

# School and Non-Governmental Organizations Partnership in Benefit of the Local Community

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## *Abstract*

*School is a complex social institution with specific role in a community. Each school works together with other institutions and organizations in a specific environment with characteristics that may differ from a community to another. Schools have developed many forms of partnership with NGOs in order to achieve different educational objectives. Such forms of partnership have positive impact and benefits for students and their families, teachers, and community as well. This is why entities involved in educational partnerships have to act responsible and to build their actions primarily based on students' needs and interests.*

*The present paper analyses the complexity of circumstances in which the partnerships between schools and NGOs works and also forms of partnership and the interdependence between schools and NGOs from the perspective of partnership's consequences. Some recommendations are presented to improve the partnership between schools and NGOs management and increase the level of social responsibility of involved actors and entities.*

**Keywords:** *School and community, non-governmental organizations, partnership, social responsibility*

**JEL classification:** I20; D71; M14.

## **Introduction**

School is one of the different institutions that make a community to work and is affected it directly or indirectly by all of these institutions and organizations. One of the most important influences that affect the school comes from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In a community, normally there are and work three types of organizations grouped in three sectors: (1) Public sector, socially invested with the responsibility to manage the 'common goods' and to ensure the 'public interest'. Public sector is based upon public/ state owed property and is regularly managed by the government; (2) Private sector based upon private property includes for-profit organizations; (3) Not-for-profit sector, also called non-governmental sector, is the third independent sector resulted from voluntarily association of people in

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organizations that provide services, protection or the ways of meeting specific goals of the groups they choose to be included.

NGOs are placed between public and private sector. They are 'private' in terms of the properties they own. They have income, attract public money, and provide 'collective goods'. But they do not make profit; any additional revenue is reinvested in other specific activities and redistributed in benefit of those they assist and support or of community in they work, never in benefit of their stakeholders, owners, or board members. NGOs are based upon the principle of non-distributive. That means that the organization may have income from different sources (production activities, selling goods and services), but it can't share or distribute the surplus to its owners/stakeholders/board members.

The sectors are interdependent, with changing roles. Some social roles could be delegated from public/governmental sector to NGO sector. For instance, in Romania, the government recognizes all NGOs, but gives special attention to some of them, so called 'NGOs with public utility' and to the social services they provide. In other countries, the government chooses to delegate responsibilities and funds to NGOs with expertise, in terms of experts who demonstrated the capacity to provide high quality services.

### **1. School – NGO Partnership from Perspective of Public – Private Relationship**

Non-profit sector includes a large variety of associative entities. Mihaela Vlasceanu (2003, page 94) considers that 'non-profit sector... includes NGOs that are diverse de-concentrated': clubs (athletic, cultural, social, mass-media, or recreational clubs); societies (literature, historical, arts, humanistic societies); museums; zoo and botanical gardens; broadcasting and TV studios; schools and universities; research entities; hospitals and other medical assistance units; entities that provide social services and protection; community centers (economic, social, or cultural oriented); associations (charities, political, professional, ethnic, business, neighborhood associations and so on); foundations; political parties; trade-unions and so on.

We must say that there is a difference between terms 'non-profit organizations' and 'NGOs' are not synonyms. NGOs are non-profit organizations that involve people voluntarily private association and determination to contribute to achieve different social goals. David Mason (cited by Străinescu I., Ardelean B., 2007) identifies some characteristics of NGOs, in relationship with other types of organizations: the market values of provided services cannot be precisely measured as on regular market: people act and react voluntarily; NGOs are not-for-profit oriented. Whenever there is additional revenue, this is redistributed to exiting or potential beneficiaries of organizations; NGOs must pay attention to have resources that allow them to function and also to provide services to others; money is not a target. Money is only a mean to achieve social, humanitarian, educational, or cultural goals; NGOs management is beneficiaries oriented.

It is difficult to separate strictly governmental sector from non-profit sector. There are organizations that, even there aren't non-governmental, are designed and function according with the non-distributivity principle. Such organizations are: schools, hospitals, social services governmental agencies, and so on. From this perspective, the partnership between school and NGOs is placed somewhere in the middle of governmental and non-governmental.

It is difficult to separate profit sector from non-profit sector too. There are non-governmental entities such as foundations that organize private schools and universities that make profit. There are also organizations that conduct production activities and sell goods and services (e.g. different products produced by kids, or parents books, counseling services, baby setting, or after school activities). Another different case is the profit entity that in the name of social responsibility acts in community interest and is not necessarily interested to make profit. Some companies established partnerships with NGOs or organized their own foundations. There is a great variety of situations: companies that provide grants for different organizations in order to enforce different projects, or allocate (financial) resources for different initiatives they have, or provide social services and protection (financial support to disadvantaged people: poor, kids from poor families, elderly; scholarships, prizes). They also encourage their employees to voluntarily support charities (e.g. one way to do this is the company to double the amount of money donated to a charity by one of its employee). Schools are particularly targeted by companies. They can receive donations, scholarships for gifted children in poor families or support for different cultural activities. One question still remains in respect with this kind of actions initiated by for-profit companies: how much of this is charity and how much publicity and advertising.

Another way of looking at partnership between schools and NGOs is the relationship on providing social services. Education is often presented as a general interested social service, and, from the same perspective, school is understood as a public organization. Nowadays, public organizations are deeply changing, shifting from being bureaucratic entities based upon functional specialization and hierarchy to citizen-oriented ones. Public organizations are re-thinking their role as services providers in citizens' interest. The citizen is free to choose from a variety of alternatives and has a voice in respect with public organizations functions. Public organizations in general and schools in particular, are expected to become, like the private ones, innovative, entrepreneurial and effective. They have to perform more complex tasks in a changing environment. The change in public organizations is very complex. There are many types of changes: changes in organizations ways of function, in their structures, in services they provide and in the ways of providing these services. Together with other public organizations, schools have to compete with private organizations that provide similar services. Unlike public schools, private schools, for instance, have the advantage of a smaller scale and of more flexibility and adaptability to expectations and requirements. They can even take, totally or partially, validated public organizations models.

Public and private organizations are interdependent. In order to rank public organizations, communities are using more and more private like criteria such as

financial and functional efficiency or customer satisfaction. In USA, the movement for organizational change was called 'government re-invention' do to the need to emphasize a new rationality in designing and implementing public policies. Public organizations started to adopt the private managerial still or to subcontract some services to profit or non-profit organizations. This conducted to a new type of social management. Traditional organizations were geographically (at district, county, city, or town level) and functionally (in the fields such agriculture, education, health and so on) delimited. The new management implies integrated administrations, cu strong horizontal relationships, plated hierarchies customer (citizen) oriented. The borders between public and private organizations are more and more flexible; they both are included in networks adapted to real needs of their beneficiaries (customers/citizens) and problems they faced.

School is a public organization with a specific type of management, and social recognized roles. In partnership with NGOs, school must change its management, and redefine roles accordingly new types of services it has to provide. The partnership with NGOs is legitimated by many reasons: complementarities of services provided to children and their families; developing a framework of services that corresponds to real existing needs; professional developing of people implied; beneficiaries (students, teachers, and the whole community) satisfaction. The school remains the most important educational services provider. But is a new school – a developing by learning one. The partnership between school and community agents works in diverse forms: using (material, human financial, logistic, informational, time) resources to common good; running common activities/projects/programs, allocating community agents resources to school, voluntarily participation in actions at community level, testing local needs, fund raising and so on.

In order to be open to effective partnerships, school itself has to change and to promote an open attitude: its members have to be open, adaptable and agents of pro-change mentality (Năstase M., Giuclea M., Bold O., 2012) and to establish relationships based on open attitude with members of local community. These can be done in a decentralized environment that gives schools control on their own decisions and management (Enăchescu, A., V., 2011).

## **2. Educational NGOs in Romania**

In 1989, in Turin, Italy, in an international conference were presented the results of John Hopkins Comparative Study of Non-profit Sector<sup>2</sup>. The survey involved 150 experts that analyzed the dimensions, goals, funds, and roles of non-profit sectors in 22 countries. Some of the report's conclusions are the following.

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<sup>2</sup> \*\*\* *John Hopkins Comparative Study of Non-profit Sector : Globalization of Non-profit Sector - A Revision*, Foundation for Civil Society Development, Bucharest, 1999

- Non-profit sector represents a real power if we think at the number of employees and spending in this sector as percentage in total labor force and total spending.
- Non-profit sector includes traditional domains of public services: education, health, and social services. In this domains are employed 2/3 of total employees in non-profit sector: 30% of total number of employees in non-profit sector in education, 20% in health, and 18% in social services.

Five regional models have been identified in non-profit sector: education oriented model – in Belgium, Ireland, Israel, UK; health oriented model – in USA, Japan and Netherland; social services oriented model – in four European countries: Austria, France, Germany and Spain; culture/recreation oriented model; equilibrium model.

After 1998, in Romania, civil society developed explosively. According with the law there are following categories of NGOs<sup>3</sup>: (1) *associations* – ‘Association is a legal subject of law founded by at least three persons that agreed to put in common and with no right of receiving back material contribution, knowledge or work to act in general, different groups or individuals interest;’ (2) *foundations* – ‘Foundation is a legal subject of law founded by at least one person that legally agreed to put permanent and not revocable his or her property to work to achieve general, or different group goals’; (3) *federations* – ‘Two or more associations or foundations reunited in one federation.’

Nowadays in Romania, NGOs face a complex situation. The Foundation for Civil Society Development Report ‘*România 2010. Non-governmental Sector – Profile, Trends, and Challenges*’ pointed out that in 2010, in Romania were registered more than 62,000 organizations. From these, more than 21,000 are active (,have fiscal shapes’) in educational, social, environmental, cultural domains providing goods and services, establishing partnerships with public organizations and businesses, attracting resources, motivating people, defending rights and promoting new ideas and reforming projects.’

Romanian non-profit sector developed sinuously. Some primitive forms of non-profit sector were identified in 14 century when in large monasteries have been organized ‘illness rooms’<sup>4</sup>, a kind of pre-hospitals for elderly, priests and monks. After 1750 other charities have been founded: ‘Princess Balasa’ women asylum, Coltea Hospital which provided free medical care for poor. In 1872, in Moldova Province was founded ‘The Mercy House’ and in 1876, by royal will, The Romanian Red Croce Society. During the 1<sup>st</sup> World War and immediately after, many charities have been started. They were active in domains such as children, youth, and family protection, disabled people protection, education, and war victims (invalid people, widows, and orphan) protection.

During the communism times NGOs sector disappeared almost totally. Some organizations for disabled and retired people and continued to be active but

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<sup>3</sup> Act no 246 / July 18, 2005 to approve the Government Regulation no 26/2000 referring to associations and foundations, Official Monitor no 656/ July 25, 2005

<sup>4</sup> ‘bolnite’ in Romanian language

under governmental control. This control was so strong that we could say that they were state-owned.

Year 1990 represented a crucial moment for Romanian NGOs. NGO sector developed quickly together with other sectors, in a very complex and challenging context, in a country with a lost tradition of association, very weak, almost none, local initiative, and trying to shift from a strong centralized political system to a decentralized locally responsible one. Based upon reality they could see especially in social sector (huge orphanages, abused institutionalized disabled children, lack of care and support to institutionalized children in general and disabled children in particular, the poverty of social institutions, with extremely scarce resources and qualified people) international organizations shocked by information provided by mass media helped a lot especially by collecting and sending money, food, clothes, medicines, and all kind of necessary goods. Some organizations, such as Save the Children, UNICEF, or United Way, started activities in Romania, organizing local branches. Other organizations were founded as private initiatives.

Many NGOs identified the need of social services, especially those targeting the most vulnerable groups: institutionalized, disabled, or homeless children. They had the initiative of founding and providing a variety of social services. In time, the government organized its own social institutions and framework taking the expertise, models, and even experts from NGOs. NGOs had international organizations support too. They got funds, expertise, and training, and also attracted and involved experts in social services domain.

Today, NGOs have different domains of interest. The NGOs activity in the field of social services has diminished, mainly because the government took care of these and there is less and less international financial support for charity. Nowadays, NGOs are actively involved in the whole social sector. According with the information provided by The Foundation for Civil Society Development, education is the main domain where Romanian NGOs are acting. 7.5% of Romanian NGOs have declared as interest and/or mission improving education and educational system. Active educational NGOs employed 19.03% of total labor force.

The development of NGO sector was strongly influenced by funders' interests, especially external funders. The main funds available for NGOs are private and public grants: donations made by individuals or companies, grants from foundations or private funds, governmental grants. NGOs can also earn money by subcontracting services from government and governmental agencies or local authorities or by different activities (selling products they produce – e.g. publications, art-crafts, hand-made or manufactured products). They can collect money from members (membership fees) or from participants in conferences or charity dinners, concerts or proms and so on.

The evolution of grants was not linear. In 1990's the main funds came from international private and public donors. In 2000's, especially after 2007 when Romania became an EU country, international grants diminished a lot. Nowadays for NGOs from EU countries are available EU money distributed to specific operational programs that involve specific type of assistance.

### 3. Domains and forms of school - NGOs partnership

There is a great variety of forms of partnership between school and NGOs that makes difficult identifying and describing types of this partnership. We will try to classify organizations and types of services or projects they provide or conduct using different criteria.

#### 3.1. Domains of partnership

NGOs are active in many domains: (1) social services for different group of persons; (2) community development: economic development in rural and half-rural areas, community involvement and participation, personal development; (3) advocacy and influencing local and national public policies (by legislative initiatives, designing intervention proceedings, defending human rights, and so in); (4) environment protection: prevent destructions, quality insurance and improvement, environment education; (4) networking: establishing partnerships with other organizations (federations, coalitions), with central and local governmental organizations, institutions, domestic and international organizations, and so on.

There are also multiple educational domains of partnership: health education, human rights education, inter and multicultural education, life skills education, musical education, physical education, education against juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, and human being trafficking and exploitation: (1) *Family assistance*. Children need adequate family life to develop in harmony. Partnership in family assistance domain involves not only school and NGOs, but also authorities and social institutions that contribute to improve the life of poor families by identifying families' needs, selecting adequate social services, and orienting families to adequate services. In this domain, there are intervention-oriented and prevention-oriented partnerships too. The targeted issues are: poverty, the lack of financial resources, domestic violence, drug addiction, children abuse, juvenile delinquency, child abandon, divorce, and so on. All above mentioned issues affect children. Partners are providing counseling, information, financial support, orientation to special services. They also alert authorities whenever physical or mental integrity of family member is in danger organize services for single mothers and employed parents; (2) *Disabled people assistance*. NGOs together with schools may conduct programs, and sometimes they do, that aim to recover and integrate socially and professionally disabled persons, especially children and youngsters. Partners involved in such kind of programs provide counseling, information, organize center where disabled children can socialize, learn and/or play together, or campaigns to promote positive image of disabled children and help them to be integrated in schools.

### 3.2. Forms of partnership

Thinking at the main category of beneficiaries (relevant from the partnership between school and local community perspective) of actions/projects/programs conducted by NGOs, we could identify: (1) Organizations whose main beneficiaries are children: children with families socially and economically disadvantaged (poor, immigrants, ethnic minorities, single parent families, and so on), disabled children, gifted children, children living in isolated areas, homeless children, trafficked, exploited children, abused children, juvenile delinquents, pre-school students, students in general, and teenagers, and so on; (2) Organizations whose main beneficiaries are parents/families: parents with children enrolled in a particular school, or parents with disabled children, or parents with children with special needs; (3) Organizations of teachers: teachers who are teaching a specific subject or interested in a specific domain; (4) Mixed organizations – with more than one category of beneficiaries.

Thinking at the partnership extension, we could identify: (1) *Partnership in a program*. A program is a set of planned, controlled, and dynamic activities in general that represents an integrative approach oriented to organization's mission and goals, but without a specific deadline of achievement. Unlike a project, a program aims at a lot of simultaneous or consecutive changes. It isn't necessarily time limited, it is a long run process, and may include more than one project. Programs with large coverage represent specific partnership frameworks. Usually, funders announce more funding rounds at national level, in that schools can come with projects, alone or in partnership with other eligible public or private organizations. Organizations that designed projects to be funded in a program compete for funds, their projects being evaluated according to specific criteria; (2) *Partnership in a project*. A project is a set of planned activities that are addressed to a specific problem, have specific goals, time limited, and limited funds too. Projects are developed step by step. They may be conducted by schools, possibly collaborating with other partners (other schools, NGOs, authorities). School itself may ask for funds and, in this case, will be the beneficiary responsible to implement the project and achieve established goals together with other organizations and institutions; (3) *Partnership in conducting specific activities* locally conducted by schools or other community actors who aim at actions and local resources and involve people with common interests at a moment.

Thinking at the assisting domain in which the partnership may be established, we can identify different categories of children and youth who need protection: orphans, children with no parents to temporarily protect because they left families and went to work in different countries, poor children, physically or emotionally abused or neglected children, abandoned or institutionalized children, HIV infected or disabled children, ethnic minorities children, victims of natural and other kinds of disasters, children living in rural areas and have limited access to education, pre-school pupils, students, teenagers, juvenile delinquents.

### 3.3. Objectives and actions in schools-NGOs partnership

Partnership can have different objectives: schooling, counseling, protection, prevention children abandon, drug addiction, or juvenile delinquency, integration in school and local community. There are intervention-oriented and prevention-oriented partnerships.

Actions that partners can run are training, counseling, informing, exhibitions, trips, summer camps, organizing youth/teenagers centers, campaigns in community, educational fairs, after-school centers, centers for recuperation and occupational therapy, theater performances, research, fund raising, and so on.

Parents associations have important roles. They can help school to develop itself by implying parents in school activities, and fund raising. School must take the initiative of organizing parents associations. Parents do not have the culture and the availability to organize and act in such kind of organizations<sup>5</sup> and see the relationship with school only for a limited period of time – the schooling time of their children. This is why school must ensure the parents associations' sustainability too.

NGOs influence school in many ways. (1) They take initiative of new forms of educational activities, such as centers for disabled children, centers with integrated services (education, socialization and recovering), after school centers (mainly for children with employed or poor parents), disabled children school integration. (2) They initiate changes in curriculum, putting pressure on it: new subjects or content to be teach, school based curriculum to be develop so that school to provide health, intercultural, and family life education to students and to preserve local culture (local history, traditions, and industries), education in minority groups mother tongues to be provided. (3) They argue in favor of and/or support teacher training in respect with new methods of teaching, counseling, social assistance and psychology. (4) They also involve teachers/students/parents in learning, cultural, physical activities and contests. (5) NGOs may have the initiative of educational research and changing in educational policies aiming motivating students to learn, improving teaching, integrating children with special needs, or fighting child abandon and abuse, and human being trafficking. They may ask for public debates on educational issues and make lobby and advocacy to governmental agencies. (6) NGOs may contribute to school infrastructure improvement and promote innovative models of educational activities/projects/programs.

### Conclusions

Public-private partnership is in advantage of both schools and NGOs. NGOs may demonstrate their social utility and achieve their mission. Schools are developing themselves and increase the number of services provided to children, parents and community. The partnership in not limited at school and NGOs, but

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<sup>5</sup> In Romania

involve community actors, such as local authorities, medical care units, police, church, and businesses.

All entities involved in education must act responsibly and promote real values. In the same time, they must be aware that community may progress if people are actively involved in community life and education, and respect the others and the common values. Responsibility is based on information and awareness. Putting together positive practices of schools, NGOs, authorities and businesses in common actions may conduct to a better life.

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