

## A Collaboration of School and Kindergarten with the Environment

Anja Milošič Šalamun

Primary school, Slovenia

anja.milosic@gmail.com

---

### Abstract

*Primary schools in kindergartens in the Slovenian environment are often very intertwined with the surroundings where they operate. Recently, there have been several more active at this time in the multiple version, but the Institute has prepared to enter into cooperation with local groups. I wonder why he would seduce anything that is in the interest of such cooperation, but the institutions are also forced by the legislation where the border is, do not give a coder to entice further involvement with the local community. I delved into two institutions operating in a rural setting where everything needed at school was much more intense than in cities. One institution is a primary school and the other is a kindergarten with 8 units in a smaller town in the surrounding settlements. Collaboration with the environment was encouraged in equivalent observations, so I am also interested in my opinion on such forms of operation of the Institute.*

**Keywords:** School, kindergarten, environment, community, collaboration, networking

### INTRODUCTION

I am a parent and a landscaper myself, and I see the involvement with the local community as very positive for all employees. As president of the Cultural Society, I am confronted with the question of when it makes sense to involve institutions in the organization of events. As a result, the question arose as to how such cooperation is viewed by principals as representatives of institutions and why such cooperation would be a challenge to them at all.

However, since I am employed in education, in practice, I notice that employees often ignore the needs of the environment and therefore do not respond to them. At the same time, due to the multitude of tasks within the school, we do not see or seize the opportunity to cooperate with the environment, which can bring satisfaction to both users of our services and locals, improve the reputation of the institution, enable a more solid existence of the school in the long run and, last but not least, enrich the financial and material situation in the school.

## Theoretical starting points

The school organization enters into cooperation with the environment to realize its vision, mission, and goals of the school, arising from the needs, interests, demands, and wishes of direct and indirect users of its services. Collaboration with the environment is, as in all organizations, both profitable and not-for-profit, part of a marketing or exchange relationship geared to the needs of the user and the rest of the public. Of course, the marketing goals of the school are very different from the corporate goals. Schools fulfill predetermined social needs, and they come primarily from social value rather than creative profit. More important to the business of the school are the values that drive the school. In schools, it is not only what you market that matters, but how you do it. (Žuraj, Zupanc, 2006)

Cooperation with the environment is touched by all the laws that define the functioning of the school system. Thus, the Law on Institutions already defines cooperation with the environment in the definition of public institutes and more specifically defines this in the provisions on the composition of the institute council, where representatives of the interested public are involved. The law on the organization and financing of education and the laws governing the organization of the elementary school, music schools, gymnasiums, vocational and vocational colleges, colleges and adult education, in their introductory articles, which define the objectives of different types of education, indicate the necessary cooperation with the environment. (Duh, 2006)

A study by the Faculty of Philosophy (University of Ljubljana) conducted in Slovenia in 2014 and 2015, found that primary schools saw the need to connect and collaborate in the local environment. The results show that 75 percent of schools connect with local community organizations on a weekly or monthly basis, and the need and desire for connection and cross-fertilization between the school and the environment are expressed. The survey also finds that the schools and communities in which the schools operate express a need and desire for more collaboration. Quantitative data, meanwhile, did not confirm statistically significant differences in the extent of participation depending on the size of the school and the different local environments.

Organizations expectations are different in different school settings. Of course, the most widespread is the renting of school premises, especially gyms, to local societies and other organizations for recreational and sports purposes. In such cases, especially if only the financial interest of the school is in the background, it would be difficult to talk about cooperation as it is more about formal relationships. However, informal meetings of users with the professional staff of the school and, last but not least, with students who gather and stay in the vicinity of the school, especially in the outdoor playgrounds and schoolyards, should not be forgotten.

Such informal contacts, especially in smaller places where social cohesion is greater, are also of greater importance for the formation of informal groups and communication, which integrates the school space and, consequently, the school as a whole into the local environment. However, even when it comes to infrastructure, the school's chances are far greater than renting out recreational spaces. Namely, the school has a wider infrastructure, which may or may not be offered for various activities (Mažgon, Muršak, 2016).

The role of the principal in the implementation of school projects is primarily in identifying the needs of the school and the environment and providing the resources needed for the project implementation, in selecting and planning the project, forming the project team and defining its basic tasks, and in controlling the project implementation and evaluating the goals. Although the director is responsible for the successful implementation of the project, it is reasonable to leave the individual stages of practical implementation of the project task to the project team members and project manager. (Vogrinc, 2006) In this context, projects that enable meeting the essential needs of the school, for which funds and contractors will be provided, should already be identified in the annual work plan. It is also advisable to provide a back-up path if the project fails or does not meet the needs of the school.

There are many obstacles to this kind of cooperation. Especially in smaller towns, such cooperation often hides the realization of political goals in the background. Although this can never be completely avoided (Mažgon, Muršak, 2016), since, last but not least, the school board is a body that includes representatives of the local community, political interests cannot be part of the school-community collaboration. While the school council is apolitical, the participation of the local community in the workplace, at least one that is part of the annual work plan, has a great, even personal, impact.

There may also be problems with project teams. Due to the overload, the length of the project, non-constructive interpersonal relationships and the feeling that they are not appreciated, interest in the project may gradually diminish among project team members. The problem can be effectively prevented if the project manager is in close contact with the team members if there are regular discussions about the progress of the project, the feelings of the team members, their ideas, etc.

If the project team members are creative, they can deny the authority of the leader. When project management is inefficient or all tasks within the project are considered equally important, team members may spend too much time on the wrong tasks. Conflicts between team members are also inevitable. Such problems are avoided by determining the importance of individual tasks and monitoring the work of individuals and groups. (Vogrinc, 2016)

## **Methodology**

I have collected data from practice in several ways. I focused on two institutions. First, I reviewed their Annual Work Plan and selected sections that illustrate the way and content of working with the environment and the local community.

The next step was an interview with the heads of both institutions. Both have responded positively to the collaboration. They gave their opinion on cooperation with the environment and their intentions in the future. I asked both of them the same questions:

- How is the institution working with the local environment?
- Please indicate what a successful collaboration experience you have.

In each of them, the conversation went in other directions, making it easier for me to see the actual state of cooperation.

I also searched for a publicly accessible copy of the elementary school's annual report, which describes in great detail any involvement of a school outside the institution. I was unable to obtain the annual report for kindergarten.

For the sake of data protection, I do not list the names of institutions, places, and persons. For the same reason, I do not cite the source of both the Annual Work Plans and the Annual Report I obtained on the Internet.

### **Data collected and examples from practice**

In the research process, I first began to analyze both Annual Work Plans. A detailed review of the Primary and Kindergarten Annual Work Plan shows a great affinity for cooperation with the environment at both institutions.

The school lists a long list of external institutions and organizations with which it plans to cooperate in all areas that contribute to better, safer and more diverse work at the school. The ministry, the municipality, the health center, the education institution, the police, the labor office, the local community, as well as all other organizations with which it is possible to cooperate as a school, are listed. The list also includes all surrounding elementary schools, kindergartens, societies in the locality, music school, fire department, faculties, etc. They also list schools and societies abroad.

The Kindergarten Annual Work Plan also plans to engage with a large number of external stakeholders. Many listed institutions relate to the primary activity of the kindergarten and can be co-operated at the user level. So, by enrolling children and their parents, they participate in the activities of other organizations and institutions, thus deepening their connection and reputation. These are collaborations with elementary schools, high schools, other kindergartens, senior citizens' homes, tourist information centers, care centers, general libraries, municipalities, and local communities, etc.

Again, a different kind of cooperation is the one organized by the kindergarten for children and parents who will just enroll the child in the kindergarten. Events like this can influence parents' decision to enroll, so this is a good kindergarten move. The LDN of kindergarten states: open day, joint work and cooperation for parents of children not included, organization of lectures for parents of children not yet included in kindergarten

The list also does not miss all the main institutions in the country that are involved in this field and with which the kindergarten is more or less intensive or must cooperate. These are again the ministry, faculties, municipality, secondary and elementary schools, social work center, institute for education, etc.

I had a conversation with the heads of both institutions about this topic. I asked the two of them the same questions, to get a clearer picture of their view of the importance of cooperation with the environment and the way of cooperation. In the conversation, we focused primarily on participation in the local community.

The primary school principal described cooperation with the local community as very important. She is aware of the importance of the elementary school in the locality, so she tries to get the school involved in all the events where she is invited to participate. The school is the bearer of some key events, which, despite being quite self-sufficient as an institution, also allows local societies and organizations to be able to participate in their efforts. The school is truly highly regarded by the people, and the principal still enjoys great support and prestige after two terms. The fact that the school cooperates extensively and well with all the stakeholders in the locality certainly contributes to this.

The kindergarten director is in his / her position for the first term of office. He is a representative of the younger generation of principals and is extremely motivated to connect kindergarten with the environment. The term of office came after the departure of the previous management, which ran the nursery for almost 30 years. In their work this was known in the negative sense since the kindergarten was in a very bad voice in recent years, there was practically no cooperation with the environment, the quality of work in the kindergarten was poor and self-sufficient. Apathy was very evident in the work of the employees, but the parents' comments in this area were not heard.

With new leadership, things have changed a lot. The kindergarten has been very open to any activity in the local communities where the units operate. Preschool is currently the most important integrative role between locals and societies, even in the smallest hamlets. The difference between the power of the kindergarten and the school is also very noticeable. Parents of younger kindergarten children are much more responsive to the various events they take to accompany their children. At school, when the children are already larger and more independent, the interest in such activities is greatly reduced, or the older children attend the events on their own, unaccompanied by their parents.

The kindergarten director also acknowledges that the kindergarten's involvement with local societies is very helpful for them because it raises the parents' opinion of their work. Local associations, however, benefit from collaborating with the kindergarten because they attract a lot more visitors to events than they would otherwise.

#### *How is cooperation with the local environment going?*

Both of my interviewees answered this question quite similarly. Participation begins at the invitation of a society or other group in the locality, rarely at the initiative of a school or kindergarten. However, as a rule, both organizations always respond to the invitation by cooperating by their capabilities and functioning. Most of the collaborations are already defined in the Annual Work Plan, and in the case of newly set up collaborations, they are carried out and planned next year.

The school often participates in the installation of art exhibitions in the cultural center, the premises of the administrative unit and the municipality, and other public spaces. He also occasionally participates in the municipality's cultural events with a choir or other student performances. The problem occasionally arises when students need to be provided with transportation to another place. The School of Transportation cannot take over, and parents often do not have this option. This is solved by parents connecting, and many times teachers are transported by their cars.

Kindergarten is involved in events that involve the participation of younger children and are also intended for such an audience. As I mentioned earlier, in recent years, the kindergarten, under its new leadership, has become noticeably more active, and this is also reflected in the cooperation with the local community. The principal is aware that the parents' opinion on the institution is very important, so he tries to maximize involvement.

The kindergarten also regularly exhibits children's art products in some locations. One of these locations is a large retail chain operating in Slovenia. These images, upon exit, soften strict trading activity, but may also indicate a good merchant marketing move.

*Please indicate any successful collaborative experience.*

On this issue, the headmaster highlighted the Christmas and New Year event, which the school organizes on a large scale each year in the cultural setting of the place where it operates. It takes place every year in the first half of December and is presented to the students of the school. They are presented with the points made with them by the teachers in the school, as well as those learned by the students in the public and private music schools, the dance schools that operate here, and also students of the self-taught and groups that can be introduced they operate in cultural societies. For some, this kind of collaboration and presentation is a good promotion for their business, but for others, it is their pleasure to showcase what they do.

In recent years, the mentor of this event has already had to decide to audition before this event, because there are already so many registered performers that only the best ones need to be selected. After all, otherwise, the program would be too long. Thereby, the event indirectly gains in quality.

The kindergarten director cited several smaller events as a good example of working with the environment. He emphasized participation in the marathon, which is held annually in the municipality. It is attended by both kindergarten staff and children accompanied by their parents, presenting the institution.

There is an event in the center of the city during the Children's Week, which also plays a very active role in the kindergarten, with performances by children, presentation stands and workshops for visitors.

There is also greater cooperation with the Cultural Society in one of the local communities during Happy December. It is a decoration of the Christmas tree, which is set up by the local society and at the same time prepares a cultural program with the participation of kindergarten groups. Although the event takes place in the late afternoon, it is very well attended by children and parents.

Finally, I searched for the institutions' annual report. I got it for the elementary school on the website of Ajpes (Agency of the republic of Slovenia for public legal records and services), where public access is made available, but I couldn't find it for kindergarten.

The report of the elementary school is as positive and comprehensive as it was already discussed with the principal and as reflected in the opinion of the locals. The school works very well with the local community. All the events that took place or were attended by the school are described in a very detailed, systematic and chronological manner in the report. All the activities carried out so far are planned in the future.

## **Analysis and interpretation**

Having reviewed and analyzed the documents that guide the work of the schools in the area of cooperation with the environment, I find that I had the opportunity in practice to analyze two institutions that are a model of filling this field. I am aware that not all Slovenian educational institutions operate in such a cohesive way in the local community in which they operate.

The school and kindergarten I got to know more through interviewing the management and reading their documents are located in the countryside. Educational institutions have a very high status there, and they enjoy great respect as well as the events that never happen in these places. Although the status itself is as it is, managers and other employees are working hard in all areas and at every opportunity to connect and influence individuals, groups and societies from the environment.

On the contrary, I cannot say this for schools in major cities. I have a close acquaintance with a primary school in the center of Ljubljana, which is not a challenge to work with the local community. There are virtually no links to the environment, except for those that are strictly necessary for the operation of the school. Parents, however, are actively involved only during their children's schooling.

Although the struggle for students there can be much more pronounced, as parents have another school a few streets ahead. I would expect the body of city schools to work harder, compete for more for the number of students. From the cases I know, I would say that they put in far less effort than rural schools.

On the other hand, in smaller places where everyone knows each other, there are even relatives, such cooperation crosses borders. Almost, as a rule, the same people and their like-minded people appear in all major positions. According to Mažgon and Muršak (2016), there are many obstacles to this kind of cooperation. Such cooperation often hides the realization of political goals in the background. This can never be completely avoided since, after all, the school world is one that requires representatives of its founder, that is, the municipality, among its members. So we can quickly come across a group of people with the same interests and beliefs who have the power to turn things around.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

The collaboration of educational institutions with the environment enables all stakeholders, employees, management, children, parents, and other participants, to gain a sense of belonging, friendliness, and confidence in their work and the work of others. Quality collaboration enables you to learn about the history, culture, and heritage of the place.

In the conducted research I found that the management of educational institutions attaches great importance to cooperation with the environment. Both institutions work with the local community in different ways and at different events throughout the year. The initiative for cooperation is most often given by individuals, groups, and societies from the local community, rarely by institutions because they are self-sufficient. Institutions always respond positively to initiatives.

From their experience, they only spoke about positive experiences of collaboration. They did not have or did not expose them.

I believe that such collaborations need to be maintained, nurtured and further strengthened. Unfortunately, cooperation with the environment depends on the convictions and motivation of the management of the institute, so some people hardly do it or the cooperation is very modest. In this way, the school in the locality becomes only one institution with no cultural value. In contrast, institutions that foster such cooperation enjoy a high reputation and respect in the local community.

## REFERENCES

- Žuraj Balog, A., Zupanc Grom, R. (2006). *Zakaj sodelovati z okoljem?* Ljubljana, Šola za ravnatelje.
- Vogrinc, R. (2006). *Kako sodelovati – projektni management.* Ljubljana, Šola za ravnatelje.
- Duh, M. (2006). *Kaj spodbuja šole k sodelovanju z okoljem: Zakonske osnove.* Ljubljana, Šola za ravnatelje.
- Mažgon, J., Muršak, J. (2016). *Osnovna šola kot središče socialnega in kulturnega življenja v lokalni skupnosti.* Ljubljana, UL, Andragoška spoznanja.