

Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in SEE

Focus Group Report

MONTENEGRO

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INTRODUCTION

Aim of the research: Introducing and understanding of principals' attitudes concerning reforms in elementary schools, decision - making process in schools and parents' participation in the decision - making process.

Description: Two focus groups with elementary schools' principals in Montenegro-first phase of the regional research project '**Promotion of inclusion and quality in education in South-East Europe**'.

Place: Foundation Open Society Institute - Representative Office Montenegro (FOSI ROM), Njegos Street, no. 26, Podgorica.

Date: 05th of February 2008.

Time: 10:00-12:00 (the first focus group)
12:00-14:00 (the second focus group)

The first focus group (7 principals):

The second focus group (8 principals):

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Submitted with the report are: the audio and visual materials, as well as the transcripts of both interviews.

1. General feeling of principals and social framework in which school system functions

Reform of the elementary school system formally began in year 2000. In the period 2000 -2004 the legislation was changed as a basis for the reform in all elementary schools. Also, in this period schools' curricula and programmes were designed and education of teaching staff was implemented as a part of capacity building for effective and efficient realisation of new goals and methods in the elementary schools. Finally, in year 2004, the first generation of pupils enrolled nine year elementary schools according to the new programme.

The school, as an institution, is an integral part of overall socio-economic and political life. This is basic framework that determines its general social status and position in institutional environment, and nevertheless, attitude of the public towards this institution. In other words, school 'shares destiny of the society', as stated by the elementary schools' principals. The phrase 'destiny of the society' refers to all transitional shocks that either directly, or indirectly, define environment in which process of education of the youngest members of the society takes place.

One of the fundamental characteristics of Montenegrin society, as well as of the large number of other societies in transition, is economic crisis that reflects upon everyday life of its citizens, but also on impossibility of the State to finance work of the public services. Speaking about the state in which elementary schools are, the principals of the elementary schools emphasis **material and financial problems**, and, even, when they do not talk about them explicitly, material and financial problems are treated as 'socio-economic constant', that is to say, as something that is implied. Remarks concerning lack of finance are often specific and brought to the absurd level:

'Just now, let's say I have had school anniversary and from the Ministry I got 500 euros for costs and around 7000 euros was spent'. (Director of Elementary School)

In this concrete situation, the misbalance between 500 and 7000 euros must be covered somehow, so the principals have recourse to many possible and impossible strategies leading from appeals to local authorities to enterprises and individuals' donations. In other words, in overcoming these problems, they are very often left to themselves and final outcome depends upon their perspicacity, persistence and resourcefulness. However, material problems are not visible only when they speak about celebrations and similar, 'not so necessary' expenses. The material problems are, even, reported when speaking about '**basic material terms**' that are necessary for normal elementary schools' functioning. In this light, and according to principals' statements, the law regulations, by which schools are obliged to provide all necessary conditions for pupils, are a specific problem:

“So, from that point, concerning equipment, that is special story and, also, when we talk about inclusion, access...now, legally, parents can sue school if it doesn't provide it. We have to, simply, provide it. Now, there are different kinds of buildings, especially in small schools in village areas. There are schools that worked in King Nikola's period, and there is no way that some buildings' mending are possible to be done, if it is even touched, that can all be, I mean...then plumbing fixture, not even to mention that...Many things need to be done, of course money, but...” (Director of Elementary School)

So, on one side, the State appointed minimum material standards that the schools (principals) are legally obliged by, and on the other side, the State does not give enough resources to help schools provide this minimum. This situation compels principals to use 'methods of finding solution by themselves', because it is their commitment to fulfill the material standards. Accordingly, this is one of the most significant factors **for principals' personal and professional dissatisfaction**, especially in those municipalities where economic problems are more noticeable (the north of Montenegro) and where space for maneuver 'of finding solution by themselves', in the process of finding additional resources for financing, is significantly narrowed.

The Montenegrin society is a **political society**. In reality this means that politics is involved on all social levels. The actual political relations, that from the beginning of multi-party system have been recognised as relations filled with tension and strain, reflect also on life and work of elementary schools. Existing **bigotry between political parties often causes blockade in efficient schools' functioning**. This is, particularly, reflected in situations when, on different levels of governing, different political options 'encounter'.

So, for example, if on the local level there is one authority governing and on the state level the other political option, local structure makes it harder, decelerates and, in every other way, blockades principal's election:

“...I will explain it immediately. Please, it had to be avoided, here is the reason: we had a big problem in local communities where the opposition was governing, so if someone was the best principal in the world, it didn't matter...That was, mainly, because we, principals, are often victims of that procedure...there are principals who are appointed like acting for even 5, 6, 7 months until they get it, and then agree on the appointment. No, there are no reports from local community, nor there is positive nor negative, local communities, I beg your pardon. Then, you wait and the minister waits and school waits. Here, that is the reason.’ (Director of Elementary School)

Other than this political bigotry, the problem that often occurs is the one of efficient functioning and also **personal intolerance** that can have different causes. This state of affairs sometimes brings the whole situation to absurd in some specific situations:

‘...though, it is all about politics, recently, for example, the president of municipality Tuzi rejected to finance arrival of children theater from town, he refused to do it, because he is not on good terms with the mayor, they don't agree politically so that parents are also being political in that sense.’ (Director of Elementary School)

According to this, in real life, principals can easily become victims, or maybe, protagonists of some political and personal bigotry, and all of this is a by-product of overall legislative patterns of behaviour in one *par excellence* political society. Anyway, this factor marks destiny of elementary schools and it is almost certain that it reflects upon a great number of reminiscences that are characteristic of social school life in general.

The elementary schools are, by necessity, focused on the local authorities. The principals, mainly, express the attitude that **relations with local authorities are** ‘good’. This qualification is mainly referring to general quality of communication that is developed between principals of schools and authorities in local government. However, the principals notify that they cannot expect any specific help from local authorities:

“Yes, yes, now the mayor opened the seminar and said hello and helped. I do not know now, concerning local authorities, there is no help, we have cooperation in the part that we say what is bothering us, we can’t get any help, especially not professional one, from them.” (Director of Elementary School)

There are other concrete problems concerning the educational process in the elementary schools and they are result of **lack of capacities in local government**. So, for example, it is appointed that there 20% of the teaching curriculum that can be created according to the cultural and economical specifications of local environment in which a school works. This is an integral part of the process of decentralization in elementary education that is aiming to get teaching curriculum closer to local community in which a school functions. In practice, elementary schools expected help from local authorities in creation of these 20% of teaching curriculum, but local community simply is not capable to respond to these school’s needs, because there are no qualified people to do it:

“...since I come from Rozaje and so, let’s say, have extremely good cooperation and communication concerning problems to help us in equipment, there and that, though it isn’t maybe obligation of local community, but concerning these things there are no skilled and qualified people in local communities to help us, because we are given 20% of teaching curriculum and programmes for us to make it, 80% we get from Ministry, Institution, I don’t know, from the State, but this 20% I should make as a teacher in cooperation with local community, but there is no one to do it.” (Director of Elementary School)

Subsequently, something that was, at the beginning, imagined to be ‘decentralization’ practically led to frustration of teaching staff and principals, because, in this situation, teachers and principals have to find the way by themselves to design those 20% of curriculum that is related to local specifications.

Work of the elementary schools is highly influenced by **direct social surroundings**. By this social ‘micro-climate’ in which schools function is implied, or to say rather problems of traffic, pupils’ safety, social surroundings, in terms of social structure of people in which school functions.

'...considering cooperation with parents, maybe school work is also influenced by surrounding, that is to say, not same school location. To tell you, it is not to be praised but it is the fact that we are the first elementary school that got school policemen. Because we have such school location that all children that ran from other elementary and high schools had place of gathering in front of our school and then they had fighting among each other or with our pupils. So, that is location, surroundings, roads on three sides. With school policeman many things changed, that is, they simply found other locations to meet. School location also determines structure of children, parents; many other things are connected to each other.' (Director of Elementary School)

Accordingly, there are several levels that are influenced by school's location: leading from social structure of pupils and their parents to a series of situation parameters that, to a great extent, determine frequency and nature of the problems that principals, teachers, pupils and parents deal with.

2. Evaluation of the reformed nine-year school

Generally, when speaking about **educational reform**, the principals have positive attitude to all key changes that have happened in the process of reform. In descriptive and lively manner, more experienced principals depict that this reform is both, better prepared and implemented, comparing to some earlier reforms of elementary schools:

'Since I am the generation of older teachers I have survived few reforms and I think that this is the best one and thoroughly prepared and that it is being realised in the same way. There are very good moments, starting from those where programmes are adapted to present moment, innovated, redundant staff is being removed. Specially, I like the opportunity of flexibility in realization of the programme, which was not allowed before and that was prejudicially influencing quality of knowledge, that is its lasting of practical use. This reform, I think is the best because it included thorough education of teaching staff, starting with school principals.' (Director of Elementary School)

Particularly, the principals positively assess **new teaching methods** that, due to the reform, became an integral part of educational process. It was emphasised that interactive teaching significantly improved communication between pupils and teachers and that, consequently, it contributed to the accomplishment of educational goals:

'...But huge progress is achieved in that interactive teaching, that means, that is actually goal of this reform and it seems that it is being realised, at least in these schools that I know of, and that is one relation towards teaching, so called active teaching that was before this one, these reforms we do now, because, probably, here many colleagues have same active teaching before this as a form...that mutual relation between pupils and teachers is developed and it is much better, teaching is much active and better results are accomplished concerning achievements that are, actually, aim of the teaching.; (Director of Elementary School)

So, if the reform is to be generally assessed, our principals would give very positive grades for everything that was done and realised within the reform's framework. However, this reform, same as any other, could not completely respond to all requests and structurally could not entirely adapt to all aspects included in the reform. So, for instance, principals emphasize that **all schools that enrolled the reform from 2004 up until today have not been equally treated**. The schools belonging to, so called 'A cycle', that is to say the schools that were the first to enroll in the reform, benefited the most. This benefit is reflected in the improvement of material terms, but, at the same time, it is mirrored in teaching staff's education:

"Secondly, we, were lucky, especially because our school was the first school which entered reform in municipality, so we got equipment and big material support for teachers' education, for realisation of new educational programmes so we did repair of the school buildings, fulfilling school cabinet needs, included computer technology, on breaking many... I am very pleased with everything we accomplished now with the support of Ministry of education and Bureau for Educational Services, NGOs that we owe big gratitude, especially to Unicef office from Podgorica, Pedagogical Centre from Podgorica, Save the Children, Enfants organization offices from Rozaje." (Director of Elementary School)

The previous paragraph confirms the statement that the **schools which entered the reform at the very beginning mostly benefited**, principally because the principal of this elementary school himself says that his school was 'the lucky one', since it was among the first schools. In other words, this principal has got information that the elementary schools that later entered the reform received significantly less help and support comparing to schools from, so called 'A cycle'. This statement is, also, confirmed by the principal of the school that did not enroll the reform with the first wave, but later:

'Here, to summarize from this all, starting from the entering the reform. This is school, they got biggest financial support, we others a little less, these after us even less and so on. I know that seminar for principals was 9 modules, we have 7, so that there is lack of money, but that is not the question now but other things as well, not now, I am not saying this for this reason, just there is lack of money.' (Director of Elementary School)

This attitude confirms one more principal whose school was in so called 'A cycle':

To me, it seems, the biggest mark of everything so far is several paradoxes that follow this reform - one of them is that it was expected that colleagues that came after us, that it would be easier for them, but it seems that in some way it is harder, because it seems to me, that it was pretty good for us concerning material school equipment, compared to other colleagues, as I heard from those who came after us." (Director of Elementary School)

He features this situation as 'paradoxal,' having in mind the logics that it is always hardest in the beginning and that other schools which follow can use experience that schools from previous cycles accumulated. Among principals who participated in discussion, however, the same points of view could be heard:

'At the beginning, teachers were afraid and scared and I think that it was lack of education there, however, we were lucky to be that next to last group and that we could use experience of other colleagues who started earlier, so we used that and we ourselves organized seminars, in order to give opportunity to our staff that teaches first graders, to manage better, we used that experience and I think that it starts working, there is big willingness in colleagues, bigger than, lets say, those from the old system. Simply, they have need for the initiative, meaning, it is good, that makes me happy, as their leader. It means, the reform was successful for us, its first phase, we can say'. (Director of Elementary School).

This principle, unambiguously, says that her school "was lucky" to be next to the last group in the reform and that the greatest benefit in that sense was **usage of the comparing experiences of the schools which already had gone through the reform**. Accordingly, we can see at first glance, that the principles' opinions are contradictory. One point of view is that the schools which were first in the reform 'had more luck' and the other is that schools which entered reform later 'had more luck'. It is illusory that these opinions are really contradictory. Actually, when they say that schools from the first cycle 'had more luck', they mean, mainly, on material improvements that were part of the reform. On the other hand, when it is said that schools that entered reform later 'had more luck', it refers to usage of the previous experience of the reformed schools. By this, they do not dispute that the schools from the first cycle had more luck when they talk about improvement of material conditions.

The fact that the principal of elementary school in Budva, that entered the reform among the last, considers that fact as positive, is a product of constellation that material situation in this school is much better than it is case with large number of other schools, specifically those in the north. That means that for the principal of this school, **reform is not mainly in improvement of material conditions**, because in her school those conditions (Budva-seaside) are much better than in other municipalities, or to say it in other words, for this principle the reform is, mainly, in close connection to the reform of teaching plans and programmes and also to the inclusion of modern methods in teaching process.

Once again to emphasize, the principles evaluated the reform in a very positive way. But, on the other hand, since all principles were directly involved in process of the reform, they underline a number of problems that follow the reform of elementary school system. One of the problems is **age of the teaching staff**. The principles emphasis that reform was better understood and accepted by younger teachers than the older ones:

'Then, in my school it took one step at the time, I mean, at the beginning, so that teaching staff in first four grades was rather ready for the reform and it was easier for them than for subject teachers, than about the structure, they are younger and younger people accept more easily and gladly changes, though we should not ask from those that will retire next year to reform much, nor does he(her) have willingness to do it, nor some effect to invest in him(her)'. (Director of Elementary School).

Also, one of the problems is **disharmony between regulations and the real capabilities of schools**. The principles underline that there are regulations that are simply impossible to be fulfilled in certain situations and with existing capacities. Concerning this, problem of responsibility of the principles themselves is observed separately and they express dissatisfaction concerning this matter:

'I would say something now about these norms and standards, there is new rule book being written, there are many things, many are reduced, norms are increased for certain jobs, we are between that we have to respect regulations and that we need to organise our teaching in highest quality. That means, if someone comes to check this, work inspection, he will want to see if everything is how it should be. However, we have Civic education and there is no faculty for that, now there is the question how that lessons, we know that when it is more than a quarter then norm says that open call must be issued. How can someone ask us to take responsibility for that, there are some things that need to be solved.' (Director of Elementary School).

One of the critics related to the reform process is **lack of feedback** about how the reform in total was performed and realised. Honestly speaking, this objection is more than profound. Actually, every reform process has to be followed by analysis and feedback, so that participants in reform could have realistic approach toward what was achieved. Otherwise, their attitude towards reform and motivation altogether is reduced:

'About the analysis, I think that every job needs to be analyzed in the end, what we have done. I am not in contact with other colleagues and I asked this on the seminar, analysis of the success in the first cycle, I think, we should have some feedback on class level, grades level, what we did, because in the first cycle there is no successfulness, aims are evaluated. If we now made some charts with around ten aims for one subject, that would be, don't know what kind of information we could get, there is no success, so it would be good to think about it'. (Director of Elementary School).

We already spoke about material and financial problems of schools' functioning, but the principles, specifically, underline this problem when they speak about the reform. They emphasize that **existing conditions for work are not on the necessary level** in order to support reform's requirements:

"It should, it would star well, but somehow it was stopped, the modernization of teaching. Schools usually have old equipment, that began with furniture, biology cabinet, as I remember they said that chemistry and physics were next, but there isn't any, at least at my school, and I know that most schools have old teaching equipment, so that modernization should be continued and give that material side bigger attention'. (Director of Elementary School)

Some principles particularly underline **the lack of material stimulation for teachers from A cycle**. They accentuate that teachers in schools that firstly entered the process of education had the biggest burden concerning design of teaching plans and programmes and that it would be appropriate to give them certain material compensation for that. This is mainly because the results of their work will be used by teachers for their subjects in those schools that later entered the reform:

*'...I think this is also one paradoxal situation. So, these colleagues who, so to say, are broadening roads for us, they go from first to fifth, fourth grade, in lower grades teaching, and these colleagues also from sixth to ninth, from fifth to ninth, they do programmes, prepare programmes that are of great use for colleagues who come after them. They aren't in way stimulated to come to the ninth grade, making programmes for ninth grade, that means completely same salary as for the colleagues that make those programmes for the first time, which is really hard, trust me, my school and I also believe at other colleagues as well, we stay one month during summer in our cabinets preparing for the next school year new programmes that do not exist anywhere yet'.
(Director of Elementary School)*

One of the fundamental goals of the reformed elementary school was to reduce and change enormous and large in scope teaching plans and programmes and to have as the final aim **reduction of burden for both pupils and teachers**. However, this, according to principals' words, did not happen in practice:

"I wouldn't agree completely with the thesis that neither children nor parents are without burden, I think that there is even physical work. For example, I make school schedule so we have situation that, we have over 6 lessons, that means over 6 lessons a day, which was not the case so far, that is it wasn't like that in old school system. Children also didn't, they are burdened, you can tell by books" (Director of Elementary School)

In addition to this thesis, there is a statement of principals that **parents themselves complain on volume of assignments and demands from pupils in general**:

*"...that really, parents complain that there are homeworks again, that children carry too much books, that books are heavy, I for example, think that programme in the fourth grade same literature, or in the third, I beg your pardon, where children actually didn't learn how to read properly, they already have four books to read over 400 pages?!"
(Director of Elementary School)*

Hence, the principles themselves agree that reformed school reduced total pupils' burden, but they also estimate that it is not enough. They consider that even more should be done to further disburden pupils. Besides, it is not clear whether 'too much burden' for

children is a resultant of teaching plans and programmes being not enough reduced or is it a resultant of teachers 'good old habits'.

One of the problems on which the principals insist is **the problem of elective subjects**. This form of teaching is, especially, supported by teaching plans and programmes that are integral part of the reform, with purpose to, firstly, provide pupils with a choice what subjects to learn and, secondly, to make professional orientation of pupils a resultant of pupils' choice (or in our case, parents' choice). The principals emphasize that a large number of elective subjects disables efficient organization of teaching, due to practical and technical reasons and, at the same time, the lack of capacities in total:

"I would also only, just shortly look at, as I believe, paradoxal situation concerning the elective subjects, we continually get new and new ideas from the Bureau for educational services, excellent and good ideas for elective subjects, for subjects the new ones that we can include in elective part of teaching. However, concerning the number of lessons, that is 5 lessons of elective subjects that we can give to our students, simply inapplicable for schools in number that Bureau for educational services recommends...There is another, very important situation, that is that schools, aren't equipped and that there isn't enough teaching and well trained staff to accomplish all those programmes that are offered, so I say, well, for elective subject. That is hard to achieve also due to other reason, making schedule, because of space in school where we can't give one rich spectrum of offered subjects." (Director of Elementary School)

One of the problems in the reform is **fluctuation of teachers**. This refers to situation in which teachers that are trained to meet the needs of the reformed schools, change their place, leaving an empty space which is necessary to be fulfilled with teachers that are not educated to meet needs of the reform:

'All of my teachers who were there when reform started in my school, they were trained. However, every teacher who retired, went on sick leave, anywhere, left school, went to other town etc. new teaching staff came. That staff is usually young human being, like this colleague next to me, that weren't trained and she has to go to a class immediately. And then she is in amazement, then I educate her ,colleagues, no many colleagues, one biology teacher, Math teacher, one Mother language teacher and then it is a great problem, there isn't anyone to show it to her'. (Director of Elementary School)

Finally, one of the problems that principles insisted upon is **education that is organized for teachers**. They criticize the previous practice when teachers had to go from their local community to the capital (Podgorica) in order to participate in education. This is, according to them, highly unsuitable due to two reasons: firstly, it is not economical, and secondly, very often it happens that majority of teachers is absent from school and this negatively affects the process of regular teaching realization.

'For schools that have around 50 or 60 teachers it is better to organize instructors, two or three of them in the place than to send too many teachers to other place it is more economical, I even organized it, half of the teaching staff went through it, so, we were late again" (Director of Elementary School)

Accordingly, these are, briefly, identified problems on which principles insist when they speak about the reform of elementary schools. As well, though it is not probably necessary, we are mentioning that the order of problems that we have presented above does not imply in any way their priorities, nor does it imply estimation of frequency or hierarchy according to their significance in any sense.

3. Decision – making process in schools

When speaking about decision – making process, the principals insist on two principles and all the discussion’s participants absolutely agree upon them. Firstly, they emphasize that during the decision making process **existing rules and regulations must be obeyed**.

This statement would not be significant by itself, but what matters is the fact that they ‘insist’ upon this.

In other words, insisting that in process of school management regulations must be obeyed means either that this, in some previous period, was not the case, or that the respect of the law today from due to some reasons is brought to question. However, it is still unclear why they insist so much on something that should be ‘normal’ by itself. The other thing is the magical word that all our principals use when they talk about school management and that is ‘**transparency**’. Thus, briefly, the description of their school management is brought to a thesis that management must be **transparent and in accordance with law**:

‘The most important thing is that school work is open to public, that no decision is made without informing Parents’ Council, School Board etc. It means that the most important is that, change of regulations that parents know if a teacher inappropriately marks a student twice during school year, he/she can automatically lose a job, from that extreme action to that the most democratic where parents really has that, the most important thing is that it is transparent.’ (Director of Elementary School)

The very word ‘transparency’ is used in many a possible meaning and in a wide range of different ways. It is possible that one of the reasons for this is frequency of usage of this word in public and political discourse. Anyway, this word is ‘mantra’, the magical word with which principals demonstrate their loyalty to the reform and modern developments in the society. According to this, in every single case of decision making, the principles insist that ‘everything must be transparent’.

Crucial apparatus for school management is **School’s board** and the main part of the interview was actually related to functioning of school’s board. In the first instance, regarding the **structure of the school’s board**, it is obvious that schools’ boards are very

heterogeneous, both in terms of the institutions that members are from and in terms of their professional identities:

‘Concerning School’s board, it comprises people of different professions, interests and they represent different institutions, that is different subjects, representatives from Ministries, School Institution, parents’ representatives and employees. Those are people who are, one part of them is in relation to education and the other one isn’t. (Director of Elementary School)

With regard to this, the principles were often **critical concerning criteria for school board members’ election**. Namely, they emphasize that there are cases when institutions that have right to autonomously delegate members for the schools’ boards send to the boards incompetent people who cannot, in any way, contribute to school’s functioning:

“Concerning these school apparatuses, problems are more or less identical. For example, recently School board was formed and I was sent two men from Ministry, who are more-less, uneducated. You ask him ‘Do 36 letters in Albanian and 30 Slav letters, which is 76? means half. I asked him that was probably someone’s interest that he should be there, ok no problem. He is generally good man, good family, but that doesn’t do, let’s say, what school should be because I consider that school is an institution, place for creating new men and to form a new men then I believe that all my work in school and that are around school to school they should behave really professionally because there is no real school without it, no matter what position you have. (Director of Elementary School)

One of the main problems concerning associates that school principal chooses for leading functions is **limitations emanating from existing regulations** in terms of the election of school board’s members from teaching staff. One of principals unambiguously points out in what way the existing regulations negatively influence the choice, indicating that he is coerced to choose as his associates older teachers, actually, those who are ‘close to retirement’.

“Problem is, let’s say, in my school, 60% of teachers are ready to retire so then, they are not too interested in many things in school. For example, I now need to choose two s. According to this, both should retire, none of my workers wants to apply. They say: ‘we are not guaranteed jobs after mandate is over’. (Director of Elementary School)

Hence, this happens because, due to the existing regulations, for the ones who are in charge of the leading jobs at school, and this is the case with principals and his associates, a job position as a teacher after their mandates are over is not guaranteed. This determines that young teachers, who would, according to principals’ words, be much more efficient as principals’ associates, do not want to candidate for these positions because they would put themselves in danger to be out of work after their mandate was over.

Based on the overall discussion and other principals' opinions, the prevailing attitude is that **members of the schools' boards are not active enough**. The majority of principals underlines that they have good cooperation with board's members and that decisions are made without great problems, but that members of the board are, still, not interested enough to contribute to greater degree to school functioning:

'Members of the school's board could be better included though they are not motivated...usually people are too occupied with some other obligations so often they can't come to meetings, so then we work with half of them. So there is no high capacity, to say that is School's board, and then some member hears that we did it and says: 'who, I am a member, that wasn't done there'...and he doesn't come to meetings. There are unpleasant situations when you hear these kinds of statements and so on.' (Director of Elementary School)

This statement also shows that there is one more problem concerning **school board members' selection**. Namely, and majority of principles agrees upon this, when school board's members are elected, those 'accepted in the highest circles' are chosen and they are, by nature of their job, already overdriven and, thus, cannot contribute enough to the school's board functioning.

However, there are some positive examples when speaking about school's board functioning. One of the principles depicts it explicitly:

'When we talk about the decision making process, in my school I have very positive experience for a rather short time when we talk about the School board. However, the new School board was formed recently and in a short time period I really saw maximum of interest to help school, which is actually a practice so far too. All decisions were brought up unanimously, school had one very good cooperation and support of the School board, even when there was school reconstruction and if it was necessary to give help or support, these people were there to do that' (a.i director of Elementary School)

But, when we talk about this school board, we should have in mind that it is possible to say that this is rather exception than usual pattern of school board functioning in general.

When we speak about **decision making in practice**, it seems that the standards are adopted and that the process of decision making regarding schools' boards is characterized as a 'routine'. The process refers to the fact that all board's members, who are willing to participate in discussion, make their statements, exchange arguments and by the means of plurality of votes, the decisions are made:

' When we talk about the School board, that means management, it decides based upon single arguments that prepares, depending what is it about-is it about teaching or financing, so , with plurality of votes and decisions that principal makes in the range of his authorities. I mostly bring those decisions based on the number of data, that is from discussions with my associates, we have practice that every Monday, we have meetings with cooperatives, that means that associates, pedagogy and psychology office and about all the questions from one week to other, unless there is something unexpected, and it is necessary before, and of course, what is in school, what we all know, it is defined by existing regulations.' (Director of Elementary School)

Apart from school's board, there are other apparatuses that participate in the decision making process in schools. Basically, all decision making apparatuses can be divided in two groups: **professional and managerial apparatuses**. The professional ones, in accordance with their authorization, make decisions on professional questions related to the teaching processes:

‘This means that there are professional and management organs. That is, there are two different systems in decision making. When we talk about professional organs that means, from class teacher over professional group, class councils and teaching councils. That is, decisions are made by plurality of votes, when we talk about decisions themselves, however, before making decision there is discussion where arguments are given of people and based on that...decisions, meaning, based on plurality or how it is defined.’ (Director of Elementary School)

Generally, when speaking about the decision making process, the principals do not emphasize that there are some specific problems in functioning of all apparatuses responsible for decision making.

4. Attitudes towards parents' participation

4.1. Different perception of Parents' Council as one of the apparatuses of elementary schools' management

For the most part, groups' interviews were focused on **parents' participation both:** in the decision making process and in school life in general. In regards to this, it is necessary to notice that there is a difference **in perception of principals and parents themselves** when speaking about total participation of parents in elementary schools' work.

The essential body that assembles parents and has a status of advisory organ in the decision making process is **Parents' Council**.

Firstly, when discussing the function of the Council, the principals point out the differences in perception that exist between them and parents related to **parents' expectations**. Namely, the principals underline that in most of the cases, on Council's meetings, parents expect an 'expose' from school's principal.

Accordingly, parents in the parents' councils mostly expect from a principal to pass on information, to say what he has to say, to inform them and they (parents) remain passive concerning participation in Council's work:

'...and I think, they (parents-rem. M.B.) would their involvement at meetings mostly by, that principal, that is school representatives to have their report and they to come and listen what is prepared...That is, they do not understand still that school, with its change of the law and changes in the society that we had in recent years, become more and more open and that we simply are desperate for getting some feedback from them'. (Director of Elementary School)

Furthermore, one of the key problems that the principals emphasize is that **parents themselves do not understand Council's authorities**. They simply do not understand the role of the Council in decision making process, as principals explain:

' Some parents understood that they should run school, simply they thought that they should even decide how much would teachers salary be, working time, that is the fact and they didn't understand that Parents Council is on every important organ that should help school, in that way, by helping school, they will be part of school management'. (Director of Elementary School)

The principals claim that parents simply try to exceed the authorities that Council has. According to what principals say they oppose this, and as a consequence this body becomes a cause of **tensions between principals and parents** rather than a contribution to the schools' functioning and positive participation in the decision making process.

“My experience is that, occasionally, and maybe even often they get out of their authorities. And we constantly bring them back ‘Yes, we will give you information but you do not decide about that. They give opinions, recommendations...’ (Director of Elementary School)

Also, the lack of understanding of Council’s authority, according to principals’ words, often is manifested in the way that they discuss about whole spectrum of **different questions** that are single and, according to their words, trivial by themselves:

‘Well, it depends on what. About teachers: ‘Why this teacher, we would like that one’ or some blanket statements like ‘this one works well, this one doesn’t’, “this one was good, that went, this one is bad and it is according to them to be good or bad. Or ‘What was done on building and that wasn’t? Why electric station in the building is put 50 years ago, why is a road so narrow...?’ Some of those are jumping in occasionally and in my school Parents’ Council often is held, every second when they ask for it. (Director of Elementary School)

So, the principals consider that one of the crucial problems of Parents’ Council functioning as a body which is a part of the decision making process, is that parents simply do not understand Council’s authorities or precisely, **parents in a different way from principals understand their part and function in the Council.**

Moreover, special aspect that refers to Council’s authorities by parents is their insisting on **single problems**, and these are often problems which are supposed to be discussed on parents’ meetings or some other quorums.

‘Parents’ council seems hard to make their members understand that he is there a member of the organ and he motivates through the Council as the organ of school parents and it is often a cause for all these expectations and presents some information, behaviour, achievements etc. It gets out of context and starts talking ‘One of pupils hit my child’ etc. What is going or should be going at parents’ meetings, he transferred it here, and there he doesn’t come or if he does, he doesn’t mention that. And now he would like that Parents’ Council deals with some slapping, some minor things...’ (Director of Elementary School)

In addition to this, the principals explicitly **criticize parents’ focus on questions that concern ‘their children’, that is to say** the children of the parents who are the members of the Council. According to the principals’ experiences, this shows complete **absence of systematic way of thinking** about school as an institution and the role of the Council in school management:

‘Often parents talk about single problems on Parents Council, they are interested in child’s behaviour and that they can get from class teacher every day or at class parents’ meeting, that is, some small, individual. We, also, give them excerpt from the law and school status, what are their authorities. I think that Parents’ Council should include more in, to say, total life and work of the school, not individually. In our school in both mandates, president of the Parents’ Council was also member of the school board, so that he was informed about everything that was going on in the school.’ (Director of Elementary School)

4.2 Criteria for electing parents for Parents Councils' membership

Explaining the criteria and the method of parents' election for the Council, the principals highlight that the standard and regulated procedure exist, meaning that **every class Council delegates one member for the Parents' Council**. Accordingly, there is formally the same number of Council's members as there are classes in a school.

'And selection of the Parents' council is such, simply at parents meetings, every homeroom teacher should be chosen for one class. This means, the number of classes is the same as members of the Council' (Director of Elementary School)

The principals underline that **they have no influence on election of Council's members**, emphasizing the fact that class councils autonomously choose members of the Council, and that sometimes the results being that the elected members are dysfunctional for the Council's functioning itself:

'Presidents of the Parents' Council are elected in every class meeting because they choose whom they want, without any suggestion. It depends upon class teacher...sometimes the loudest from the class will be elected and that does obstruction of everything and in every school at least one. And now, who will presidents of the Parents' Council be, a lot depends on that'. (Director of Elementary School)

When discussing about parents' election for the Council, there is a specific problem indicated. Namely, it is common that in class' councils, members who are elected are the ones from the highest 'circles', or to be more accurate, the ones that are respectful in the given local community, the ones having influential positions within the local government's apparatuses, or are, again, successful private investors or businessmen.

'I know that in its structure, Parents' council that function at the level of 40%, they are regular, others come once a year, and the reason is that they are municipality secretary, a doctor, don't know how many shifts he works, this one from dawn until dusk, the other until midnight is obliged to work and they are elected. Maybe on some other meeting, they should still, be reminded on that business, that people who are elected should have time to participate in work.' (Director of Elementary School)

Therefore, this kind of criteria in election of Council's members significantly reduces efficient functioning of the Council simply because these **elected members of Council have no time to participate in work and functioning of the Council**.

4.3 Level of parents' participation in the school work

Speaking about the level to which parents are involved in school's life and work, and according to what the principals claim, first of all there is a need to state that **a low level of parents' interest for participation in the Council's work** is evident:

'When the question is about parents' council I can't say that there are some negative experience, I would rather say that there is too little interests of the parents, that is, parents are not enough interested to be involved in the right way in life and work of school. There is, I need to say, one smaller group of parents who really tries hard and who is involved in life and work of school in the right way and that gives maximum support to the school but, still, there are more those who show complete lack of interest except when there is some criticism, there is always something negative to be found.' (a.i director of Elementary School)

Here is one statement which statistically shows the low level parents' interest when speaking about Council's functioning:

'..Now nothing...I have around 3000 parents, and I have a Council of about 5-6 parents. Noone wants to be involved, that is not he problem only here, but everywhere.' (Director of Elementary School)

Besides the fact that parents' interest for Council's work is 'low', even when they are present at Council's work, **parents are inactive**. As stated above, they, simply, expect to be informed about everything by a principal and that they only acknowledge it.

'When it is about the Parents' Council as an institution, we so far, most of our colleagues here said, that parents' council is not active, that does not mean that parents don't come to meetings, though we must say they do not come readily.' (Director of Elementary School)

As one of the conspicuous proofs that parents are not interested in the Council's work is the fact emphasized by the principals in relation to the reality that the **principals themselves must initiate the Council's meetings**. Otherwise, if principals waited for the parents to organize and appoint assembly the Council, it would be questionable whether it would ever take place. According to this, the meetings are initiated by the principals though they are formally supposed to be initiated by a president of the Parents' Council:

'What is specific for my parents' council is that I have to call them; they don't have any initiative, though, now is new parents council elected, I expect that something will be done differently, but definitely I was always initiator, normally, I wasn't formally the one to call them but I call the president of parents' council ' this and this should be done' and, what colleague Drincic said, they simply wait for some report.' (Director of Elementary School)

Lack of parents' self initiative is one of the key problems on which the principals insist. In accordance with the principals' claim, they simply lack capacities to be effectively involved in the work of the Council and thus helpful for school:

'...I simply see that they have lack of initiative, that they have ideas what they could do. When the parents' council was created, their rights were read to them, their authorities, and all much more than should relying on school that it should, let's say I do for them.'
(Director of Elementary School)

Some principals emphasise that there are **differences in levels of participation among parents**. They clearly make difference in the 'levels' of participation according to different categories of parents:

'Parents in general, I say, that is, one part is really ready to cooperate and we have use of them, while others would be that surroundings, and so, but we have parents who really are not interested...' (Director of Elementary School)

One of the principals refers to the **results of one research** done in schools indicating the number of those who participate in school's work in relation to those who do not:

"The Bureau for educational services had its team of supervisors who were probably in all schools. There is, among others and questionnaire for parents, analyses was made based on it. For example there is the question 'how much do you participate in school life?' there, I don't know, 15-20% who are active and „how often do you come to school' again, answer to do they participate and they participate as much as they feel interested in it, 'did you suggested something' 90% never suggested anything.."
(Director of Elementary School)

Consequently, the principals express **wonder because of the small interest of parents** who are members of the Council in the whole work of the Council and school in general.

They observe that the overall amount of obligations related to the membership in the Council is substantially very small and being like that it should not indicate an additional effort to anyone. However, in practice, parents really badly respond to even this small obligations' fund:

'However, those who are regular, we have, you know, there is that frequency of twice a year that there is the meeting of the Council. That means that parents can not hold an hour or two hours a year, that really isn't some big burden, they say, you call us all the time so are bored...' "I don't know, I can't understand all of them, still that Parents' Council was made from people who are elected like this, they gathered in that first call and there were some congratulations that „how this was done well, see how we are elected: so I think, we live in the small place, everybody know each other, there should be camera to film that. And then we were in full number and never again. That is how it is, I really can't understand how someone can't find an hour of its time twice a year for his child." (Director of Elementary School)

The statement that the **Council assembles twice a year** is in accordance with the minimum of standards appointed by the law. Hence, according to the law, it is appointed that the Council assembles at least twice per a year and, as the principals say, they take care that this minimum is respected:

“Well, twice a year we have an obligation, though they meet 3-4 times a year means, twice and when it is necessary, mostly at the end of the term.” (Director of Elementary School)

Finally, as the main evidence of low interest of parents, not only concerning Council’s work, but generally speaking, **is a small interest and participation of parents on parents’ meetings**. According to one principal’s words, only one fifth of the parents come regularly to parents’ meetings.

“Just take notes from parents’ meetings and you will see that not even 20% of parents come to parents’ meetings.” (Director of Elementary School)

4.4 Forms of parents’ participation in school work

Apart from the decision making process, the principals put a lot of attention to discussion related to different **ways in which parents participate** in general life of a school. In the first instance, they emphasize that parents are, almost without an exception, prepared to help school in situations in which they can offer that help, and when the help itself is in their personal and professional domain:

‘Situation with Parents’ Council as institution is very similar to that what colleagues said so far. We formed third parents’ council, as I can remember and I think that essence of its work is based on what has already been said by colleagues. If it gets to some specific things, parents that are part of the Council are always ready to be involved in finding a solution but only as individuals and you can’t feel that Council is acting as institution. They come from different educational structures, from engineers to workmen and they are always ready to help in their domain that is their profession, to our school.’ (Director of Elementary School)

Therefore, here we talk about **personal involvement in the process of specific problems’ solutions** rather than about the Council’s work as an institution. In this sense, the principals were assuring us, by providing specific examples to support it, that this form of interest and parents’ inclusion is very common and that parents are unselfishly ready to offer this kind of support:

‘I have one positive experience, president of the Council was so much involved in work and life of school and all actual problems that school had lately, since we have one big problem, unsolved school yard. I can see that parents are completely involved because urbanity city plan is being made in the part of town where our school is and I can see one maximum of interest and he also informs parents in the right way.’ (a.i director of Elementary School)

One of the ways in which parents often help school is **material, id est financial help**.

This is actually related to the certain number of parents, who are often private investors and who have, in transitional allocation of checks, accumulated large financial resources, and thus small financial investments in school do not represent a problem for them in any way:

‘Well, again, that are those who are active, they are really active that they differ so much that those are men who have some firms, who have money and they were included in some donations, though it was never asked on the Parents’ Council, I always more emphasized ideas, suggestions, information cause it looks inappropriate to ask money from parents.’ (Director of Elementary School)

However, though the principals, without an exception, accept the offered parents’ financial help, they put stress on the fact that **there are bad aspects of this kind of help in elementary schools**.

‘I do not support the idea that parents should give much, equipment and similar, I think that public school should provide that itself, because I am afraid, that as time goes by we can come to situation to have privileged parents. But, then, that is some my fear that is based on some public opinion research, that is, certain things that I can experience in my work.’ (Director of Elementary School)

As a special form of parents’ participation in school’s life, **their participation in school’ teaching activities** is emphasized. The principals are very positive towards this form of parents’ participation:

‘When I think about Parents’ Council, it should be put in the frames and should not be broadened, parents should be taken into teaching process, to feel his help and in those things about making decisions, that really comes over the frames of culture and behaviour, I don’t know it myself; and it destroys system of work itself and the balance between school and parents. And now, some space should be found for including parents in direct teaching process and that is the cooperation between the parents and school. I hope that will give the highest results and after that we will have as consequence this better cooperation and better work of parents’ council and all, when they are involved that is, not only to be observers, to analyze the results..’ (Director of Elementary School)

Moreover, one of the arguments for including parents in teaching process is that it might lead to the **increase in total parents’ motivation for participation** in all other aspects of school life, including the Council’s work. At that, and as it is mentioned, there is a legislative framework for this form of participation, since every teaching plan and programme leaves open space for the autonomous creation of some parts according to the specificities of a local environment, and this is a part parents can participate in:

'To be involved in planning doesn't mean that you will write, you would see them writing it, in involving and planning of some contents, they can be included. Let's start from the fact that every place, in Montenegro has certain capacities, cultural, economic, I don't know myself...where they can give contribution as parents, that is by presentation, town, their home town, some firms' theme...' (Director of Elementary School)

Very often, the principals positively spoke about practice and importance of involving parents in **out of school's activities**. When it comes to this, parents are involved based on their own professional responsibilities and positions. So, they, as individuals, give support to school in **out of school's activities**:

'Well, nothing, I just wanted to say that for example in my school teachers do a lot specially for the observing, but the grown-ups too. At my school, for example, there is fire vehicle in every generation and it was brought by a parent, parent who works in fire brigade, they organize it there, comes a vehicle and children go, have a contact with firemen, they talk, show interest, watch the car, look inside and so. Few days ago we had, for example a ride for all IV grades, ride in city bus. That means, bus came for them, they were at the bus stops where they should enter, went out, entering the bus etc like that through the whole town. Then parent-policeman comes in uniform and there in the classroom talks to children.' (Director of Elementary School)

According to principals' opinion, it is very important that **parents are showing high level of interest for out of school's activities** and that is one of the reasons why these parents' interest must be supported. In this way, parents might get closer to school, or precisely, in this way bond between parents and school becomes 'social organism', and this is very important condition for overall efficient school's functioning as an institution:

'However, I think that by this we neglect one very important thing, through we try to do something in school that is out-teaching activities. It is like this, we try to animate as bigger number of students as possible in different out teaching activities and I can tell you that parents are very interested to bring children to school, at school we leave them space for parents to be there where those activities will be held.' (Director of Elementary School)

As reasons for this increased interest of parents when we talk about out of school's activities, the principals emphasize the fact that **parents choose in what of school's activities their children will be included**. Thus, 'choice' is one of the key incentives for high interest of parents for of school's activities. Secondly, when we speak about out of school's activities, their interest is influenced by the fact that there is a possibility for **easy insight in results** related to these activities, the fact being that as a consequence they are witnesses of the level of children's participation in the activities.

‘...secondly, children are small, they can’t decide by themselves, parents decide that, what section, will they go there and there, he brings the child follows him and then he himself wants to be involved, to watch, gives suggestions and opinion about the teacher etc.’ Shall we go there, I will provide the van, „let’s sell performance to some other town...” here we had an agreement with Bar etc so that those activities are really, we give wide range of them, they mostly choose them.’ (Director of Elementary School)

One of the specifically significant ways in which parents are intensively included in school’s work is **elective subjects**. In relation to this, as the principals emphasize, parents, also, show great interest. It appears that the reasons for this are partly similar to those for out-of school’s activities. So, interest is result of the fact that **there is a choice** and in practice, according to words of parents themselves, they, not their children, choose the subjects that their children will attend:

‘However, parents are those who choose, you know. Parents are those who choose subjects, elective subjects or that space in school where school can decide, without the Bureau for educational services. That is what I was thinking about; there we needed to ask parents more. Beside those partners who need to participate, there is working office etc, which means that it should be different in our school than, let’s say in Kolasin, and what do I know, that selection of subjects should be a little different. That is exactly, what my remark referred to concerning elective subjects because we have that situation here, for example, situation that parents in our school, we know that they will decide about it more than children. For example, all parents will, no matter if child isn’t for that, but parent will choose to take some foreign language, second foreign language. Simply, parent wants his child to attend second foreign language.’

Furthermore, the reason for increased parents’ interest in the field of elective subjects is the fact that in this way pupils are being **professionally oriented**, and this might cause serious consequences for the future pupils’ education and accordingly this question is given special attention.

‘When it comes to the elective subjects, parents see a possibility for professional orientation.’ (Director of Elementary School)

As one of the forms of cooperation, **building of institutional arrangements in local community** is specifically emphasized. There is a significant argument that by networking between a school and other organizations in a local community, a positive social atmosphere is being created enabling the improvement of the overall communication with parents.

'I don't know what I think is important here is special cooperation between school and parents. Mediators are those organizations which gather our children, children who go to a certain school out of school and that is important. For example , we have cooperation with all clubs, sports ones in town, swimming,, basketball etc, or for instance we have excellent cooperation with NGO's, Roma organization which helps us in our further cooperation with Roma etc and we have that, which means when we have problems to make contacts with parents we go and have cooperation with that NGO. "Youg Roma", which regularly comes to school and we with them, they are interested in position of those children and then they transfer that to parents.' (Director of Elementary School)

4.5 Reasons for low level of parents' participation

Parents' participation in the decision making process is very low, and this is specifically evident in the Parents Councils' work, this being the key institution that enables parents' participation in the decision making process. This statement unambiguously immerses from the statement of principals who were involved in the group interviews. Considering the fact that during these interviews this statement became apparent, we insisted to hear answers from principles to the question what were the reasons for insufficient parents' participation. In this section, we will list all reasons that the principles identified.

First reason is that **Parent's Council is a new institution** to which parents themselves are not accustomed. Simply, they cannot easily accept this new practice, which demands from them new institutional arrangement, and in compliance with the previous period, they are passive in the work of this body. Besides, the Council is the institution which functions on voluntary basis and subsequently parents have got no obligation to participate in its work.

'We principals often forget that Parents' Council is the organ, that it is something completely unknown, was like that for every school in Montenegro until few years back and we often forget that Parents' Council is on voluntary basis.' (Director of Elementary School)

The other reason is total **repudiation of educational process** as a mechanism for social status achieving. The principals point to the fact that a school as an institution lost its significance in post communistic period and that distinctness of functionality of some other mechanisms of social promotion seriously jeopardizes its importance. Consequently, this leads to the loss of parents' interests for school success of their children, and interest for school in general.

‘I think that, observed in the wider aspect, is also axiological problem. These crises that happened had influence and as you can see that during some time, there were people as most important and they are not educated. What can a ten year old child observe, academy professor and Arkan and compare who is his idol, so that certain values dropped to lower degrees, there is disorder in it, lack of motivation, there used to miss that diploma that used to bring certain status in society, money, solid life, after that some people appeared, I know from my generation that started to do some illegal trade business, who are, they see their cars, they compare and it is clear to him that going to school is a waste of time so that parents also weren’t motivated, specially if some analysis would be done, we speak now just according to impressions, if something would be done in this social culture, intellectually..’ (Director of Elementary School)

The third reason is **authoritarian heritage** of previous school system and as well as social system in general. By inertia, based on this heritage, parents are used to authoritative and submissive relation towards teachers. They experience them as ‘superior’, rather than as partners in educational process:

‘Parents’ Council-very significant link for strengthening role of parents in the school. But, it takes a lot of work with them as well, there are great expectations, they admit they are not qualified, they are ashamed to communicate, to them teacher is the authority, for them school is authoritative institution... it will take much more, more work and many steps to get out to the field into some climate that will give us possibility for school to function and that main concern is what is decided systematically.’
(Director of Elementary School)

One of the reasons for small interest in participation in the work of Parents’ Council is **parents’ dissatisfaction conditioned by small level of authorities** that they have being the members of the Council. One of the principals unambiguously and specifically paraphrases parents who at first showed great interest that reduced the moment they realised that, as members of the Council, they have only advisory function:

‘You know what the problem with Parents’ Council is? They understood it, as soon some position is being elected, we Montenegrins like very much to decide and the minute when I copied all of this and put down: It is opinion, it is opinion, it is opinion... so we don’t decide upon anything in the school. Well, no , I decide, we just give opinion and believe it or not, it was that first meeting where there were all and what will I do, It is important “will I say it or not”.’ (Director of Elementary School)

Generally speaking, experience shows that **interest of parents of younger children is bigger comparing to interest of the parents whose children are older**. This is justified by a great number of different arguments. There is common agreement between the principals that the children being older, the parents’ interest gets decreased.

‘Yes, there are certainly more reasons, and this one that older child can transfer more, and that children in higher grades get worse marks and no one is glad to hear something bad and this part that students don’t have to give information from every subject, there are many things, but it is evident that the response is worse in higher grades’ (Director of Elementary School)

When speaking about parents’ participation, according to the principals’ opinion, there is one discriminatory factor and it is related to the size of a local community. Very convincingly, parents speak about local communities, claiming the smaller a local community where a school is situated, the bigger is parents’ participation. This is explained by a simple fact that in small local communities, there is directness in communication same as the network of acquaintances among citizens on different basis. Also, in small communities a school is one of the centers of social life in that community in general:

‘It seems to me that size of the school and its position place an important role, whether it is rural or urban surroundings. As larger is the place, larger are the schools and that relation between parents and teachers is worse, so that means that small schools, for example the school of our colleague, there is certainly better relation, closer since Petrovac is town and a smaller place so that relation between the parents and teachers is closer, more friendly, they meet at the street, have conversations informal ones, and that is why parents have much better insight in whole situation in the school, not only with their child but in the whole school. As the surroundings is bigger, there must be weaker relation among parents and teachers, that is, those relations are distant, cause teachers have their lives, their time which they can’t spend so easy, so I believe that is important fact, where school is positioned, is it smaller or bigger place, size of the school, that place significant part.’ (Director of Elementary School)

The principals notice that certain differences in regulations and procedures of functioning of some apparatuses increase parents’ participation in life and work of school organs. So, for instance, the regulation that pupils’ marks are not read publicly during parents’ meetings had positive influence, because in this way ‘pride’ of parents whose children had bad marks was protected. In other words, earlier when marks were read publicly, parents whose children had bad marks avoided coming to parents’ meetings:

‘According to law, it is not allowed to read bad marks at parents’ meetings, this change, believe it or not in my school, where they are given in written form, parents and students get it, so that just general success is read and normally is discussed about other things beside success. I was there on many such meetings where they talked about what is the problem for example that there are 20 students and 13 negative marks, from chemistry where is the same problem, from biology or together history and geography, there are identical marks, 3 from history and geography, 5 from history, 5 from geography, about such things they discuss, but not about bad marks, though parents convinced that it was really like that, picture changes slowly, I speak for my school> So it is improving, even parents, every teacher and homeroom teacher have time when they receive parents, that is always agreed time and always, for example every Tuesday teacher in sixth grade of one class accepts parents, so that is improving in my school.’ (Director of Elementary School)

Speaking about the reasons of small participation, the principals gave certain **suggestions for increase in parents' participation in decision making process**, as well as in general schools' lives and work. It is interesting to say that the principals themselves were rather self-critical admitting that part of responsibilities for small participation depends upon them as well. Some principals insist that they themselves need to change first in order to be able to change the surroundings.

"I claim that we need to change first, school principals, it doesn't matter if I let's say am 57,I am in obligation to change in this school and then after that my associates, pedagogues and teachers. In that way, if we change, and not only say like we used to say, I am a professor, I am this and that, and in a way we reject parents and everyone else from school." (Director of Elementary School)

One of the suggestions related to the increase in parents' participation is a demand for the **improvement of parents' informing**. The principals underline that they need to improve information channels with parents, because the flow of information is the first condition for increased motivation for parents' motivation:

"Here we should add the thing about parents informing, as I know it is not on the high level in all municipalities. This means that local radio station, papers etc should be included. I know, in Bijelo Polje for example that in certain period of time some special programmes have been done about teaching etc and then in few years it all stopped, there wasn't any programme. Anyway, there was the programme 'School bell' where every Wednesday in an hour programme guests were principal, teacher, pedagogues, psychologist and they gave special attention to parents informing them about their interests so that there should be... (Director of Elementary School)

The greatest number of principals' suggestions was referring to the request for finding the means by which **parents would be educated for the roles of the Council's members**. This request, that was loudly and unanimously asked by parents, is justified by the argument that parents simply do not know their authorities, nor are they motivated, or capable to efficiently accomplish work of the Council's member and the only way for solving this is their education.

'So, we need more parents' education, that is what we need. Not only when we speak about reform and correlation with the school but also, I tried, in my practice before to implement parents, that is not to let them be someone aside, not only concerning education but also upbringing of children and to cooperate in the proper way, so we often organized seminars for parents, let's say also individually during school...I will return to those with parents, I think that parents' awareness should be raised.'
(Director of Elementary School)

However, based upon total discourse in which principals described their relation towards parents, it is noticeable that, actually, from their part, **there is no principals' evident willingness to include parents in decision making process.** That is why, during the interview, there was a direct question that followed:” Do they, and to what extent if they do, the principals want parents to participate in decision making process?” Generally, the principals express readiness to include parents in the Council’s work in terms of suggestions’ giving, but that it is not favorable to have a right to decide. At the same time, they refer to existing laws and regulations which define parents’ Council as advisory apparatus.

‘in my school everybody has right to say his opinion or suggestion, but I am the one who decides, so I am really glad to have parents’ presence but only in degree of their authorities. Believe it or not, it is unbelievable how much they want beside those opinions and suggestions to decide about something. They can’t do all, law restrains us that we can’t get involved in adventure like that, to do something against the law because parent or Parents’ Council... out of mind.’ (Director of Elementary School)

The principals emphasize that the possibility for **parents to assess and evaluate the principals’ work** must not be accepted at any cost. According to their opinion, their interest is, being particular and based on the lack of information, relied on critics:

“Well, concerning this, every good willing parent, good willing suggestions are welcomed. Why should they, colleague Slavko, evaluate our work now, that is not good...however, those come as well and when they do, we have the biggest invasion and biggest problems then, when it is already end of the year, where were you then, you ask them simply, it is certain that cooperation will increase and it is possible to become easier for us as well, to principals and teachers and children.” (Director of Elementary School)

5. Appendix- the attitudes about inclusive education

Though it was not one of the explicit aims, the principals spoke about the problems of **inclusive education**. Wishing to make this Report complete, in this part, we specifically elaborate on the principals' statements related to inclusion.

Firstly, the principals spoke about certain forms of discrimination and deprivation of certain social groups. One of the basic forms in which deprivation is evident is division between children that come **from rural and the children from urban surroundings**.

“Let’s say that in Tuzi children from surrounding villages come and we have the problem, city children are still better educated than children from village, and they know more before they start school about how school is important than children from village.” (Director of Elementary School)

When speaking about minorities, some principals held opinion that **education is largely adjusted to members of national majority more than to the minorities**. Specifically, this opinion could be heard from principal who runs a school where majority of pupils are Albanian:

“The second thing that is a problem is at teaching in Albanian, there is little equipment in Albanian...Books and everything else, literature, there is less comparing to those in Montenegrin.” (Director of Elementary School)

However, other principal who is Bosnian and at the same time a principal of school where great number of pupils belong to the nation of Bosnian/Muslim states the opposite, that is that **institutions to the highest degree meet the demands of the minorities**.

“I just want to mention, but I don’t want to be used in certain political purpose and staff. Concerning the fact I come from Bosnian people, my colleague Sanela can agree with me or pedagogues and all that about teaching plans and programmes I can tell you that all that is happening, Ministry and School Institute made remarkably big step for my people, including writers, literates, culture and all of that where and I can tell you that. When I was a child also we had Camil, then Mesa Selimovic. Now let’s say, I know that in Rozaje we have also 3-4 men who are in our reading books and 20% I can choose from local community, from Bijelo Polje and all.” (Director of Elementary School)

When discussing about Roma people, the problem is evident, **because there is simply a number of obstacles related to the inclusion of Roma children in the process of education**. However, out of all reasons, the most significant and the most crucial is the problem of language barrier. Namely, Roma children, especially refugees, often do not speak the Montenegrin language and, on other hand, there are not conditions that would enable realization of teaching in the Roma language.

“In the beginning we registered 104, around 20 of them we couldn’t enroll though we put a lot of effort with NGO’s and teaching inspection and with our forces and so on, that is typical example of our relation towards inclusion of Roma people in regular school system. Those are children that belong to Roma population, they don’t speak their language, they speak Albanian, we don’t understand them, though the youngest children that were born in Berane learnt our language, they start to communicate normally. At first, we had a problem how to enroll them, pedagogues does not know their language, they do not know pedagogist’s and it was said they were not for regular schools and enrolling. We saw where is the problem and that is why, it was the reason to include Roma assistant in the school and that he would tell us what was said in the message of the child and to say to a child our question that we want to ask him and further communication with family and with a child.” (Director of Elementary School)

There are certain schools where a problem of **discrimination of children with special needs** is evident. One of the principals emphasized that there were parents who reacted very negatively on the notion that a child with special needs will enroll the regular teaching process in a class.

“I remember. When children were enrolling in the first grade, when parents heard that there would be children with specialized training, like „horrible, my child can’t...what will happen in the class...”It means that education of parents, teaching staff and that is something that should be done.” (Pedagogue of Elementary School)

However, **discriminated attitudes towards children with special needs can be, even, heard from teachers** who work in elementary schools. The principals say that there are teachers who openly put effort with the aim of segregation of the children with special needs.

“So, there are teachers, mainly people who are working for many years, so that on inclusion they don’t look as on something normal - those children are necessary to put aside and similar and then it causes us troubles.” (Director of Elementary School)

One of the principals, using the data of his colleague’s research, points out that the pupils are **prejudiced against the children with special needs** and at the same time states that these prejudices are mainly formed at their homes, by their parents:

“We have a class with students with special needs and she made analysis how do children react in the class where is that student and in those where isn’t one. What is being emphasized is, that children mostly give that information they were taught at home. Those are answers, those prejudices, we, of course that is the process; we started with inclusion, now that first step is integration of those children in the classes. However, it should be worked on breaking those prejudices.” (Director of Elementary School)

One of the principals emphasizes that one of the problems influencing successful inclusion of children with special needs is the fact that there are no legislative standards appointed by the State with the aim to enhance the inclusion.

“During making this ramp I was telling about for the school entrance, we had problems with standards. Neither School Institute nor Ministry have no basic data about standards or level, how steep should slope be and so ask Institute to help us...Entrance ramp, length, degrees...construction’s adaptability. Also we could get standards for toilets and so... This means, there should be some help, investment...” (Director of Elementary School)

The same principle provides a **positive example** from his local community related to the more efficient inclusion of children with special needs. Namely, there is Association of parents of children with special needs and they are very active and the school has very good cooperation with them.

“Further on, I said that I have rather good cooperation with the Society of parents of children with special needs which is rather active in our town and it means, they have their activities and they organised staying of those children, not only those that go to school but also others who don’t go to regular lessons...” (Director of Elementary School)

Talking about the inclusive education, the principals, mainly, emphasize **lack of education of teaching staff** in schools. They say that existing education is not enough and that it is necessary to put a lot more effort and time in education of the teaching staff in general.

“School is also included in inclusion, but I would say that there is lack of one more competent education, I would add to what my colleague was saying, around ten teachers were trained that went through some projects starting with inclusion, then project „To inclusive education”, however, school is working at the moment on teachers’ education and 37 teachers, including school management will go through education about inclusion. I certainly think that is not sufficient number and that it should be worked on including all teachers in those seminars, even school organised some additional education, because everyone is in situation to work with those children.” (a.i director of Elementary School)

One special problem related to the inclusive education is **lack of staff** key to the efficient process of inclusion. In relation to this, there is no adequate number of qualified experts upon whom the efficient work with the children with special needs depends:

“For inclusion some experts to be engaged, other experts, in my school specifically with 1200 pupils I was looking for speech therapist, but Ministry didn’t allow me, I think that those services should be complete in bigger schools, pedagogues, psychologist ,speech therapist.”

In accordance with the principals' statements, **the biggest problem** related to inclusive education certainly is, so called, **problem of categorization** of children with special needs. The essence of the problem is the fact that the children with special needs must undergo certain procedure in order to be categorized. In practice, however, the process of categorization is not implemented due to various different reasons. As a resultant, this process is left to the schools which are not authorized for this, neither there is qualified staff. . This is very frustrating for both, school principles and parents of children with special needs.

*"...Education of children with special needs, those are the biggest problems that we had faces with because there weren't basic conditions for it. Those are commissions that didn't make categorizations while enrolling those children. That means that there weren't municipality commissions and after that nor republic commission, so that we according to our evaluation, we ourselves, speaking with quotation marks, categorized, inadequately to what they need, which means, it is possible that some mistakes were made because we aren't qualified for that and we had no help concerning this."
(Director of Elementary School)*

At the same time, one of the biggest problems concerning categorization is the fact that **parents are not ready** to accept the fact that their children are belonging in the category of children with special needs. The principals underline that parents manifest strong resistance and that they are ready for conflicts with aim not to allow their children to be categorized:

*"When child is being enrolled to school it should bring certificate that it is for school, If doctor does not give it to him, but gives him doctor's request to go to categorization, it means that he can't get it but goes to categorization, it means that it is the easiest way, so to say, to accomplish that. If parent does not accept this, it means that those children have enrolled, to who they gave to go to regular school or that some change happened later. We have a child in the fourth grade, in wheel chair. When he enrolled, he was still walking. They said in April, when it was tested, that it can. In September he came in the wheel chair. He is now in the wheel chair and parent does not accept that, even more, reacts angrily. We tried several times „What is wrong with us, what is the matter with the child, he is not mentally ill..."So, he is in the wheel chair, we did everything, made path, we did everything, but parent just does not accept it, he simply doesn't want it."
(Director of Elementary School)*

There were many an example like this one in discussion and in this sense there are no experiences that much differ, but the principals are facing almost identical problems.