

**“Linking the school management process with the local society :
the case of the school board in the Greek Education system”**

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ABSTRACT

Our interest to study the institution of school board in the Greek education system was reinforced by the intention of the Greek education law to empower the role of the regional-local authorities and to increase the local societies' influence to the decision making process in relation to education matters as well as the creation of collective bodies in regional and school level. However, the Greek public administration system (and, consequently, the Greek education administration system) is traditionally characterized by centralism and bureaucracy.

The school effectiveness is strongly related to the involvement of local society in the school life and the active but essential participation of teachers, parents and students. Especially, the participation of the representatives of the local authorities and the collaboration with the schools are not only rights but obligations as well that determined by their mission to serve the citizens. In the Greek education system the school board provides this possibility but does not play interventionist role equivalent to the expectations, that the legislative regulation cultivates. It also provides an innovative change that concerns the culture of the school as well as the team working process. However, some changes of mentality are required in relation to the school role within the local society and the local authorities intervention to the school operation and management.

This research explores the opinions and attitudes of the members of the school board such as the head teacher, teachers, parents, students and the representatives of the local government in relation to the factors that influence the operation of this body, rendering active or inactive, the achievement of the determined by the law aim and, finally, the school board's importance for school physiognomy and culture.

KEY WORDS

School management, head teacher, local self government body, society, Greece

0. INTRODUCTION – THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The Greek educational system has the character of a hierarchically organised system with some aspects of decentralization, visible in level of administrative mechanism. The educational system consists of a large scale hierarchy. The Ministry of Education lies at the top of the hierarchy. Towards the base of the hierarchal pyramid many other lie until we reach the small school hierarchy. This structure is so much obvious either in relation to the administration or to the scientific-pedagogic field (Michalakopoulos, 1987). The establishment of bodies of public participation by the Law 1566/85 constituted a step to the democratisation, the decentralisation, the disengagement from the stifling effect that the central authority practises. The philosophy of the participatory system of administration is the authority to be distributed to all the members of the school and the operation of the school is based on the democratic decision making process, the massive participation and the initial confirmation that the decisions made will be implemented (Nias, 2001). But a lot of researchers claim that the approach of education as a clear responsibility of the state and its bureaucratic organization led to the separation of the schools from the society and to the discouragement of the society to participate in the decision making process and the administration of the schools (Murphy & Louis, 1999).

The **School Board** is a collective body of administration in the level of school unit. It functions in each public school. It is constituted by the members of the school teachers' association, the members of the board of directors of the parents association and the representative of Local Self-government Body in the School Committee. In the school boards of the secondary schools three representatives of the school communities also participate. Chairman of school board is the head teacher. The school board synthesis shows that the social capital, as it is expressed for the first time by the immediately interested parents and the representative of the local self-government body, is introduced for the first time in the school, meet with the body of teachers and, still, for the first time, the students are expressed in collective bodies for subjects that they concern immediately (Bouzakis, 2002).

The school board tasks include the guarantee of smooth operation of school in an appropriate way, the establishment of ways of reciprocal communication between teachers and parents, as well as the hygiene of students and school environment. The decisions that receive are functional (operational), while they are related with the daily operations of the organization and with the concretisation of the administrative decisions.

1. THE ROLE OF THE HEAD TEACHER

In Greece, even if today is considered to be undeniable that the school head teacher affects in a catalytic way the operation and the configuration of multifunctional school reality, it does not have however completely clarified – despite the research in this field – in which way this reality became true, which are the specific characteristics, which are the specific education, training, knowledge or dexterities that they act in the most decisive way (Zavlanos, 1996). The research has also shows that conditions and the environment consists very important dimensions, towards the effectiveness of the head teacher role (situational leadership theory).

The description of the role of the head teacher in the administrative frame of Greek school system gives a picture that delimits the role in makro-level. The conditions for the fulfilment of the role, the competences and the margins of autonomy that it involves, are in effect for all the school units in the same way in Greece. However, some particular aspects of the head teacher role are shaped by the demographic and organisational characteristics of schools in which they belong, as much as from particular characteristics of the persons that are recruited for this job (Papanaoum, 1995).

The head teacher is mainly the person in charge for the smooth operation of school, the co-ordination of school life, the observance of laws, circulars and official commands and the application of decisions of the school teacher association. He/she participates, also, in the evaluation of work of teachers of his/her school and collaborates with the school advisers.

In recent years the relationship between the leadership styles of the head teachers and the environment around the school is considered to be a vital parameter through the head teacher can obtain the support of the local societies (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, Heck & Hallinger, 1999).

2. THE RESEARCH

2.1 Purpose and research questions

The main purpose of the research is to identify the role of the school board as an collective administrative body of the and its operation in selected school units. The research attempts to detect, record, investigate, but also to interpret the opinions of all members – teams or individuals - that participate in this body, in relation to the terms, the conditions of operation of the school board, its effectiveness, as a collective administrative body of the school unit, its importance. Concretely we are interested in identifying the opinions of the head teacher, teachers, parents, local community and students opinions.

In this frame the basic questions of the research were determined. It was attempted firstly to formulate assumptions with regard to the factors that are related with the operation of school board. More specifically:

- The operation of school council is related with the way of organisation of Greek educational system (a centralized one).
- The operation of school board is related with the administrative frame inside the school unit: leadership style, decision making process, internal educational policy, vision, innovation application process, collaboration with stake holders.
- The role they play and the opinions of the representatives of the local societies through their participation and their engagement in the educational matters of the schools.
- Moreover, the effective operation of the school board is related with the active attendance of representative of local self-government body in this but also with the growth of a positive climate of collaboration between the school and the social partners.

2.2 Methodology

For the conduct of the research and the collection of inquiring material we chose as more suitable methodological tool the semi-structured interview, one of the more important methods of social research (Breakwell, 1995). The formulation of inquiring questions and the determination of inquiring frame followed the planning of the questionnaire with questions that would be addressed in the participators in the research. In the main stage of collection of information we were addressed in four schools of obligatory education, two primary education schools and two secondary education schools (gymnasia). A primary school and a secondary school in which the school board functioned and a primary school and a secondary school in which the school board did not function.

The four examined schools that were the subject of the study constitute *case studies*. This methodological approach describes the study of a small number of subjects or units and of course it does not cause claims of generalisation of conclusions to which we lead (Hopf and Xochellis, 2003). The process of conduct of interviews lasted five weeks (April and May 2007). The de-recording process of interviews followed that attributed in total 125 pages of material to analysis.

As method of treatment of qualitative data that resulted from the interviews was selected the technique of content analysis. Vital process is the qualitative analysis, as method that is interested not for the strict measurement of frequencies of appearance of units of analysis and their quantification, but that attempts simultaneously to study the text and include it in ideological, political and social context.

3. PRESENTATION OF DATA

3.1 School units where the school board functions

A parameter that determines this entanglement of other stakeholders of the local societies in the administration of school unit is related with the head teacher. Some other parameter is related with the physiognomy of the stakeholders (the representatives of local self-government body, the teachers, the parents, the students) and their perception of their role concerning the administration process in the school unit. That is to say, on one side how they conceive their role as institutions of relative power and authority that can be exercised through the operation of the collective bodies of administration, such as the school board. On the other side, if they consider that the frame of action, self-activity and initiative is provided to them, conditions that render vital and essential their attendance in the collective bodies. Their sense of exclusion or restriction of their role effects directly in their eagerness and willingness for participation and attendance.

Both the representatives of local self-government bodies declared satisfied from the way and their degree of attendance. But their satisfaction is expressed exclusively concerning the role that they play via their attendance in the school committee (the other collective body in every school unit) and their inevitable entanglement as administrators of the school fortune and allocated recourses. In this context it is important to outline that no one has participated in any meeting of the school board. *"I do not believe that the Municipality remains somewhere from outside. There is direct entanglement. I would want to participate more actively, but I believe that it is a matter of time. Legislatively, the head teacher and the teacher association in the school cannot decide alone without the positive opinion of the representative of the local self government body ...I undersign as the chair of the school committee (ETADS)". "I am satisfied about my participation through the school committee. My role should be discreet – I do not enter in the fields of other (ETAG)".*

The collaboration of the schools that were examined with the local self-government bodies is firstly in relation to the economic subscription of municipalities in the schools, the benefit of technical equipment and human potential, so that problems with the material and technical infrastructure are solved or that other recourses in relation to organisation of events that undertakes the schools are provided. All participants recognized the relations and the collaboration as very good. The effective collaboration is attributed in the two-way reasonable attitude and well-disposed disposal, but decisive importance is considered to be the economic robustness of municipalities in the jurisdiction of which belong the schools and which allows in the local self-government bodies to provide all kinds facilitation

in them. The willing and active participation of municipalities is attributed also with a disposal of realistic interpretation in that the schools recommend as the "window of" municipalities and extend the picture of effective management of power from the local authorities. *"The collaboration with the local self-government body and with the municipality is too much good. For example each time where it results a problem in the school, functional, we telephone in the municipality and it immediately resolves the problems, mainly the technical problems that result (DDS)". "Firstly with the municipality we have daily communication. The bodies of municipality exist and the chairman of school committee and the secretariat and all the services of municipality, with which we have direct communication (DG) "*

They are formulated, as are expected and the objections, the disagreements and the demand for more active support of municipality, but also the extent and their dynamics are limited. *"Some time disappoints us, with regard to technicians, who have other obligations. But in this case we tend with the school committee to resolve the problems, because, when are economic the problems and the school committee has money we can solve the problems (DG) "*

Particular interest presents the representatives of the local self government bodies points of view and the way in which they conceive their role and their relation with the school. They comprehend that their role is to solve or and also to anticipate functional, mainly, problems, without they participate in pedagogic matters. *"I see, as representative of municipality the problems they exist, I talk about the problems to the municipality, I try to solve the problems. Basically I try to cover the needs of school. As I said we do not involve in education matters. Our role is functional. For this reason I visit school more and only for the meetings... and no always. Because the head teacher is very formal. There is confidence. My presence is not necessary all the time (ETADS)". "The relations with the other institutions are very good. Our aim is to anticipate as Municipality the problems before they are presented. I consider that teachers should participate in the municipalities (he is teacher himself) – they can contribute substantially (ETAG)".*

The entanglement of local self-government bodies in educational matters is judged as important and necessary. The argumentation that supports this point of view arises exclusively from its competence to manage money and distributes allocations. These conditions make the participation inevitable. *"I believe that the local self government should attend and participate in the educational life. The local society should express opinions. Allocations are given by the local self-government body (ETADS)". "I very positively see the entanglement of local self-government body in the educational things. Otherwise problems would exist. Much more, after the school property has been given to municipalities (ETAG)".*

3.2 School units where the school board does not function

As conditions of an effective collaboration are the direct communication and the unhindered contact, the good disposal and the eagerness, the responsible management of money and the fair distribution of allocations, terms that, if they are not achieved, cancel the legislative forecast and confirm the immaturity of Greek society to manage effectively in local level the educational matters.

In the primary school is elected so much by the head teacher what by the representative of association of parents another particularly important aspect of problem of communication and constructive collaboration between the municipality and the school unit. The representatives of municipality and participators in the Municipal Committee of Education are firstly such a political persons and they act as political persons. Their political attribute is presented over-identified and thwarts their institutional role, that the legislation determines for them. Sometimes, the municipality not only does not facilitate but also deliberately impedes for the service of politicking interests, the operation of school. The limited resources that allocate the Local Self-government Bodies in the schools of the country for the cover of the expenses of operation constitute often source of conflicts. One of the main sources of conflicts that take place in the Greek primary school is the sluggish organizational support, after a lot of problems material and technical and building infrastructure remain unsolved (Saitis, 2002). *"Because sometimes the representative of municipality functions, unfortunately, also electioneering. Therefore, I cannot help. I can not go to strike the door and ask for money, because such a phenomenon is observed, the municipality removes some allocations and it keeps a very important part in the end, which if you asked to have it they would give it to you but in an informal way. In two schools I was a head teacher. The one has formulated an important accesses, the other has not. Therefore in the one we have surplus of money in the other we have minus (ETADS)".*

"Look. The role of the local self-government body is tot maintain the buildings. It does not build, not even it decides in questions of curriculum, books, staff recruitment etc., as it happens in other countries, where a decentralised administrative system exists. It is only a matter of simple management. After they do not have their own allocations, they wait for proper funds from the government. The role is an executive one. They could have a word in questions of culture for the education. That is to say collaboration of school with municipalities in questions of culture. (DDS)".

The experience of both representatives of local self-government bodies concerns exclusively the role that they play as members of the school committee. Consequently, they conceive their role as role of administrator and controller. They are talking with the attribute of supervisor of management of

money of school units and mediator of school unit to the municipality, on the claim of allocations or on the confrontation of problems. Through the limits of this role they conceive also their obligations with regard to the maintenance of school units. *"The attendance and participation in the school committee is something that becomes for all. It is obligatory each adviser of municipality to undertake a school committee, become chairman of school committee. The municipality exercises a certain control to the school committees, because all the schools are maintained by the municipality. The entanglement of local self-government bodies, I believe that..., I would say that it is required but it is not imposed. It would be supposed that a representative of municipality participates that would check, at some way, how the school functions, but also to help in the good operation of school, because the schools have also the buildings. Specifically at the centre of city, they are all very old buildings and they need permanent maintenance. And this facilitates the operation of schools. Sometimes, of course, certain obstacles also exist, because there are many differences among the schools in relation of expenses, buildings etc. Of course the municipality have to distribute the allocations that it takes from the central government equally (ETAG)". "But generally my specific role is to give information to the municipality about the operation of the school (ETADS)".*

From the words that were expressed it is provided that although the role is related immediately with the existence and the operation of school, the representatives of local self-government bodies seem to resign – by not participating and attending the school board - from their institutional right to be participated in a more energetic way in the educational matters, to come in essential communication with all the stakeholders, to render thus more fertile their participation, to contribute in the acquaintance and in the dialogue of school with the local society which they represent.

4. DISCUSSION

Because of the character of the research and the limited number of school units (four) in which this it was realised, our discussion, as already it has been pointed out, is based upon the particular school units and we could not claim any generalization.

In the two school units, that were included in the research, where the school board functions, this operation becomes in a specific way that is adapted in the particular conditions that prevail in each school unit. Even if the representatives of local self-government bodies have never participated in the school board, as it is fixed by the relative legislation, nevertheless the head teachers consider that the board functions "regularly". This choice can be also connected with the perceptions that are expressed

that the size of this body and the variety of institutions that is represented impede its operation (Saiti & Saitis, 2007, Zavlanos, 1999).

There is also a confusion in relation to the time of establishment, the extent and the sectors of its competences, its relation with the school committee and the other collective bodies that function in a school unit (teacher's association, parents' association). This confusion can give some answers with regard to the obstacles of the operation of the body and the distance some institutions (conscious or unprincipled) keep from such type of collective forms of the decision-making process, but also can raise questions in relation to the causes of the confusion.

More important among others for the effective operation of bodies in level of school, hence also the school board is considered to be the role of the head teacher as the key person for the achievement of aims and targets of the school. The law determines that the head teacher is the person in charge for the convocation of the school board and also the chairman. However, this responsibility is not limited in the formal role that is held by the legislation. His/her attitude, his/her opinions, his/her expectations from the school and from the participating institutions that are intermingled with this, his/her individual choices, the self-perception of the role, the internal educational policy and his/her vision for the school unit shape much more vitally and decisively a frame of behaviour, choices and attitudes with regard to the role of the stakeholders. The head teacher of each school unit is the leading physiognomy, that shapes the climate and culture of operation of school. His/her behaviour, that is to say his/her way of communication with the instructive personnel, the students and the parents, are the more basic factors that contribute in the creation and maintenance of a positive or negative climate and culture (Deal & Kennedy, 1999; Kuck, 2000; Barth, 2002). Equally important role plays the unwillingness of the head teachers in all the levels to abandon traditional privileges (Fullan, 1991). The dependence of institutions and individuals from the head teacher of the school was expressed openly and categorically from all people they took part in the research.

For the local self-government bodies the attendance and participation in the discussion of educative subjects, the regulation of educational needs and the collaboration with the school do not only constitute legal right, which the state poses to them, but also an obligation which results from their mission to serve the citizens and to promote their quality of life (Thoidis, 2005). By the social institutions are today required the active attendance and action. However, the representatives of local self-government bodies maintain for themselves in any case a role more distanced, even in the school units where the school board functions. Even there, they do not participate actively in meetings of the body.

Considering sufficient and more essential their entanglement in the life of school community via their attendance in the school committee. For this reason the possibilities that the legislation gives them are not extensively developed by them, in order to play a more active role in the configuration of the school life and they are involved vitally in the decision-making process that concerns in the school community. They seem to identify their role through the solidified and narrow optics of the allocations administrator. The dependence of the school unit from them is direct and obvious (provided that legally they are the persons in charge for the distribution of allocations and the cover of functional expenses of schools). Therefore, remaining entrenched in this frame they are deprived as institutional persons of occasion to develop the school units, changing them in centres of local society.

The effectiveness of school unit is connected in the Greek and international bibliography with the entanglement of local society in the school life, the active attendance of parents, teachers and students in this, under the necessary condition that the participation will be essential. In the school units that were searched the school board does not play interventionist role equivalent to the expectations, that cultivates the legislative regulation. It constitutes, of course, the resultant of the most important stakeholders, the field of contact.

There has not been shaped a frame of direct and constant collaboration between the head teachers and the local self government bodies, on the base of some planning or frame of communication, that tend to fulfil the guarantee of briefing essential for the determination of priorities of municipality on educational issues. The collective bodies have not functioned in a way that would cover this need. This can be considered as an additional difficulty in the job of head teachers and, definitely, it contributes in the maintenance of a distance between school and local self government bodies. Consequently, a redefinition of enacted relation between schools and local self government bodies is required, as well as a redefinition of the role of collective bodies.

The vague determination of duties of institutions that are involved and members of collective bodies from the institutional frame, forces the head teachers to take on many administrative and executive tasks. Moreover, their pressure of work grows, their role is downgraded and the time for employment with the management of the building of relationships between the school and stakeholders (parents, higher administration units, collective bodies, local self government bodies, cultural and other institutions) is decreased. This conclusions agree with the conclusions of researches in level of school unit pointed out that there is a lack of time for the head teachers to communicate with the stakeholders of educational process because of their instructive schedule and administrative duties (Tipas, 1999, Mlekanis, 2005).

By the side of the representatives of the local self government bodies it is pointed out that we are still long from the will of legislator and the vision of the open school with autonomy. They agree with the problems stated above and, at the same time, however, they focus and give particular accent in the following reasons:

- The local self government body does not have competences of intervention in the educational process. There have not been given competences and possibilities for essential interventions in the content of study (e.g. local history, environment, particular needs), but also in the way of operation (e.g. evaluation, recruitment of head teachers). The limited competences do not allow the complete growth of collaboration with the schools - and general the growth of completed intervention of local authority in the education.
- The involved institutions and the members of collective bodies do not demonstrate the required interest. Thus, the collective bodies, which, when they function, connect the school with the local society, elsewhere have slacked, elsewhere do not function at all, while generally is observed reduction of attendance of people in the publics. These conclusions confirm the conclusions of other researches in relation to the way the collective bodies of public participation operate, that led to negative point marks on their way of crewing, the possibilities of their members, the degree of activation and their exploitation of the possibility of having a positive role in the configuration of better conditions and in the decision-making process (Saiti, 1999, Saitis, 2000).

In the education field the established collective bodies of social participation could be considered as result of effort of creation and maintenance of culture of cooperation through the "artificial" cooperation (Hargreaves, 1994). However, the extension of the operation of these centrally constituted collective bodies as well as their consumption in legitimizing transaction of central policies with determined and foreseeable results have led to standardisation and inactivation of these bodies, without their replacement from other bodies – representatives of dynamics of local societies.

Today, much more organizations face a dynamic and altered environment. There is also the requirement for these organizations to be adapted in the management of change process. We consider the organizations as the schools as centres of changes and innovations. But sometimes the school is faced as isolated from the social - political frame capable to be renewed without the contribution of society. The core of problem is that the education, thus as it is shaped nowadays, is not inter connected effectively with the students, the parents, the teachers and the head teachers (Fullan, 1991). The school board provides this possibility and, mainly, it recommends change that concerns in the culture of school.

There is not a matter of choice between the change process and sustainability, but we do have choice with regard to how we will correspond (Fullan, 1993).

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