allocated budget.

For schools with a large number of students, with self-contained classes, it is possible to talk about an allocation in the allocated budget, but where the number of students does not cover, by standard cost, the necessary budget there are problems every year in the salary of teachers.

Also in this sense, the deficit in the case of preschool groups can be demonstrated, due to the low standard cost at this level or the classes in primary education with simultaneous teaching. Although the Ministry of National Education specified in GEO no. 90/2017, article 39, paragraph (3) the solution to cover the deficient amounts (When, at the level of some educational units, the amounts distributed on the basis of the standard cost are insufficient for the payment of the rights provided in paragraph (1), the
school inspectorates can carry out redistributions of these amounts between educational units within the district / municipality of Bucharest or they may proceed to the allocation of the remaining unallocated amounts, as the case may be), however, the decrease of the school population could affect the salaries of the personnel from the pre-university education.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In essence, decentralization in the financial field aims to increase the volume of financial resources for education and make their use more efficient. It can be achieved by diversifying the sources of financing, transferring the decisions regarding the composition of the local and central budgets and the way of their administration, the control of their implementation.

However, the current system for substantiating the budgetary projections and the allocation of funds must be supported by objectivity and security in relation to the financing degree of each educational unit and with its real funding needs in order for the decentralization of pre-university education funding to work on the principles of transparency, equity, adequacy and predictability.

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