



ALTERNATIVE FUNDING OF SCHOOLS IN EUROPE

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Abstract:

The present article investigates the alternative means of funding for schools in Europe. Because of the economic restrictions for several European countries in recent years, schools internationally seek alternatives in order to improve the current situation, beyond government funding. These alternatives are broadly classified in European Union and private-sector resources, including the concepts of “Virtual Enterprise” and “Open School”. The relevant policies of several European countries are also presented, as an example indicating that the alternative means for the funding of schools are innovative but realistic proposals.

Keywords: school funding, virtual enterprise, open school

1. Instruction

The state resources that are available to meet the operational needs of schools in most cases are not sufficient, due to the economic downturn in recent years for several European countries, especially in the South (e.g. in Greece, the decline of GDP reached 27% between 2008 and 2015, according to the data of ELSTAT, 2015). Meanwhile, since 2008 in Europe with the onset of the global economic crisis, a public dialogue has

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commenced on a more effective management of public expenditure (Eurydice, 2014). In this context, schools internationally seek alternatives beyond government funding in order to improve the current situation. This article explores alternative means of funding for schools in Europe, based on European Union funds, private funds (cash prizes of student competitions, donations, business operations, etc.), as well as the ability of the usage or rental of the schools infrastructures by local organizations or individuals, developing “Open School” actions.

2. Funding of Public Education from Public European resources

At the end of the 20th century, amounts recovered from European public resources began to fund the operational needs of schools. Specifically, an indirect but major funding of primary and secondary education schools was the one from the Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training (OPEIVT-I and II: Zogopoulos, 2013; Nodara & Sella, 2008; Spyropoulou et al., 2008). Under OPEIVT-I (1994-1999) of the 2nd European Union (EU) Support Framework that was also co-financed by the European Commission, the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, several projects had been implemented to improve:

- curricula;
- books and infrastructure of the Primary and Secondary Education;
- school extracurricular activities that include Environmental Education, Health Education and Consumer’s Education;
- the training of large numbers of teachers;
- the integration into the educational system of students from specific categories, such as people with disabilities (HMERΑ, 2000).

As part of OPEIVT-II (2000-2006) of the 3rd EU Support Framework some of the actions of OPEIVT-I continued. Projects were funded:

- against school drop-out with alternative forms of learning;
- for the promotion of equal opportunities for access to the labor market for everyone and especially for those people that are threatened by social exclusion;
- for improving the initial vocational education and training as part of lifelong learning;
- for the promotion of vocational guidance and the connection with the labor market.

Under the Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework 2007-2013 (PADF), innovative and development programmes were implemented in primary and secondary education schools, funded by 75% from the European Union funds and 25% from national resources. The same dynamics is observed in the PADF 2014-2020, which

includes projects financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) of the EU.

The funding of schools is possible nowadays through the Erasmus+ Programme 2014-2020 (IKY, 2016). This is a programme of the European Commission, which is also implemented in education, having the goal of improving the skills of teachers. The relevant Action "Learning mobility of the educational personnel" offers to the personnel of public schools the opportunity of acquiring learning experiences in another country, mainly in order to improve:

- the knowledge, skills and abilities of teachers within the school environment;
- also their language skills by knowing the civilization and the culture of other European countries, as well;
- and to develop a sense of European identity.

With the Action "Strategic Partnerships", the educational agencies (schools, Regional and/or Local Education Directorates) have the opportunity of developing and enhancing the transnational cooperation between organizations that are active in the field of education. The desired goal is to involve participants from different areas related to education, and from different countries, in order to produce high-quality innovative products, by utilizing the interaction of their skills and experiences to generate positive long-term effects for the entire educational community that participates, as well as causing improvements in the systems and policies for education in Europe. Finally, in the same programme, the Action "Support to Policy Reform Issues" supports the reforms of the public policy of the Member States and seeks cooperation with third countries, including exchanges of good practices. This support includes the implementation of European transparency tools, conducting cross-national studies and supporting specific action programmes, including as well the Bologna Process for higher education and the Copenhagen one for vocational education and training.

The eligible agencies for submitting financing proposals in the INTERREG EUROPE 2014-2020 programme are the Regional and Local Secondary Education Directorates. The fundable projects aim to improve the implementation of policies and activities for the regional development, which mainly concern the achievement of the investment objectives of Growth and Employment and, wherever is necessary, the European Territorial Cooperation, by promoting the exchange of experiences and learning policies in participants of regional interest. To achieve all the above, during the programming period 2014-2020, the funding projects are related only to a small number of thematic objectives in a total of five priority axes, thus targeting more specific actions and achieving the most effective results possible. Specifically, the priority axes regard:

research; technological development and innovation; competitiveness of small and medium size enterprises; low-carbon economy; environment and resources viability.

3. Funding of Public Education from private sector resources

Private resources that can be allocated to the school funding are the prizes of student competitions, donations, business operations, etc. Undoubtedly, in this case, the resources are very limited (Spyropoulou et al., 2008: 442). Accordingly, numerous competitions are recorded, having thematic variety, diversity of objectives and prize-money rewards.

3.1. Virtual Enterprise of schools

The programme “Virtual Enterprise” is implemented in cooperation with the international non-profit educational organization Junior Achievement Worldwide (Francomano, 1988) and offers the opportunity for students to become “entrepreneurs”.

They can create and promote:

- smart applications for mobile phones;
- online services;
- radio stations;
- board games;
- utilitarian objects;
- original cosmetics;
- decoration and nutrition products;
- but also social, environmental and cultural enterprises.

The promotion of their creations is conducted in Student Fairs, while the revenue is available to charitable purposes.

3.2. Public schools open to society

The resources needed by schools are classified in human, financial and material ones. The main goal of educational administration is to manage the allocation of these resources, based on the constraints that exist. In this context, the investments are made to maintain the existing material resources or to develop new ones, among other activities. How can we invest the limited financial resources available in order to maximize the benefit of schools? In this case, the options are very difficult and a valuable tool is a cost-benefit analysis, based on answering the following two questions (Everard et al., 2004):

- a) Has it been made an effective use of resources in terms of past and present?
- b) How can we achieve a future resource usage in cost-benefit terms?

According to the relevant bibliography, the co-operation of the schools with the local social organizations and in general with the local community and authorities can contribute to better learning outcomes through (Athanasoula-Reppa, 2008):

- the development of activities in which learners (children / students or adults) will be able to develop their interests and talents;
- the usage of existing school facilities and infrastructure for supporting actions of lifelong learning.

At international level, this practice is already followed by many countries. For example, the relevant policy followed in some countries is presented next, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) figures:

- i) In Austria, schools are used both for educational and non-educational purposes, such as: adult education, sports or cultural activities or youth support activities. Especially for *Bundesschulen* schools, such actions are one of their main purposes, for enhancing their autonomy and for covering their maintenance costs. Under the current legislation, the cost and time frame for renting school facilities are identified by the local municipalities that manage these facilities. Especially for schools threatened with closure due to the small number of pupils, an important argument to prevent such decisions is how important these school-facilities are for local communities (OECD, 2015a).
- ii) In Belgium, the use of school buildings and facilities after school-hours is a common practice in many schools. In particular, primary and secondary education school buildings are used during the afternoon shift: for adult education programmes; by private organizations or sports clubs that rent both classrooms and sports facilities; or they used for activities during school holidays (OECD, 2015b).
- iii) In Slovakia, the school facilities can be rented by organizations or persons upon a decision of the owner of the school, but without obstructing the teaching or the after school activities of pupils, provided that the required safety regulations are respected. The school facilities are normally used by school clubs that provide educational or other activities and evening education sessions (OECD, 2015c).
- iv) In Iceland respectively, each local community or upper secondary education school is responsible to develop its own policies for the usage of school facilities after school-hours. Generally, the local communities put great emphasis on the use of primary and secondary education school-facilities by third parties. For example, many compulsory education school-buildings are used as youth centers and sometimes for activities such as local choirs, chess games, etc., that are organized for adults or elder people by the local community or non-governmental organizations. Also, some schools in rural areas are used as motels

for tourists during the summer period. Finally, some schools charge a fee for renting their sports facilities to local sport clubs (OECD, 2015d).

- v) In Estonia also, school buildings are widely used for activities after school-hours, such as athletic adult education or craft programmes. Specifically, in a survey conducted recently, 77% of school-facilities are used for non-school activities (only 50% for upper secondary education schools and 82-90% for other schools). The cost of using these facilities is calculated by their respective owners. Usually it varies depending on the type of usage and often is for free, particularly for local community members (OECD, 2015e).
- vi) Finally, in Cyprus, the institution of “Open School” has been already implemented since 2007 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). The Education Ministry of Cyprus proceeded to use the school-facilities in cooperation with the municipalities and local school boards. During the school year 2014-2015, more than 11,000 citizens of all ages participated in the programmes of Open School (Municipality of Nicosia, 2015; Municipality of Lakatamia, 2015; Municipality of Latsia, 2015). The aims of this action include: the use of school premises as culture, sports and creation centers, when not covering the objectives of the curriculum; the activation / participation of citizens in society and the strengthening of school-local community relations; promoting experiential and collaborative learning. In this context, such actions can be financed through the Fund of “Open School”, other European programmes and/or from the contributory cost of some services, such as:
- the organizing of sports, theater, film, dance and other cultural activities, events and exhibitions;
 - the organizing of informative lectures on social and educational topics;
 - the organizing of environmental education and training programmes or of computer training;
 - the use of school libraries by the citizens and for borrowing books.

Consequently, the schools play an important role in maintaining community cohesion and to the preservation and transmission of local history and culture (Berry & West, 2010). They also contribute to the increase of social capital within the community and to the cooperation of all members of the community with mutual benefits. Similarly, the social capital that schools promote has a positive effect on the social life of the community when the latter supports and is involved in school activities (Moulton, 2001). Besides, the specific actions should be considered financially as an investment in education that returns to the local community (Chalkiotis, 1999).

4. Conclusions

The presented herein alternative means for the funding of schools are innovative but realistic proposals. They ensure the growth of scarce resources that schools need these times in many European countries, but they also ensure multiple educational benefits for the entire educational community.

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