

## The school escaped from its upbringing role

### (Report on parents' participation in Bulgaria)

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#### Fieldwork agenda

No.	Description	Location	Date
<b>A</b>	Parents of Roma pupils enrolled in desegregated schools	Stara Zagora	26 May
<b>B</b>	Parents of Roma pupils enrolled in segregated Roma schools	Stara Zagora	26 May
<b>C</b>	Parents of children with special educational needs enrolled in a specialized school	Veliko Tarnovo	29 May
<b>D</b>	Parents of children enrolled in a consolidated rural school	Veliko Tarnovo	29 May
<b>E</b>	Parents enrolled in a School board of trustees or Parent's council	Sofia	2 June
<b>F</b>	Parents of children enrolled in urban ordinary school	Sofia	cancelled

#### EXPERIENCE NEAR CONCEPTS

- Uchiel = Teacher (neutral)
- Daskal = Schoolmaster (a teacher with negative connotation)
- Prepodavatel = Lecturer (a teacher with positive connotation)
- Vâzpitatel = supervisor (a teacher, responsible for the afternoon self-training at school)
- Klasen (shortened of Klasen râkovoditel) = form master (a teacher, that is in charge for the administrative issues related to a given class)
- Klasna = form mistress
- Gospozha = literally "madam" (like the use of "Miss" in English) is used to denote the form mistress
- Domski deca (shortened for Deca ot Dom za deca lisheni ot roditelski grizhi) = children from an orphanage
- Vsichkologiya – literally "everythinglogy". A slang expression that is to say: the students do not have separate notebooks but one in all subjects. It is a good example about the devaluation of the education.

## **Summary of the main findings**

- The parents do not consider themselves as a decision maker – neither in the present nor in the future
- The parents are passive participators. They expect top-down initiatives and organisation
- The parental councils and board of trustees have not a real power to define the school agenda. They only legitimate the budget spending made by the director
- The main subject of parental participation are the school repairs
- The decision making process in the school system is not transparent. Usually parents are both not consulted and not informed
- The main information point is the form master or a favourite teacher. However, in the rural discussion some informal channels based on the relatives were pointed out.
- A lot of parents consider participation as a time waste and non sense. The probable reason is that because they do not see a real impact on the school policy and agenda.
- The most excluded parents consist of two contrast groups: 1) parents, very busy with their occupation and 2) marginal groups with low education and living in the slum parts of the ghettos.
- In some cases the principal attempt is not to allow building of an active parents group.
- In general, being a students' parent is considered as hard task due to various reasons. However the greatest problems of the parents are the violence at school, combined by a lack of teachers' attention, and teenage curiosity and headstrongness.

## **General Mood**

### 1. Being a students' parent

*Being a parent these days equals an act of heroism (f, 42,C<sup>1</sup>)*

Being a students' parent is a difficult role. However, we found different reasoning in the different target groups. Roma parents definitely stress the lack of financial means. However there are some contradictions, which allow us to suggest learned helplessness speech. For example one of the most complaining respondents – saying that she has no money to buy textbooks, have bought a laptop to her son. Single motherhood appears as a problem in the rural area as well among the parent, having children with special educational needs.

### **Lack of financial means/ Need of tidiness (Roma parents)**

- It is very difficult because we are in needy circumstances. However, every morning the child has to be clean and tidy, with beautiful garments because he studies in the city centre amidst Bulgarians. All the time, the child has to be tidy. All the time he asks me for money but we are in needy circumstances and it is very difficult to us. More or less we cope with that but only so-so because I am his grandmother, with retirement pension and the child is an orphan (f, 52, A).
- I have a grandson in 5<sup>th</sup> grade in the neighbourhood school (e.g. segregated). I don't know how these teachers behave and approach the children but children know nothing. Our children have problems with learning and moreover we do not have financial means... well they are able to study, but when we don't have means they are not able... one child, in order to attend school classes, everyday it has to be dolled up. It is not possible to send him at school with 20 cents or with a simple muffin (m, 48, B).
- The students have not materials to study at home. In our neighbourhood school, over there - at the end of the ghetto – they do not give them textbooks. The textbooks are not for free, we have to buy them. After the fifth grade, we have to buy the textbooks. So, my child has only notebooks, but not textbooks. So he has actually only one notebook. It is a notebook in "everythinglogy": one page algebra, one page geography, one page history – we have been students also, but it was not like that (f,28, B).

### **Drug addicts/Alcohol users**

- There are many different people. Recently there are many drug addicts. They are able to drag away her or to do something bad to her because she is already 12 years old (f, 30, A).
- In the Russian lyceum the problem is slightly different. When I go there, there are always students sitting in front of the school while smoking or even drinking. They are sitting and drinking beer. Sometimes my wife is even afraid just to pass by them because she is a "small-bore" person and skinny and them may took her for student like them although she is grown up. Actually once they hint her and she was embarrass (m,34,A).

### **Teenage headstrongness**

- Soon as they grow up they became headstrong persons. At home they behave like it is a hotel. They do not want to study at home. They want only to go out and to play. At

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<sup>1</sup> Here and further down in the brackets will be given: the sex of the respondent (m/f), age of the respondent in completed years (18+), and No. of the focus group discussion (A-F)

school they behave in a different way. The school is very well guarded. They lock the school gates during the classes. The teachers all the time keep watching over the pupils. They (teachers) know the children's problems and pay special attention to every single child. The school is very good (f, 27, A).

- It is difficult because the kids enter the puberty quickly. They become stubborn and intractable. In the school they are mischievous. They learn bad manners one from another (f,31, D).

### **Single motherhood**

- I am divorced and I am a single parent. Therefore the only thing that I worried about is the financial matters. There are a lot of things that I cannot afford. I would like to enrol her in additional activities – music or something else. (f,37,C)
- It is very hard, because I am single. Nobody helps me to raise my two children (f,36,D)

### **Responsibility**

- It is hard and responsible. You want to be both – on one hand a friend, on another a tutor. You are responsible for his future and upbringing (f,47,E)
- We are living in a highly developed era. The things that are on the market are at a very high level but we have to be aware of these issues. However, we are worried because of the bad influence of this surroundings – the values are neglected. It is very hard because there is a mismatch between the values and beliefs of the parent and the values of the society. Moreover, there is a mismatch between the parent's values and the school's desire to enforce certain values. The school has escaped from its upbringing role. There is a generation gap (f,36,E).
- I faced the difficulties to impose certain rules at home but at the same time not to lose the trust of the child and at the same time to react adequately around the excitement of its friend's crowd (f,35, E).

## **2. The greatest problems of a school parent these days**

There are two common problems about all target groups – the lack of teacher's attention and the violence at school. The combination of both is an easily recognizable reason about the parental worries. Maybe in some cases it is a hidden reason about the manifested lack of interest in the rural and urban slum areas.

### **Violence at school**

- Some older students from other schools are visiting and beating the younger students in this school (f, 29, A)
- They fight each other all the time. I went to the form mistress but she said: "What can I do?". Could you imagine such an answer?! (f,35,B)
- Being beaten, my little son does not want to attend school classes because he is afraid (m,42,B).

### **Lack of teachers' attention**

- The teachers do not pay sufficient attention to the children. There are no guards or supervisors during the breaks. The children fight and jostle. The teachers just stay and look from a distance. My little girl was struck by a ball. Felt down and hit her head. She omitted the vacation trip because of this (f,34, C).
- The teachers care only for the healthy children. For example my son achieved a certain level and then stopped on. There is no progress (f,42,C)
- In 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the teachers' solicitude disappears. My daughter feels even offended by the teachers' behaviour. Some teachers are using insults, for example "you are very stupid!" (f,40, E)
- In the intermediate course [5-8<sup>th</sup> grade] the student disappears and appears a number in the class register (f, 35, E)
- After 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the teachers are not familiar with the personality of the kid (f,36,E)

- My son hearted his head in a nail at the blackboard. The leady-teacher did not give him first aid, did not call the ambulance, did not bring the child to the hospital although it is near by the school. She said: call the father. Thanks god, this day my husband suddenly was back at home earlier (f,40,B).

### **Teenage curiosity**

- At age of 13 they do not think what they are doing. Everything seems interesting to them. They want to try everything. She play the fool all the time (f,30,A)
- At my daughter's birthday party [12 years old], a little girl – one of the outstanding students in her class – brought such a shocking booklet at home with brutal sexual scenes described. I realized that it is a mass teenage literature. Thanks God, there were no pictures, but in a very descriptive manner, there were described ugly scenes that I really was shocked. I was really astounded. But my daughter told my: "Mummy, I like it!". It turns out that this is the first book from a series of 8 booklets, which the outstanding student in question has already read. I said that it is going to be the first book that I am going to take out of my daughter and to throw away in the garbage. Well, I will let her to read the book, because otherwise it is going to be an outrage in her eyes, because she does not think the book is brutal. It is brutal just in my opinion. I am ashamed to quote how the book begins... I'll try to paraphrase while quoting, a little bit censored version... "He took away my virginity by a finger"... but I am very polite in this expression. The huge problem is that there is the logo of the Coca Cola on the cover, which is a symbol. It is a value literature in the eyes of the teenagers. And this floods the market. (f,40,E)

### **Pornography**

- Unfortunately we are not able to put the censure on the TV porn channels. Some times the children are left alone at home. And they are curious (f, 50, E).
- What is placed at the first line in the newsstands – a sexual poses that you do not suspect they even exist, and creatures that you do not know are they male or female (f,34, E).
- In the Western countries, such a literature is for sale only in special shops. They are not on view. While in Bulgaria the censure does not give the needed protection to the child. Because the sexual issue is presented in a very biased manner. I remember some years ago, I wanted to talk with my son on this topic and he said: "So, mummy, what do you want me to teach you about" (f,40, E).

### **Lack of interest in learning**

- He doesn't want to study. He only wants to play outside (m,45,D)
- The computer is the problem. He seats in front and plays (f,30, D)
- "Let me play first and latter I'll study" she says (f,31,D).

### **Difficult matters**

- In 5<sup>th</sup> grade the matters are extremely difficult. I am not able to understand the history lesson and what about the child? In 4<sup>th</sup> grade the lessons were easy. Now the matter is very difficult. They study proportions. The have to do sums with proportions. I have to study with her in order to help her. But it's not always possible. I do not know English – how can I help her in English? (f,31,D)

## **3. Awareness of these problems**

The form mistress is a main source of information. However, there is no common pattern for the target groups. There is no a typical pattern for one group as well. The source of information and awareness depend of the case and the solving of the problem is quite individualized.

### **The form mistress**

- I speak with the lady, with the form mistress (f,30,B)

- The lady has to set them apart if they are fighting. She have to put them on different desks (f,28,B)
- It depends on the lady. She has to teach them what is good and what is bad. What have to be done and what not. Once, when my child was bitten, I want to school and she said: "here it is, here it is the child that stroke your child. Beat him!" (f,40,B).

### **The principal**

- I, personally, I went to the general director and personally I said to her the follow: Missis M., please excuse me that I am devilling you, but lets do something to prevent the corridor fights between the children as well as the fight in the classrooms. And these pedagogues, or simply said teachers to give advices to those children at least a little bit. I am telling you my brother; the neighbourhood school is suitable for nothing. (m,48,B)

### **The father**

- When she does not want to study at home, I speak with her father. Then she reads an hour or hour and a half. On the next day the story begin again: "Let me play first and latter I'll study" she says (f,31,D).
- I always discuss the issues with my husband. If we do not have an unified position on the matters, the things go out of control (f,35,E)

### **Other children's parents**

- When my daughter was bitten, I want to mother of the other child. She paid attention to the issue. She scolds her child but they are children, two days latter the same happened (f,33,B).
- After leaving the children at the school, we use to seat in a café and argue (f,42,C)

### **Psychologist**

- Three times per week we are visiting a psychologist at the pioneer's house [a Boy Scout centre]. I also need somebody to guide me how to care for my child (f,37,C)

## **II. Reforms of education**

### **1. Now and then comparison**

The communist past is the definite winner in the comparison now and then. Moreover, in the group of active parents a nostalgic memory about the communist youth organisation was registered. Everything in the present is being criticized – from the students' appearance to the privet business of the teachers run in the school classrooms.

### **The freedom of behaviour = Anarchy**

- Now they are freer and more democratic. Everything is freer. Before it was impossible for a student to beat his teacher in school. Now the go like for a fashion show – handbag instead of schoolbag with lipstick, lip-gloss, and a small mirror instead of textbooks and notebooks (f,34,A)
- I used to carry textbooks and notebooks in 13 subjects daily. If I had not paints and pencils in my drawing class, I was not allowed to enter the classroom. Now they go at school with one textbook in all subjects (m,48,B)
- The children stay outside, the form mistress – inside. The children simply do not attend classes. (f,30,B)
- The children stay in the school only during the first 1-2 classes and in 9-10 o'clock they are back at home (SGC<sup>2</sup>: B)
- Now the children have too many rights. If you scold at a child – it says: I am going to call the Child Protection Agency (f,31,D).

<sup>2</sup> SGC – spontaneous group consensus

- The democracy in Bulgaria, in the entire state is phoney. Everything turns to anarchy, to a licence. The parent themselves are not a good example to follow for their own children.

### **No uniforms**

- Now there are no school uniforms. I have been in Spain. Every school has an uniform. And it is not like here – short skirt, short vest like it is not a school but a disco club (f,30,A).
- At the time when I was a student, we attended the classes dressed in overall and wearing a tie. The hair was in a pony-tail. We were not able to enter the school with a dirty or varnished nails. Nowadays you are not able to distinguish the students from the teachers (f,31,D).

### **Teacher's business**

- The form mistress have about one Oriflame catalogue at school ad the children by cosmetic products from the form mistress (f,29, A)

### **Lack of engagements outside the school**

- The children have no engagements after the end of the classes. We had Chavdar organisation<sup>3</sup>, Pioneer organisation<sup>4</sup>, Komsomol organisation<sup>5</sup>. We were engaged in something because there was an ideal. We were inspired by the red tie<sup>6</sup>, by the blue tie<sup>7</sup>. Everybody wanted to wear the blue tie, the red tie, to enter the Komsomol (f,47,E).
- We had chance to do all sports for free. Nowadays I the children's grandparents do not help you – you cannot fill the children's time. And of course everything costs money (f,50,E)

### **Lack of parent's involvement in children's live**

- The children grow up around the parents not together with the parents. They are not together. The children some how survive in the surroundings staying somewhere around their parents. Not all the parents are equally responsible. That is the bigger drawback also for the school, because the one that is bound up in his/her child is also bound up in the school (f,40,E)

## **2. Advantages and disadvantages of the present reforms**

The parents put huge accent to the disadvantages of the present reforms. Their main concern is the content of the syllabi and lessons. Both, the parents living in the Roma slums in the country side and the most active, high educated parents living in Sofia worries in the same way – terminology used is not understandable to the children.

### **2.1. Advantages**

#### **Changes in the syllabi**

- The both form mistress of my children changed the syllabi and the style of teaching. The exams were changed. They are done in completely different manner. The reforms are visible. The learning is better, the assessment is better in the past two years (f,21,A)

<sup>3</sup> A kind of a communist boy scouts organization for the younger pupils 1-3 grade (age 7-9)

<sup>4</sup> A kind of a communist boy scouts organization for the children age 9-14

<sup>5</sup> The communist youth movement for the children age 14-19 (25 – until one is an university student)

<sup>6</sup> The symbol of the Pioneers

<sup>7</sup> The symbol of the Chavdars

### **Video Cameras**

- Installation of cameras in the schools is a very good decision because the increased criminality among the children (m,34,A)

### 2.2. Disadvantages

#### **Cut down the staff (SGC: C)**

- They cut down the auxiliary staff. The cook is also a cleaning lady that is unacceptable from hygienic point of view.
- The proportion number of children per teacher is also changed. It is impossible for one teacher to work with 12-13 children with special educational needs
- They cut down the permanent nurse position. Now there is a nurse only 4 hours, 2 times per week.

#### **Lack of respect to the elders**

- Go put right now and you'll see. There are 4-5 children in the class that are smoking openly in the school court. They have no fear, respect or honour. I began to smoke in 8<sup>th</sup> grade [age 14] but used to smoke hidden until 3<sup>rd</sup> course [age 18] (f,28,D)
- The speech of the children has changed. "Don't bark at me!", "don't gape at me!". Talking in such a manner, they think they are big shots (f,28,D)
- My older son [age 11] is polite, by my younger [age 6] use to say to me: "Shut up you dog's meat!". Well, to his father he does not dare to talk like that (f,31,D)

#### **Difficult terminology**

- The children are confused. There are different textbooks with different syllabi and lessons inside. The matter is unclear. The terminology is very difficult. The textbooks are written by professors and not by teachers therefore they are not suitable for school class students but for the college (f,56,E)
- In the textbook, there is such a definition about climate that is hardly understandable for me and totally not understandable to the children. I got confused by this definition although I know what the climate is. I told to my child my definition and it understood everything. (f,40,E)
- A lot of the learning matters that was in the syllabi for the upper grades today is placed in the syllabi of the younger grades. My daughter began to memorize but not to understand the matters. I have friend teachers in Bulgarian literature and they told me that the matters of 9<sup>th</sup> grade are placed in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. (f,36,E)

#### **Lack of practice**

- Before there were a lot of exercise hours. So, the students had a chance to assimilate the new terms and knowledge. Today, there are no exercises or practice. But when there are many gaps, the child is afraid and begin to omit the classless, which increase the gap and so on (f,52, E)

### 3. What have to be done?

There are different problems pointed out and therefore there are different solutions suggested. There are some restorations of the past: uniforms and vocational education as well as some ready-made "solutions", like the increase of the salary, decrease in the proportion students per teacher, and additional qualifications for the teachers.

#### **Bring back the uniforms**

- We need to bring back the uniforms (SGC: A)

#### **Bring back the vocational education**

- Why they have to study until 12<sup>th</sup> grade without profession? Like some schools in the centre of the city, out neighbourhood school should be able to prepare tailors and carpenters (f,40, B; SGC:B).

### **Increase the teachers' salaries**

- Give to the teachers 1500 BGN salaries and they will get more interested (SGC:C)

### **Additional teacher's qualification**

- The teachers, that have no achieved positive outcomes, should attend additional trainings in order to increase their qualification (SGC:C)

### **Make the lessons easier**

- The lessons and the matters should be easier (SGC:D)
- The textbooks are not made from real teachers. The textbooks' authors have never been teachers. They are "scientific brains" that don't care about the age group of children. The textbook content should not be written in the particular language of a given science but popularly (SGC:E)

### **Less students per teacher**

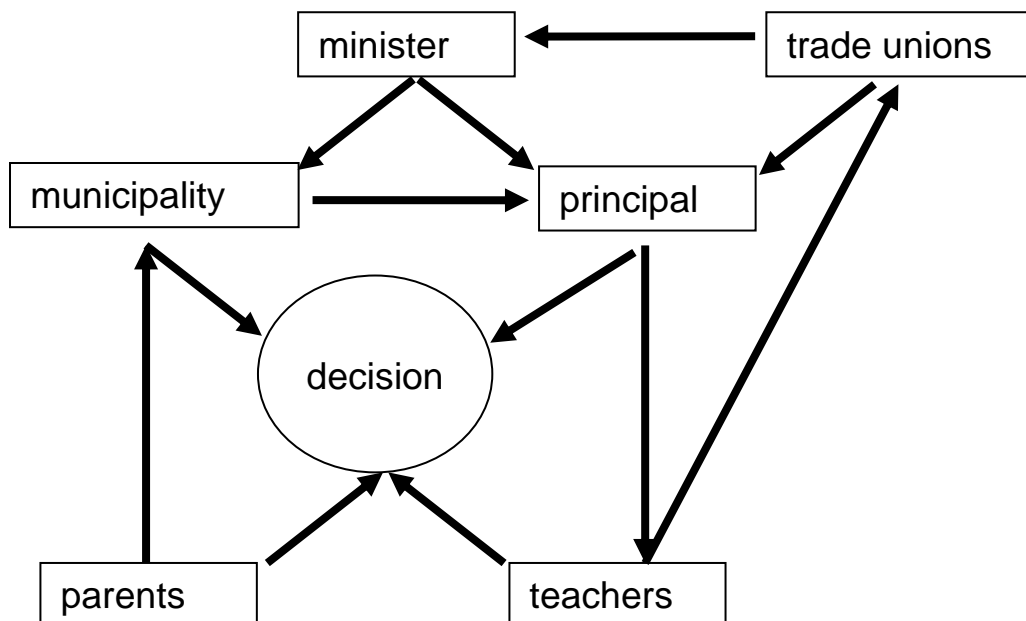
- One teacher is not enough for so many children. The proportion students/teacher needs to decrease (SGC:C & D)

### **Supervised afternoon study hours**

- There is a need form supervised afternoon study hours not only in 1-4 grade as it is now but also in the upper grades.

## **III. Participation (general questions)**

### 1. The decision maker



The focus group discussions gave a good base for the mapping of the stakeholders and the relations and subordinations in the Bulgarian system of education. On the top it is the Ministry of education that set ups the main agenda. The teachers and parents are on the bottom. Having in mind the first wave of the survey, not surprisingly the school principal is in the centre of the system, balancing between the ministry and municipality on one hand and the parents and teacher on another. It is important to mention that the parental councils and the board of trustees do not appear explicitly in the discussion.

### **Municipality**

- The most important decisions are usually taken by the municipality council (SGC:A)

### **The principal**

- It has to be the principal. He has to assess the situation and to ask the municipality for sanitation assistance of financial support (m,34,A)
- Everything depends on the principal. He/She presents the situation as it is convenient for him/her. If there are educational inspectors visiting, the principal use to say: "Pay attention what you are talking about and do not complain. Otherwise they are going to close the school and you children are going to stay without proper cares". (SGC: C)

### **The teachers and the parents**

- Both the teachers and the parents take those important decisions that affect children's education. If the child attends school classes it is learning (SGC: B)

### **The ministry of Education**

- The Ministry of education is the decision maker. Nothing depends on the local principle or our desire (SGC: D).
- The minister – he is the politician, the main figure. We cannot expect that somebody else will make the decision. (SGC: E)

### **The teacher's trade unions**

- They have the power to make changes in education, but they lack a teamwork and they are not successful in the negotiations with the minister (SGC: E)

## 2. Are parents informed and consulted about the important decisions?

### **Repairs**

- Two months ago, we were collecting signatures in order to paint the school and the change the windows' glasses (f,30,A)
- They wanted to by a mineral water machine. So we collected the money and we bought the machine. Usually they are asking us for money to by glasses for the machine, or curtains for the windows, or flowers for the sill. (f,27,A)
- If the things depend on the parents – such as repairs and painting – then we are very tenderly approached (SGC:E)

### **School enrolment**

- They are coming at home and asking: Are you going to let your children to attend school classes (m,42,B)

### **Boy-scout camp**

- The children are attending a boy-scout camp in Lyaskovec [neighbouring municipality]. The form master ask for the written agreement of the parents (f,31,D)
- At the parent-teacher meeting they are complaining about the children (SGC:B)

### **Not even informed** (SGC: C,D)

- Unfortunately, more and more frequently the board of trustees meetings are just a principal's monologue (SGC: E)

## b. source of school-life information

### **The form master**

- I phone the form master. I am asking how the child copes with the school. Is it ashamed? Is it active? Does it remember the matter? We communicate at least once or two times monthly. (f,21,A)

### **A note pad**

- The child has a note pad, where the teachers write notes – what is needed, how it succeed, how it behave (m,34,A)

### **A favourite teacher**

- I am asking a given teacher. I had a chance my daughter to be her student from the very beginning. Now my daughter is able to read, to do addition and subtraction with numbers up to 20 although it is a child with autism. She does not want to study at home with me. She likes to study with this teacher (f,37,C)

### **A relative**

- The aunt of the child works as a cleaning lady in the school. I ask her everyday how does my child behave and are there some teachers complaining (m,45,D)
- We live in the next village. For me it is impossible to come at school. Hopefully, my elder granddaughter is in 8 grade in the same school. She tells me what is going on with my younger granddaughter (f,62,D).

## **3. Parental impact**

### **No Impact**

- (B,D)
- We cannot have an impact. Teachers use to excuse themselves by the orders from the Ministry of Education (SGC:C)

### **Group meeting**

- When the parents of a given class gather together (SGC: A)

### **Formal outside organizer**

- There should be somebody to organize the parents. For example the principal or some teacher (SGC: A)

### **Shout at the principal**

- You go to the principal. Shout at her. She shout at the responsible teacher and that is how the things work out (f,37,C)

## **4. Parental decision making group**

### **Class' parental council**

- Every class has its own active parents. They collect money to organize celebrations. The form master has the leading role in this (SGC: A)

### **There is no decision parental making group about the school**

- SGC: A, D,
- The principle in the neighbourhood school does not allow. There was such a group during the 80s (SGC:B)
- There is no board of trustees because it will confront the interest of the principal (SGC: C)

## **5. Type of persons involved in parental decision making group**

### **Having free time**

- There are involved only people, which have free time to attend to this matter. There are 2-3 mothers with free time, which gather together (SGC:A)

## 6. Never involved persons

### **Self-segregated Roma**

- I never participate. They have been inviting me several times to join the parental council. Nevertheless, I am the only Roma parent in this class and I have an inferiority complex. The little children hold out against the Bulgarians but we try not to get into the centre. I am afraid that if I make a blunder, they may excommunicate my daughter (f,27,A)
- There are parents that do not want to be in touch with Romany women. My older daughter collects my younger and I don't communicate with the Bulgarian parents of her classmates. Well, I am in touch with the parents of the classmates of the older. But even then I am careful – may be they are ashamed to walk beside a Romany women in the city downtown (f,30,A).

### **Next village residents**

- I live in the next village. And I graze the caws. There is nobody to take my shift (f,62,D).

## **IV. Parental council/Board of trustees**

The parental councils and board of trustees have not a real power to define the school agenda. They only legitimate the budget spending made by the director. Thus the main motivation of participation is to compensate the lack of information about the school life of the children although the participation itself is regarded as time waste.

### 1. Decision to join the council

#### **Ask from the form mistress**

- I was not able to refuse, when the form mistress proposed (f,40,E)

#### **To know more about the child**

- I wanted to have my son "on a short-lead" and to stay on touch with the form mistress in order to know more about his behaviour at school (f,47,E)
- Being part of the parental council is nothing special. We see each other from one parent-teacher meeting to another. However, otherwise the children are trying to avoid our involvement in their school life and we stay aside. Thus I have more information about my daughter. (f,50,E)

### 2. The role of the parents in the council

#### **Just a formal role**

The number of the parents in the council is the same as the number of the classes in the school. The motions of the principal are preliminary discussed in parent-teacher meetings. The decision use to satisfy the preliminary needs.

### 3. Achievements and failures

#### **No achievements and failures**

- In fact, nothing depends on the board of trustees. That's why there are no peaks and drops. We have only formally to legitimize the principal's decisions, to sign that we are agree because they give an account of the spending (f,47,E)
- There are no achievements and failures because of the matters that board of trustees focuses on:
  - camps, excursions, concerts, necessary equipment
  - school uniforms
  - school celebrations
  - school awards. (f,35,E)

#### 4. Higher efficiency

##### **Better regulations**

- If there are normal rules for school life functioning there will be even no need of board of trustees. If the teacher is motivated. If the administrative body is motivated. For example, I had a reasonable opinion about the syllabus. In some days it has an overloaded schedule, in other days – it is free. There are time gaps, when, in actual fact, the child is on the street. (f,35,E)

#### 5. Benefits from the participation

##### **Child's respect**

- I am gaining some prestige in the eyes of my child. His mother is appreciated by the others (f,47,E)

##### **Quarrels at home – shame for the child**

- I am gaining quarrels with my husband. Look at you – he says – you always want to be the most active! It is also bad for the child. His peers say: “Your mother is a lickspittle” (f,35,E)

#### 6. Advice to the novice in the board/council

##### **Time waste**

- I'll definitely say: You are wasting your time! (f,47,E)

##### **Open sharing of the problems**

- If there are some problems, he/she has to make them explicit during the gatherings and not only to the form mistress. The kids are teenagers. They swarm with problems (f,40,E)

## **V. Participation (general questions)**

The parent participation is still gendered and a bit patriarchal, even in Sofia. The women are charge for the daily cares and homework duties of the children. However the fathers are the “bears” to impose a discipline. In general, the parent-teacher relations are rather good. They are only few problematic cases reported and they are not systematic but rather a kind of a personal conflict. There are three main patterns of exclusion: 1) living in a slum settlement; 2) having low education, which unfortunately relates to the previous point and booster its effect; and 3) having busy working schedule. Nevertheless, the working time is a legitimised excuse of non participation and we have to keep this in mind because the commonly shared attitude is that there is no personal benefit from the participation.

#### A. History of participation

##### **“Possible to do” decisions**

- We succeed in most of our initiatives. Of course it is because we are taking only “possible to do” decisions (m,34,A)

##### **Examples of parental initiatives:**

- Holiday trips
- Playground (as NGO project)

##### **Female devotion to children**

- It is a duty of the mother most of the time. The fathers work on night or extended shifts in the near city and usually are very tired. (SGC:D)

- My husband collected the child once and then the form mistress finally believed that I am not a single parent (f,34,E)

### **Male participation**

- The mothers are washing and cooking. They check only the homework, but the fathers "take care of children". They are more severe (SGC: B)
- "A heater, a bear, and a bank – that what the father is" (f,47,E)

## **B. Motivation for participation**

### **A schoolmaster ("daskal")**

- We need to be organized. Hence they need to appoint one schoolmaster to organize our gathering (SGC: D)

### **No trust in the system**

- I do not believe that our participation will change anything. Therefore it is non sense to participate (f,36,D)

### **A parent's day**

- We need to set up a parent's day once per a week. A parent coming and talking about his or her occupation. We do not need a selected active group of parents but everyone should be involved. (f,36,E)

### **Steady principal**

- We need the principal to be a steady person, which know the parents' demands. (SGC: C)

### **More parent-teacher meetings**

- We need more parent-teacher meetings – for example every week (SGC:B)

### **To lower the working day**

- They have to lower the working day. I am working 16 hours per day. If I go to parent-teacher meeting I am going to look as an intoxicated person (f,34,A)

## **C. Initiatives**

### **Parental exams**

- During the basic level of education, once there was organized a contest. The pupils tested their parents on the subject and lessons matter of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3th grades – like the TV game "Any kid knows that" ()

## **D. Parent-teacher relationship and mutual trust**

### **Parents do not care**

- I am never attending the parent-teacher meetings. The schoolmistress got use to give up and visit me at home (m,45,D)

### **No problems with the teachers**

- We do not have problems with the teachers. When you come to school, they always pay attention to our questions (f,31,D)
- The principal always say hallo to us, with the form mistress we have good mutual understanding. She is able to hug us, the kiss us (f,27,A)
- We are taking the side of the lecturers because the disagreements are to detriment of children (SGC: E)

### **Evade the responsibility**

- When we address the form mistress always evade the responsibility and transfer it to the afternoon supervisor (SGC: C)

## **E. Hindrances to participation**

### **Working time /occupation/**

- We work from 8 to 5. The parent-teacher meetings use to be scheduled around the noon, so there is no way for us to participate (f,31,D)
- We harvest the fruits of the democracy. The people have not time for the intellectual things. We open our shop in 8 AM and close in 10 PM. How could I be more active (f,36,E)

### **The principal's will**

- If a given parent is not wanted at school, they not invite him/her at the parent-teacher meetings. The school cook told me there is going to be a meeting in 5 PM. I went there 5 min. post 5 o'clock but the principal told me: I am sorry, but the meeting is over (f,42,C)

### **The healthy Roma children in the school for children with SEN**

- The school staff gets used to work with children without parents. They are coming from the near orphanage just to eat and in order not to lose the social allowances. In fact nobody cares about these children and the teachers get use to do whatever they want without concerning the parents' opinion (SGC:C)

### **Devaluation of the education**

- There is devaluation of the higher education and of the education as general. Both the parents and the children disparage the teachers. "Is there anything that the schoolmasters are going to tell me, which I don't know?!" – they say. The work is prestigious and non prestigious. Teaching belongs to the second (f,52,E)

## **F. Exclusion patterns**

### 1. Non participating

#### **Slums**

- The parents from the slum quarter are totally not interested in education of their children. They have no money for the bread, so we cannot expect participation. They are not able even to speak in Bulgarian. (SGC: A&B)

#### **The very busy occupations**

- policemen
- armed forces' members

#### **Low educated**

- They are coming last but going first after the meeting. They stay silent all the time. They are indifferent. There is no indifferent parents among those with a college degree.

### 2. Parents of children with disabilities

- They are incredibly active. The misfortune pushes the parent to compensate the weakness with more attention. Unfortunately the state gives to little financial support in such cases (f,47,E)

### 3. Parents of children that belong to an ethnic minority

- The Arabs are more active, because they do not speak Bulgarian. There is awe of the form mistress. Everything that they do is in the name of the child (f,47,E)

## G. Benefits of participation

### **The child**

It will avoid the parent-teachers war and will have the care of both.

### **The parents**

If everyone participates there will be no privileges (i.e. the participation brings privileges about the child) (SGC:A)

Satisfaction about the done (SGC: E)

### **The school**

As far as we help up the role of the school we elp up the role of the teacher (SGC:E)

### **No benefits**

There will be no benefit because we are not able to change anything (SGC:D)

The participation is too marginal to have an impact on the system (SGC: E)