

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THEIR PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

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### **Abstract:**

*Modern pedagogical studies raise challenges for the management of education, justified by the growing independence of the school, increasing social requirements, the necessity for renewal by introducing innovative methods and so on – this all requires a new approach to in-school management and co-management. The successful school should plan, encourage, evaluate and improve children's participation in decision-making - in the context of a globalizing world on one hand, and on the other hand it should admit the student as a subject in the processes. In addition to that, it is reasonable to raise the question about what is the position of the learner him/herself regarding the participation in decision-making processes and to examine the attitudes, looking for answers, whether a change in approach and the way children's participation is understood is necessary for the school community to enable the real application of modern pedagogy at all levels and in all areas.*

**Keywords:** *children's participation, decision-making, management through inclusion of children, school management*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The existence of children in a process with growing personal responsibility is raising a new social and pedagogical challenge nowadays. The professional interest in the opportunities for stimulating the abilities of a child, for establishing the personality of the young person, and for accumulating new approaches in the context of both positive education and development and the management of the processes at micro and macro level is part of the new paradigms. in education (and not only in it).

The expansion of pedagogical and organizational innovations, the development of the of the school independence, the blooming of the social requirements, the need for systematic renewal through the introduction of innovative processes, impose a new approach to the internal school management and co-management. The need to develop autonomy of educational structures is related to the democratization and the resulting possibility for co-management by parents, the community, and students. In today's globalizing world, the school management is required to create conditions toward changing the quality of life in studying community, to provide a supportive, formative, corrective environment for each student, to attract and motivate as partners all stakeholders - including children. In addition to that, for its success the school (and not only) should plan, encourage, evaluate, and improve children's participation in the decision-making.

Practices of student participation in decision-making concerning the status of students in the operation of the school management and the processes of education and care are seen in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. All of them are related with the creation of schools, which are different from the traditional ones, trying different new ideas in the field of education and training<sup>1</sup>. First sets the beginnig in 1889 by Cecil Reddie in Abbotsholm, followed by John Badley in

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<sup>1</sup>Nikolova, N., 2018. Analytical philosophy on education - history, methods and perspectives. Philosophy, 27 (2), pp. 191-202.

1893 at Haywards Heath, again in UK<sup>2</sup>, Hermann Lietz in Ilsenburg, Germany since 1898<sup>3</sup>, Edmond Demolins in France since 1899<sup>4</sup>, Werner Zuberbühler in Glarisegg, Switzerland since 1902<sup>5</sup>, Paul Gebbs in Odenwald, Germany since 1919 and Alexander Neill in Great Britain since 1924<sup>6</sup>.

Without going into details, a lot of the highlights of these reformist schools are the interpretation of the child and the student as a subject in the processes of education and care; stimulating students' initiative and entrepreneurship, freedom and self-government, education for social responsibility and democracy. In this aspect, the schools (some of them exist, although modified even now) of John Dewey, of Ovide Decroly, the school of Hellen Parkhurst, Summerhill of Alexander Neill and others are especially distinguished, in which the fundamental ideas of personal happiness, self-government and democracy are central to the concept of continuous improvement of society.

In this regard, theoretical grounds for children's participation in decision-making can be found in the liberal philosophy of education, with basic values such as equality and personal autonomy, which in terms of participation in decision-making is manifested in the following dimensions:

- equal educational opportunity for all;
- expressing the spontaneity and activity of the student in compliance with the wishes, interests, and needs of students;
- freedom of choice;
- own code of relationship at school
- self-expression and self-affirmation of the student without interfering with others;
- integrating civic with personal education goals;
- cultivating ethical means to achieve one's own goals;
- freedom of association of students;
- special obligations to minorities and diversity;
- decentralization of schools;
- autonomy and diversity in educational practices.

The right of the young person to participate in decision-making processes is justified by several international and national regulations, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In them, the term 'child participation' refers to the involvement of children in decisions that affect their lives, the life of the community, and the society in which they live. Children's participation involves encouraging children and young people to think for themselves, to express their views, and to interact. Furthermore, children's participation can refer to both public and personal decisions; it can be formal or informal, with a larger or smaller scope, one-time or systemic. Children's decisions can have a direct impact on the planning and creation of a service, as well as on the development of a particular policy. The forms and models of children's participation are diverse and differently applied in each community, region, and country, as well as with different degrees of involvement of children in the decision-making process.

Encouraging children's participation enables children to express their views and fully to participate in decision-making processes in policy development for their future, as well as to build an active civil society.

The main value in the development of ideas for children's participation is the awareness and understanding of the role of the child as a creator of his/her development. This new role is related to

<sup>2</sup> Brandreth, Gyles Daubeney & Henry, Sally Karen. Bedles Society, 1967

<sup>3</sup> Todorova-Koleva, MP, Hermann Leitz and German educational boarding schools - past and present, 2016

<sup>4</sup> Toynbee, A., History Research Volume 3, Hristo Botev Publishing House, Sofia, 1995, ISBN 954-445-371-7

<sup>5</sup> Tomasello, M., 2017. The origins of human communication. liters

<sup>6</sup> Sofronov, II and Vihareva, TV, 2015. Features of the non-traditional Summerhill school. Reviewers: Beknazarov Rakhim Agibaevich, Dr. East. Science, Professor, pp. 41

his/her greater activity as a consequence of more intensive development, respectively abilities, which must be recognized institutionally without fear of losing authority<sup>7</sup>.

Taking into account the set of factors, including the theoretical basis of the reformist schools, the legal framework in international (and not only) world, the philosophy of education, the evaluation of the child as a subject in the processes, and the dynamics of the modern pedagogical course, it is reasonable to raise the question of what is the position of the learner himself regarding his participation in decision-making processes and to explore his attitudes.

### **A. Survey of children's opinion**

By emphasizing the meaning of children's participation, their involvement must be directly linked to their own first-hand experience and identified by the children themselves as a key area of interest. To assess and analyse this an empirical survey of children's opinions on participation in decision-making processes is organized and conducted.

The methodological approach of the study is based on quantitative methods for collecting primary data through standardized questionnaires in two identical language versions - in Bulgarian and in English. The aim is to measure the real children's participation - both in the country and abroad, both in the educational, institution and in the family environment, the social and health sphere, the administrative environment, the judicial system, the regulation of order, as well as the public space in the face of the media, but with a main emphasis on the school environment.

The target of the study are children from Bulgaria and abroad, of Bulgarian and foreign origin, aged 7 to 18 years in terms of their opinion about their participation in the decision-making process. The age limit is in line with the emphasis on the school environment. The scope of the questionnaire used is defined to be as operational as possible for each school age, but it is assessed that some children may still have difficulty coping adequately with the answers, so the survey still allows for adult assistance, in case of need - at the discretion of the interviewed child.

The actual survey includes the distribution of the questionnaires on paper and electronically on the territory of the six economic districts in the country, as well as outside Bulgaria. 2400 paper questionnaires were distributed in Bulgaria. The actual survey is conducted in the period April - July 2018, and by the end of June the survey through paper questionnaires was conducted in full, and until July there is an opportunity to collect data through electronic surveys. By the end of June 2018, 1810 questionnaires in Bulgarian on paper, and 68 answers from the English versions of the questionnaire was completed.

The survey was conducted through a questionnaire, containing 15 questions, designed in a child-friendly way. Most of the questions are closed, one is open. In three of the closed questions, there is a possibility for an additional answer through the option "other", in which the interviewed child has the opportunity to indicate an answer other than the provided options. Five of the questions provide more than one answer.

The survey was designed on paper not only editorially but also visually, in a way that is suitable for children.

The established orchestration of the research supports the analysis with its character of ascertaining research about the degree of participation of children in the decision-making process, with the main emphasis on educational organizations, allowing to reveal the presence and functionality of children's participation in the educational institution, while directing opportunities for data analysis on the effectiveness of leadership and cooperation relationships; for the involvement of the children in the idea of human resources of the educational institution, as well as for the motivation of the participants in the process; the recognisability of the forms of children's participation and others.

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<sup>7</sup> Aleksieva, E., 2019. Proposal for the second edition of "The child of the XXI century and presentation of the proposed to professionals of the XX century", 2019, ISBN 978-954-463-215-1

## CHILDREN'S SURVEY

Hi, did any adult ever tell you that you have a right to express your opinion? Do you know that your opinion should be heard and taken seriously into account by adults? We do not know what your answers will be but we are interested in finding out! ... and since there are many children and young people, we have prepared the following questionnaire to let you tell us. It should not take you more than 10 minutes to fill it. You can even be assisted by an adult.

Most of this questionnaire has already been answered by children and young people in other countries. You can therefore share a link to this survey with your friends. Your answers will help us to understand better your feeling and understanding of your right to be heard and taken seriously.

This questionnaire is anonymous. You can answer by ticking the appropriate box. ☒ ☒

Thank you!

Children's survey team

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1 How old are you?

☐ 7-9 ☐ 10-12 ☐ 13-15 ☐ 16-18

2 Are you a boy or a girl?

☐ boy ☐ girl

3 What type of school do you attend?

☐ None ☐ Primary school ☐ Secondary school ☐ High school ☐ Other: .....

4 How often do you think adults listen to and seriously consider the views of children and young people?

☐ always ☐ most of the time ☐ sometimes ☐ never ☐ I'm not sure

5 How often do you think the following adults listen to your views and take them seriously?

Parents/Caregivers Teachers Doctors/health workers Childcare workers in community centres, alternative care Prosecutors, judges, lawyers Police officers In the media (TV, radio, Internet, press) Public servants in the City Hall Public servants in the ministries

6 How much influence do you feel you have over decisions taken by adults? To what extent can you influence and change them?

Strong influence Some influence Little influence No influence Not sure I don't know these people It doesn't concern me

In your family In your school In the area where you live By your doctor or health worker Community centres day-care centres and alternative care By prosecutors, judges and lawyers By police officers By the City Hall By the ministries

7 How much do you believe that the following organizations and adults help to protect children's and young people's right to be heard and taken seriously?

|                                       | Not at all | Very little | Rather little | Rather well | Very well | Really very well | I am not sure | Don't know what/who this is |
|---------------------------------------|------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| The Local Children's Council          |            |             |               |             |           |                  |               |                             |
| The School Council                    |            |             |               |             |           |                  |               |                             |
| The Youth Parliament                  |            |             |               |             |           |                  |               |                             |
| Public defender of rights (Ombudsman) |            |             |               |             |           |                  |               |                             |
| The parliament                        |            |             |               |             |           |                  |               |                             |
| European helpline numbers (116111)    |            |             |               |             |           |                  |               |                             |
| Non-governmental organizations        |            |             |               |             |           |                  |               |                             |

8 In the past 12 months have any of the following people told you that you have a right to express your opinion, to be heard and taken seriously? (You can tick more than one)

☐ Your parents/caregivers/legal representatives

☐ Your siblings

☐ Other family member

☐ Other children and young people

☐ Teachers and lecturers

☐ An adult working with you in leisure-time clubs (sports, music, etc.)

☐ A residential care worker

☐ Doctor or other health worker

☐ Prosecutors, judges or lawyers

☐ Police officers

☐ Youth workers

☐ Members of the local public administration

☐ Other adult

☐ I am not sure

☐ No one has told me a child has a right to be heard and taken seriously

9 Do you feel motivated to take part in decision-making?

☐ Always

☐ Most of the time

☐ Sometimes

☐ Hardly ever

☐ Never

☐ I'm not sure

10 What motivates you to take part in decision-making? (You can tick more than one)

☐ Develops the world

☐ Informed consent

☐ Willingness to participate

☐ Energization of goal-orientated behavior

☐ Completes my psychological needs

☐ Empowerment

☐ Sense of belonging

☐ I'm not sure

☐ Creates opportunities

☐ Solidarity

☐ Helps in making various important decisions

☐ Prompts ordinary people to achieve uncommon results

☐ Other: .....

11 How/What do you expect to change in these processes that are the subject of your active participation?

12 How often your opinion was asked and taken seriously about the activities in your school during the present school year?

☐ Never

☐ Less than 10 times

☐ Between 10 and 20 times

☐ More than 20 times

13 How many of the teachers in your school are interested in your views on school matters?

☐ Never

☐ Most of the teachers

☐ Between 1 and 5

☐ All the teachers

14 Does your school have a form of organizing children that helps them express themselves, be heard and respected?

☐ No

☐ Yes, student council

☐ Yes, student parliament

☐ Yes, student speaker

☐ Yes, child defender

☐ Other: .....

15 Have you ever had the opportunity to participate with your own opinion on decisions related to the curricular content and the learning process in your school?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Thank you!  
Children's survey team

The processing and summarizing of the results of the conducted surveys include manual manipulation of each survey on paper for the digitalisation of the indicated data. For research purposes, the responses were processed and analysed in SPSS and Excel.

The summary shows that the distribution by gender is relatively even, which is why it is assumed that the results by gender do not differ significantly in the answers, and in the analysis, data are sought and shown by age and/or by type of institution (largely age determines what type of school the child is in). Most answers come from primary schools in Bulgaria – 43 %, followed by high schools – 33 %, 11 % from other types of schools, 11 % from primary schools. Almost 1 % of the respondents indicate that they are not students and 1 % do not indicate an answer (Fig. 1).

### QUESTION 3: WHAT SCHOOL ARE YOU IN?

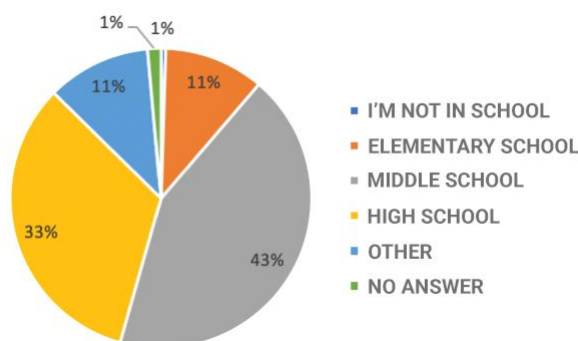


Fig. 1

The school environment is the second most important (after the family) for the children. Young people feel it is important and it is relevant to have the right to participate in decision-making processes. For this reason, the focus of the analysis is mainly on these two environments, and the others are monitored only as a reference. The main benchmark is family/parents. As it was already found that the

results by gender did not differ significantly in the answers, age data were searched and displayed. It is also taken into account that age determines the type of school in the indicators formed in the questionnaire.

Children indicate that adults are sometimes inclined to listen (39.8 %) and take young people's point of view seriously. Overall, data outweighed positive attitudes, with "always" (18.3 %) and "most of the time" (22.8 %) answers being far more common than "never" (3.1 %) and "Hardly ever" (7.2 %) (Fig. 2).

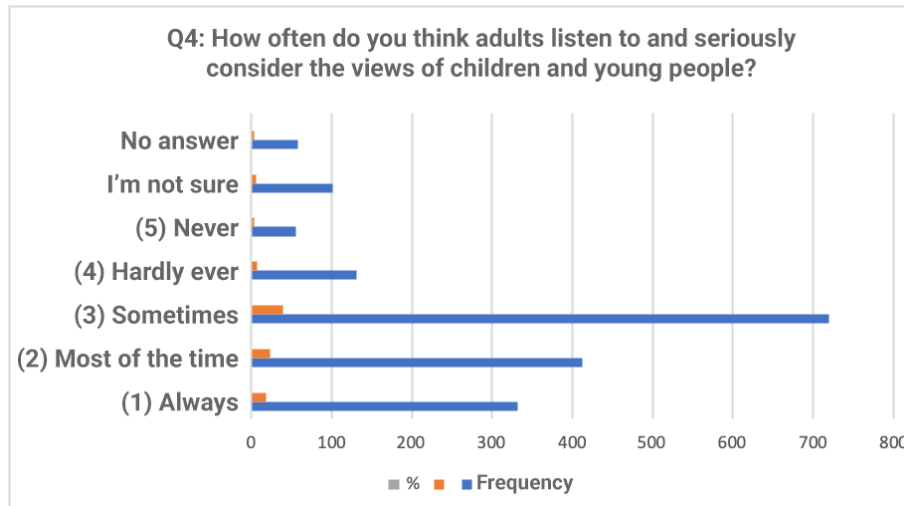


Fig. 2

Specifying in-depth the "adults", the questionnaire is of interest to parents, teachers, health workers, social workers, members of the judiciary, police, media, municipal and ministerial officials. The answers show continuation of the positive trend established in Q4, as it becomes clear that young person perceives with the greatest importance the role of parents and most accurately assesses the child-parent relationship. The highest percentage of respondents think that points of view are listened to and taken seriously by parents "always" (38.2%), followed by answers "sometimes" (25.3%) and "most of the time" (26.1 %). In comparison, health professionals and teachers are the other group of adults who enjoy high marks in children's responses (Fig. 3).

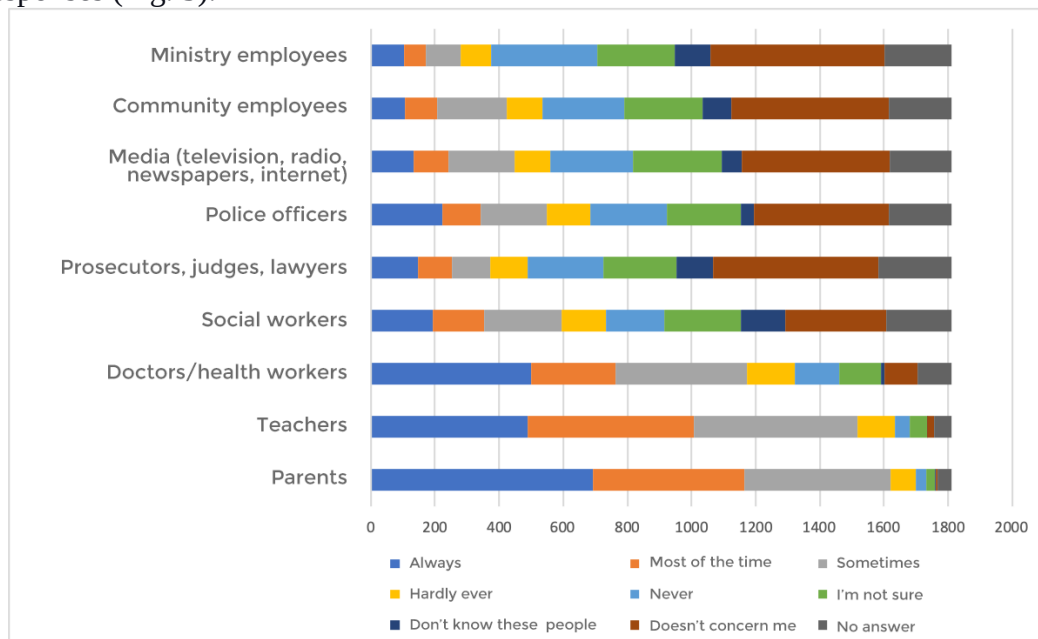


Fig. 3

The questionnaire is interested in expressing the young person's opinion and that is why Q5 introduces a study of the possibility "does not concern me" in the answers as a contrasting position and an additional basis for an analysis of the child's point of view. As expected, the results are low in the categories of parents (0.3 %), teachers (1.1 %) and health professionals (5.6%). The volume of social workers (17.5 %), the judiciary (28, 6 %), police officers (23.3%), municipal employees (27.1 %) and ministerial employees (30.1 %) still stands out. (Fig. 4).

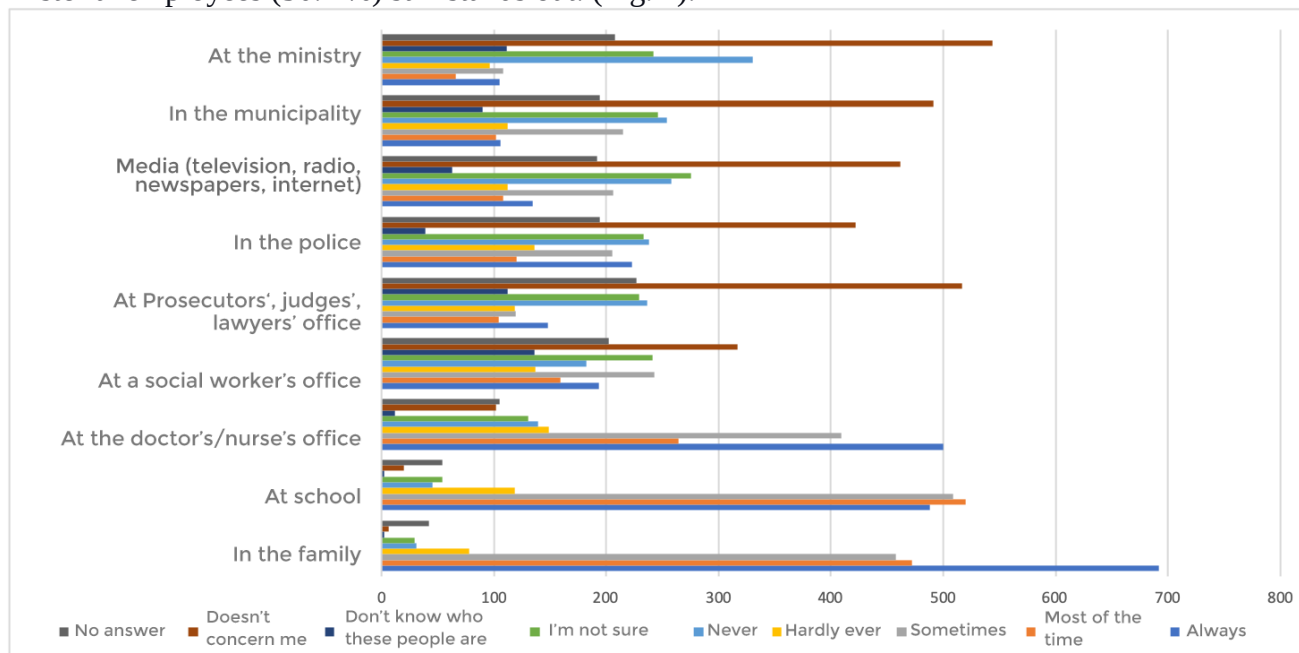


Fig. 4

Unexpectedly high are the results in the category of media - 25.5% mainly due to the active presence of the media in the daily life of young people in the XXI century - given the NSI data from 2016 that Bulgarian children spend an average of 3-4 hours a day in front TV or computer, a total of about 25.7 hours/week on the one hand, and on the other hand the fact that the child of the XXI century exists in a completely new environment - the "global network" Internet, which significantly affects the development of the younger generation. The widespread use of Internet tools, the expansion of the virtual environment is an integral part of the personal lives of young people studying in the modern school. The global information network changes the attitudes for communication in communication. Millennium learners born after 1995 have grown up in an environment where information technology is an integral part of everyday life<sup>8</sup>.

The data confirms the understanding that for the young person the influence of the local government and ministerial administrations, as well as the police and forensic specialists, is not noticeable in everyday life while emphasizing the importance in the presence of parents, teachers, and health professionals. It is also possible to assume that precisely because of the tangibility of the presence of the media in everyday life, the responses of children in this category are unexpected and surprising - a phenomenon that is worthy of further examination and analysis.

The survey develops and expands the scope of interest in children's participation in decision-making, locating the usual places for children - family, school, neighbourhood, etc. The functions imposed in Q5, raised by an adult, are questioned by environment in Q6 "How much influence do you feel you have over decisions taken by adults? To what extent can you influence and change them?" The tendencies in the answers again emphasize the leading position of the family (large influence 36.2%,

<sup>8</sup> Kaneva, O., The Child of the XXI Century and presents the proposed to professionals of the XX century, 2019, ISBN 978-954-463-215-1

some influence 32.3%) and the school (large - 18.2%; known - 33.1%). In all other possible categories, the respondents indicate "little influence" and "I have no influence", incl. the neighbourhood - over 20% (Fig. 5).

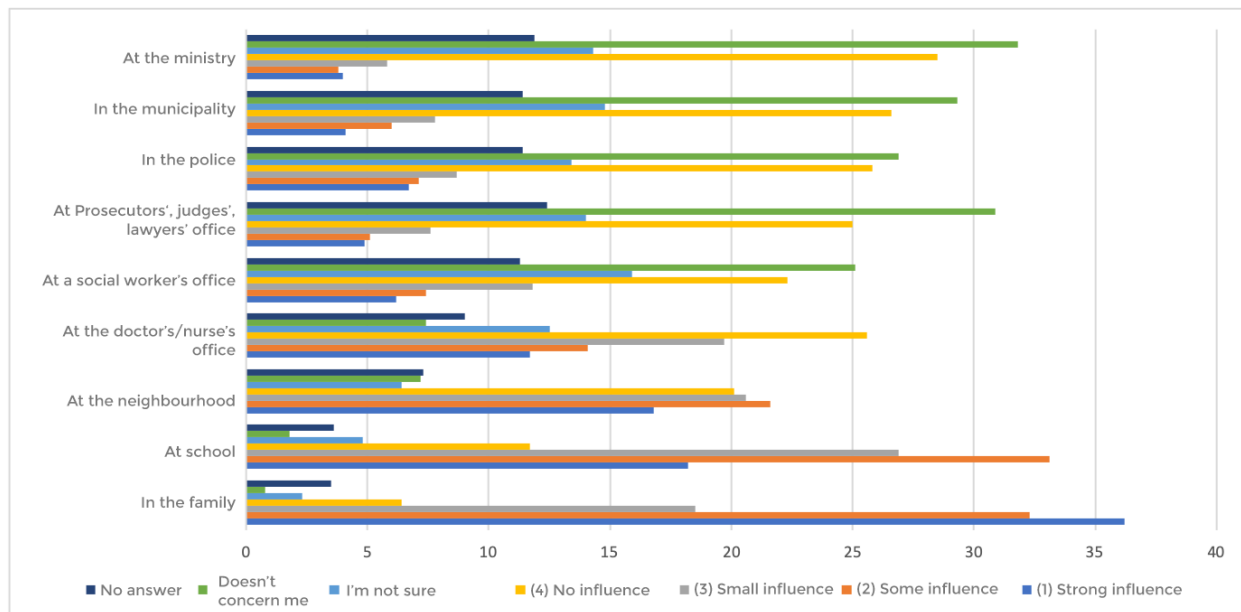


Fig. 5

In Q7, the survey asks the question in reverse, seeking children's views on the active role of adults: "How much do you believe that the following organizations and adults help to protect children's and young people's right to be heard and taken seriously?" The question presents the world of adults in a combination of individuals and institutions, but at the same time includes only those sites that can be recognized in direct connection with children's participation in decision-making - parliament, ombudsman, NGOs, a national telephone line for children 116111 of the one side, and on the other those student formations created with the direct initiative and/or intervention of the adult - the local children's parliament, the school council, the youth parliament. It is noteworthy that the results are equal in the distribution for all three organized forms of child participation in all 9 possible nuances of the answer (Fig. 6).

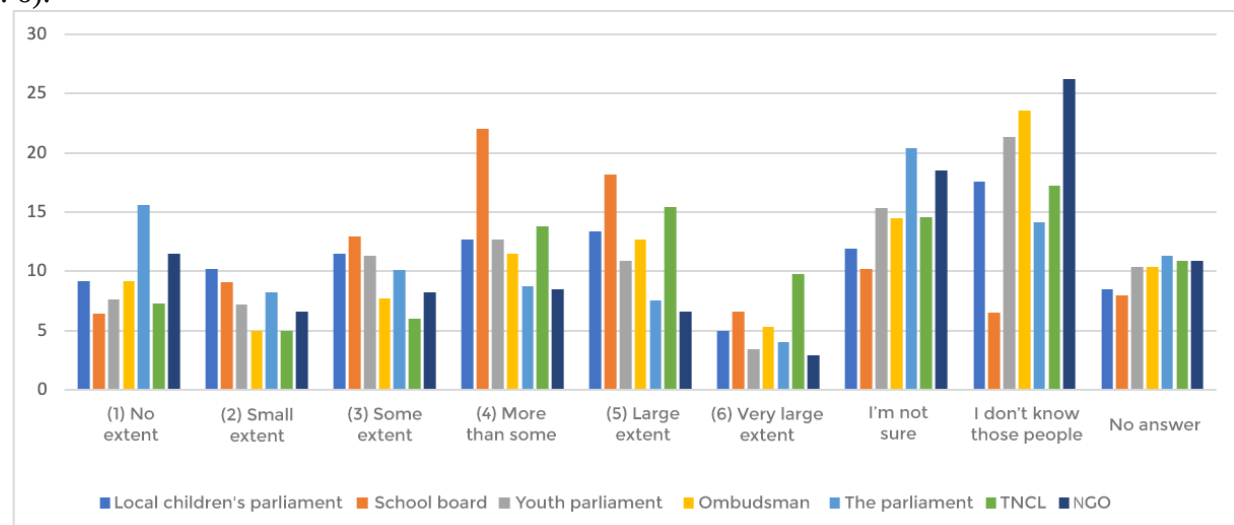


Fig. 6

It could be assumed that the specific form of organization is not important for the respondents, what's important is the essence of the process. There is no accumulated weight more than 20% in any of the positive answers, and the response are relatively harmoniously divided in the shades "small extent",

"some extent", "more than some" and "large extent"- on average about 11-12%. The definite possibility "very large extent" is poorly valued - 3-6%.

On the other hand, the large accumulation of "I don't know" and "I'm not sure" answers in the categories parliament, ombudsman, non-governmental organizations, and 116111 - on average about 40% - is impressive. And in these categories, the "very large extent" opportunity is underestimated and has little effect on the multitude. In contrast, the "no" answers are at least twice as high as the "very large extent" ones.

Governmental, both national and international, and non-governmental organizations are expected to play a major role in providing the necessary conditions and information for children's participation. It is no coincidence that children's participation in decision-making processes is one of the most discussed children's rights and is cited as a key principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the same time, the results presented so far highlight the different views of children in this regard: in addition to creating mechanisms, environment and encouraging participation, the presence of children's representatives in certain institutions, forums and/or other places for the formation of policies and decision-making is a sufficient condition to ensure participation. Participation must be real, filled with content and respect by the adults themselves and the institutions they represent. The answers emphasize that the presence of children is not participation. They demonstrate a poor knowledge of opportunities and forms of participation and the right of children to have their voices heard on issues that affect them.

Q8 deepens the interest of the survey by encouraging the placement of the answers given so far in the time frame of a year ago: "In the past 12 months have any of the following people told you that you have a right to express your opinion, to be heard and taken seriously?" It is possible to indicate more than one answer, which most respondents benefit from (Fig. 7).

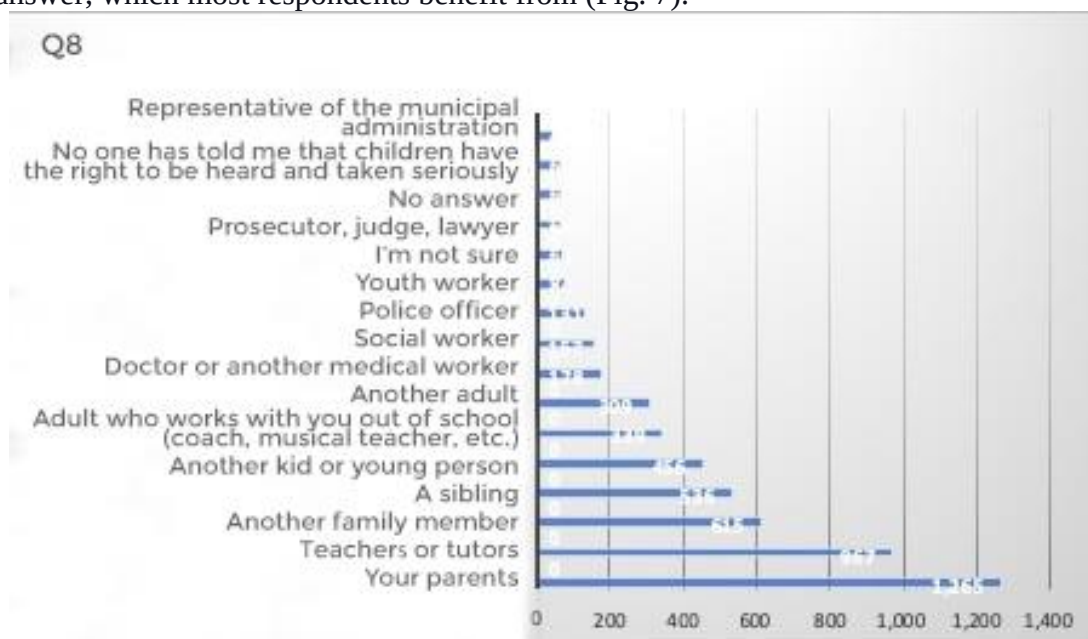


Fig. 7

The results are again categorical for a possible answer "parents" (69.9%) and "teachers" (53.4%). The family community is presented here in a more specific way, adding other family members (34%) and siblings (29.6%) in addition to parents. The level of dialogue between peers on the topic is unexpectedly low - only 25.2% indicate the possibility of "other children and young people". The lowest result is related to the representatives of the municipal administrations (2.6%), which once again emphasizes the distance of the children from the local government in this survey.

Expanding and deepening the scope of the research interest, the survey seeks the motivation to participate in decision-making and the motivational drivers of young people. Veronika Petrova defines

that motivation is part of behaviour and is the result of the individual's interaction with a specific situation; it transforms different interests and qualities into a successful community of the same type, coping with challenges and achieving its goals<sup>9</sup>. In this regard, Q9 "Do you feel motivated to take part in decision-making?" aims to assess the condition of the respondents themselves in terms of their active involvement in decision-making processes, which is further developed in Q10 "What motivates you to take part in decision-making?" (Fig. 8).

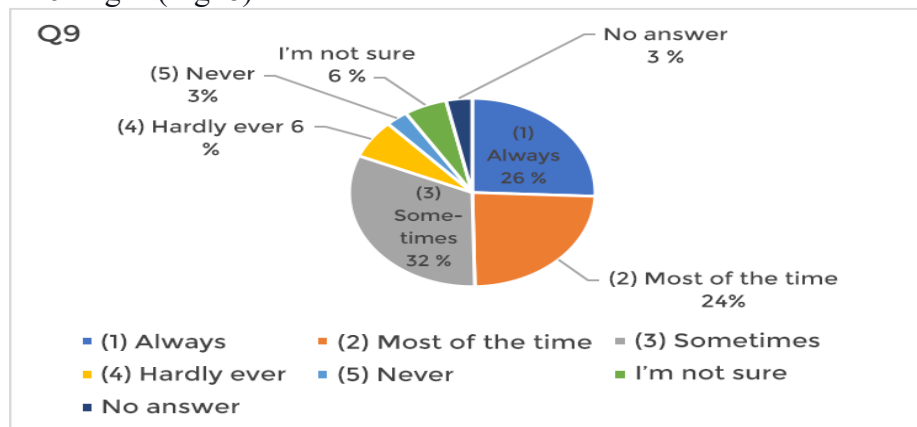


Fig. 8

The results strongly emphasize the active position of the young person in terms of participation - the answers in Q9 "always" (25.6%), "most of the time" (24%) and "sometimes" (31.7%) discourage the influence of others - "Never", "almost never", "I'm not sure" (total 15%). In search of motivational engines, the answers of Q10 are analysed, in which it is possible to indicate more than one possibility (Fig. 9).

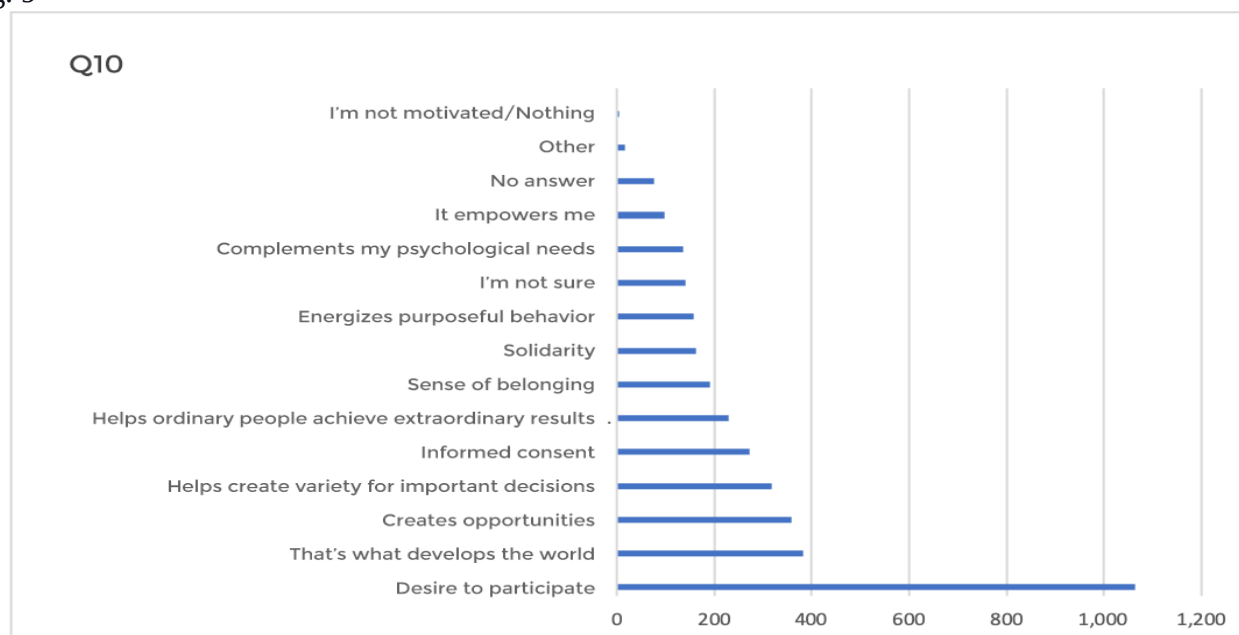


Fig. 9

Here once more can be seen the strong desire of the young person to generally participate - with a predominance overall answers (58.8%), followed by the opportunity to participate in the development of the world (21.2%) and to be part of the opportunities created (19.8%), to be informed (15%). In this spirit are the answers to help in different ways to solve important cases (17.5%), to do good (12.7%). Only four respondents indicated that they did not feel motivated (0.2%).

<sup>9</sup> Petrova, V., 2018, Motivation - an engine for a successful team, Center for International Distance Learning, [https://www.onlinekursove.bg/blog-post/?blog\\_id=378](https://www.onlinekursove.bg/blog-post/?blog_id=378)

To the only open question Q11: How/What do you expect to change in these processes that are the subject of your active participation? 52.9 % of the participants do not indicate an answer or answer "I don't know", "I'm not sure". 9.7 % answered with "nothing". In general, it is noteworthy that only about 1/3 of the respondents exercised the right to enter a personal position and a specific opinion on the question. In general, the variety of answers does not form specific trends in statistical dimensions, but additional research and analysis of the types of answers (potential product of individual work) could build on the collected data and form guidelines not only for pedagogical specialists but also for social workers, psychologists, and other experts working directly with children. The fact that answers such as "I don't know", "no answer", "I have no opinion" prevails, can be reported as a signal of lack of dialogue and participation in decision-making processes (Fig. 10).

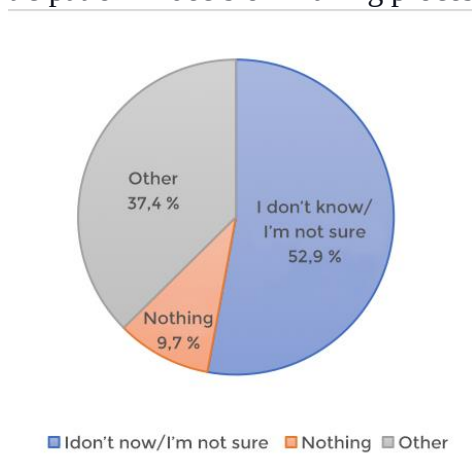


Fig. 10

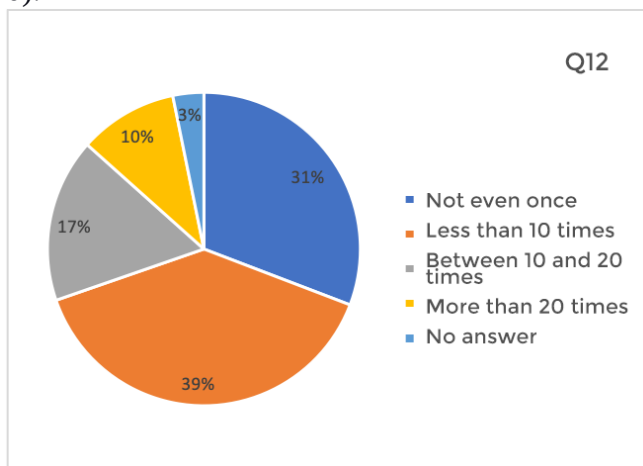


Fig. 11

Continuing to research the situation of child's opinion, the questionnaire is interested in the usual residence environment - school. In today's world, where the points of contact between children and adults are dynamically moving away in time, the real opportunities for interaction in a measurable and clearly defined/planned space can be challenging. Q12 "How often your opinion was asked and taken seriously about the activities in your school during the present school year?" provides additional information from a different point of view of what is sought in Q8 (to express your opinion, to be heard, and to be taken seriously?), Q6 (How much influence do you feel you have over decisions taken by adults? To what extent can you influence and change them?

and Q5 (How often do you think the following adults listen to your views and take them seriously?

The categoricalness of the respondents is indicative: "not once" (30.8%) and less than 10 times (38.9%) are more than 2/3 of all answers (Fig. 11). Only 1/10 of the respondents indicate more than 20 times, which reduced to the length of the school year is on average 2-3 times/month.

Deepening the interest in the school, Q13 studies "How many of the teachers in your school are interested in your views on school matters?". Once again more than half (64.8 %) of the answers are in line with the current trends - "not even one" (25.9 %) and "between 1 and 5" (38.9 %). Somewhat less than 1/10 of the top participants answered "all of them" (9.1 %). 1/5 of the answers (21.1 %) are indicated for "no answer" (Fig. 12).

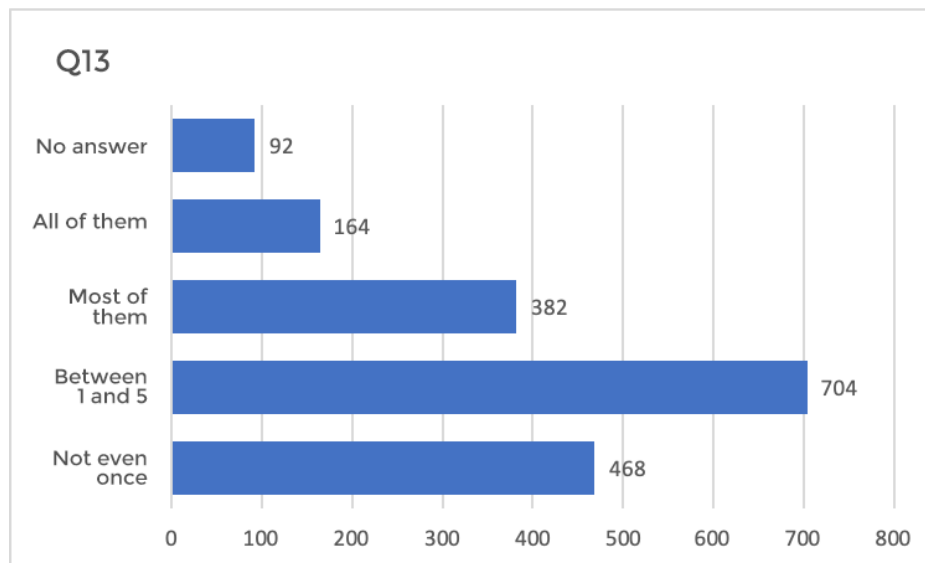


Fig. 12

The growing independence of the school, the need for systematic renewal through the introduction of innovative processes require a new approach to internal school management and self-government. As can be seen from the data presented so far, according to the children's opinion, the school environment does not show significant sensitivity to the innovative opportunities associated with children's participation.

In today's globalizing world is expected from the school management to create conditions for changing the quality of life in the studying community, to provide a supportive, formative, corrective environment for each student, to attract and motivate as partners all stakeholders - including children. Because of that, Q14 "Does your school have a form of organizing children that helps them express themselves, be heard and respected?", aims to establish the existence and types of organized forms for encouraging, improving, and realizing children's participation in decision making. The fact that 1/3 of the answers state the absence of any form in the school, and the remaining 2/3 indicate more than 5 of the possible forms is directly related to the statement previously mentioned, that the participation of children in the decision-making process, is carried out as a practice only in individual schools; on a system level, there are serious problems with this participation. The presence in the practice of the student councils (37.7%) is in a ratio of 2: 1 compared to that of the student parliaments (21.4%), and the other mentioned forms have a rather exotic presence in the sample with less than 5%. weight (Fig. 13).

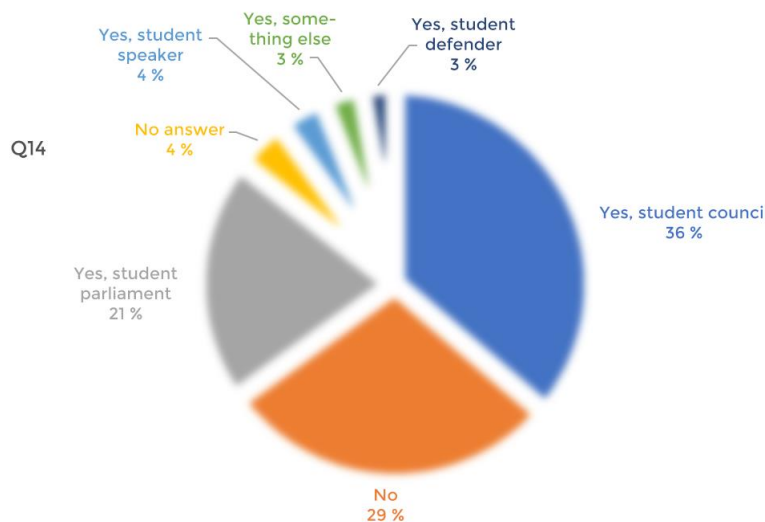


Fig. 13

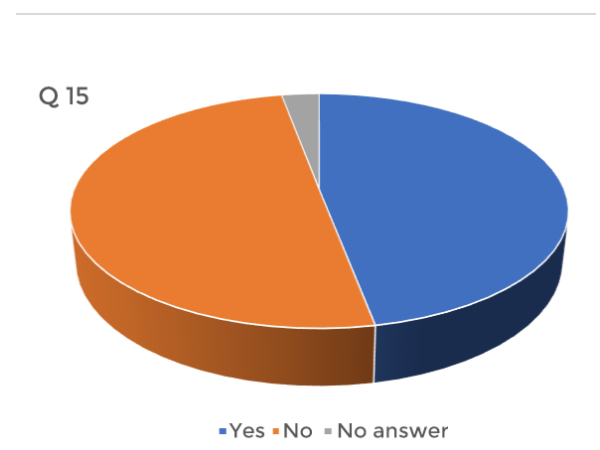


Fig. 14

Asked in Q15 "Have you ever had the opportunity to participate with your own opinion on decisions related to the curricular content and the learning process in your school?", only half of the students (47 %) confirm that they have had at least one experience with decision making. A small number of respondents failed to answer this question (2.9 %), which once again gives reason to believe that respondents express a willingness to participate in decision-making processes (Fig. 14).

As a general observation, the empirical study confirms that children's participation in decision-making is limited and there is no established standard practice about it.

At first glance, the positive answers seem high, but this is only for the questions they ask for opinions on a declarative level (as a feeling), and in practice, it is seen that the share of children confirming practices in school is low.

The results broken down by gender do not have significant differences in the answers, which only confirms the universality of the topic for students, its comprehensiveness and adequacy to one of the main shares of the participants in the educational process - children. The presence of young people in the process of growing personal responsibility is only a new social and pedagogical challenge. The data demonstrate a solid basis for developing professional interest in opportunities to stimulate the abilities of a child, to establish the personality of the young person and to accumulate new approaches in both positive education and positive development, as well as the level of management of educational processes (and not only in it). As a managerial basis, finding effective solutions to ensure adequate protection of the interests of children in the modern educational and social environment is justified by the presented data. They once again shed light on the timely and certain commitment in the educational management, regarding the inclusion of children in decision-making processes.

The results of the data analysis show that according to children, adults are sometimes inclined to listen and take seriously the point of view of young people (39.8 %, Q4). However, considered as a distribution by age, the sociological analysis shows that this trend is different in children under 9 years of age, where the weight of the same indicator is 29 %, on the other hand, for all other ages the result is at least 42 % (Fig. 15):

### General perception whether adults take seriously children's opinions

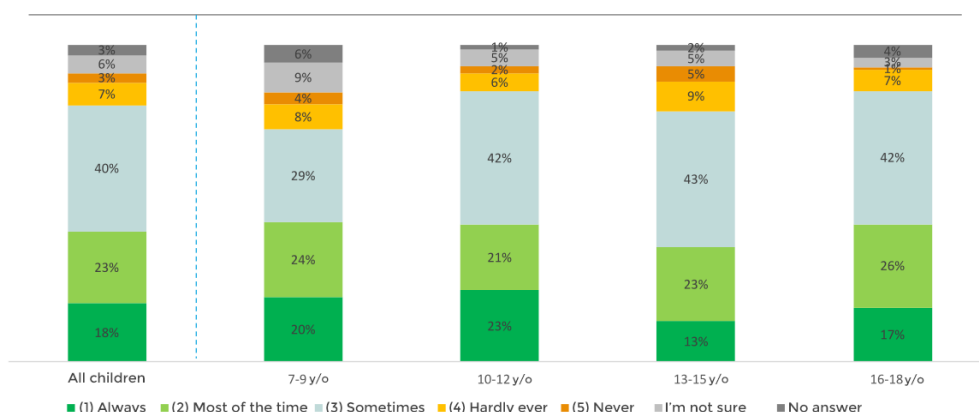


Fig. 15

The predominance of parental presence in the sample for the frequency of listening to young people was statistically derived. With applied sociological rigor in the analysis, it becomes clear that the parental criterion is unambiguously valid for all age groups, but that of teachers decreases with increasing age of the child (Fig. 16):

## Perception of the frequency of the hearing by ...

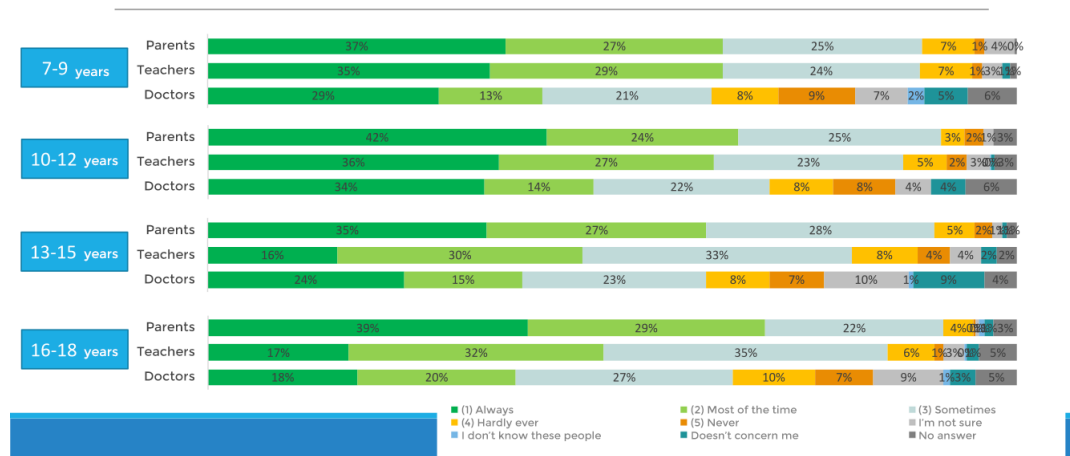


Fig. 16

Trends in Q6 Responses “How much influence do you feel you have over decisions taken by adults? To what extent can you influence and change them?” again, emphasize the leading position of the family (over 68% in total) and the school (over 51% in total).

Traced as a weight by age categories, however, the variations in the youngest and oldest students in the school are visible; the influence weakens at the age of 10-12 and 13-15 years. Family data again remain stable, regardless of the age group. The influence in the usual environment of residence - the neighborhood - increases in proportion to the age of the child (Fig. 17).

## Influence in decision making ...

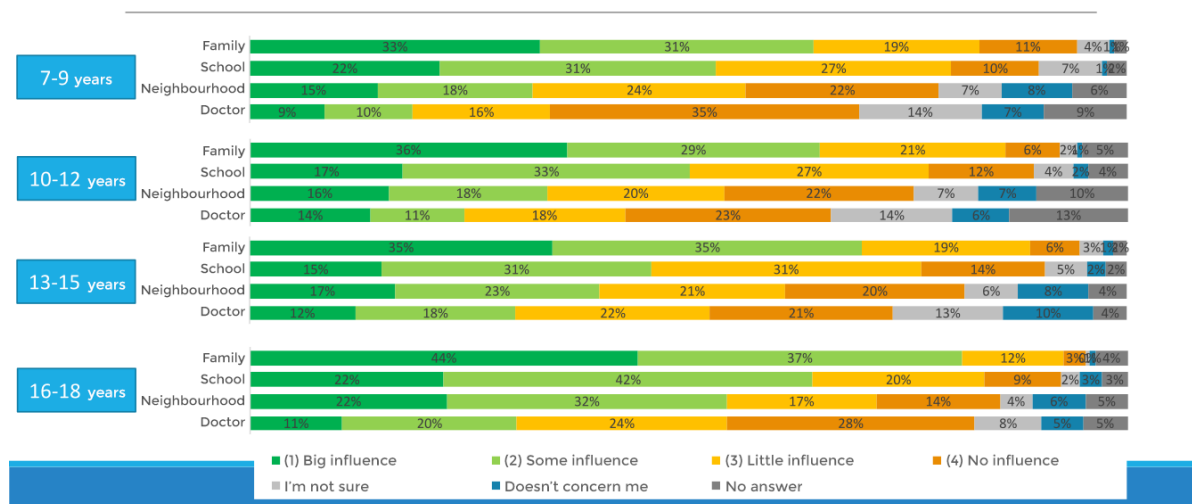


Fig. 17

When a detailed analysis was made of Q7 "How much do you believe that the following organizations and adults help to protect children's and young people's right to be heard and taken seriously" above, it became clear that the School Council is the most frequently mentioned answer and gains the most serious trust among the students answering the questionnaire. In this regard, following the indicator "School Council" of Q7 by linking the accumulated answers with the age of the respondents, it

becomes clear that with increasing age of the respondent, it increases the faith in the school council. Except for the answers for the age group 7-9 years, the other age distributions are in relative synchrony with the frequency of the answers for each of the possibilities (Fig. 18):

## Faith in School council to defend the rights of kids and young people:

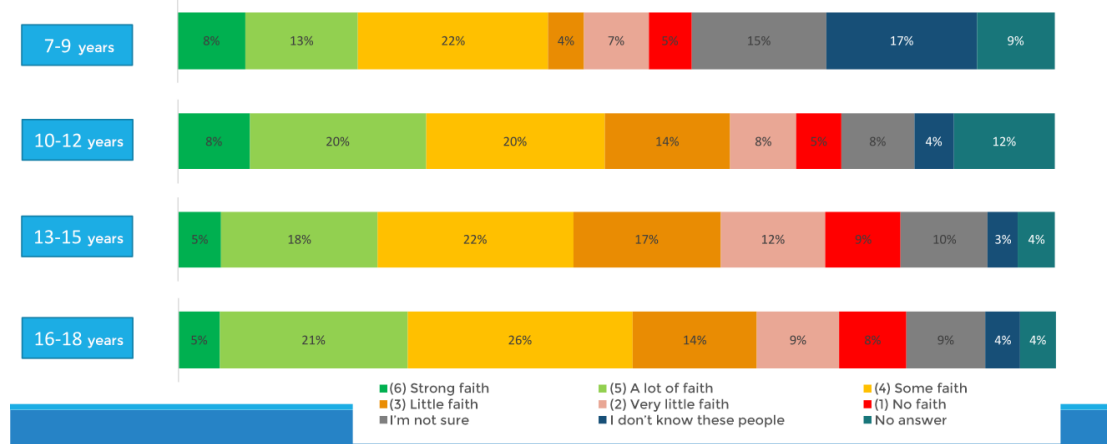


Fig. 18

According to Victor Vroom, people with a strong need for power and enforcement, as well as people with a low need for independence, are indifferent to the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. On the other hand, people with values of equality and democracy and those with a strong need for independence are motivated and increase their productivity by participating in decision-making<sup>10</sup>. Motivation to participate and motivational drivers are examined directly by Q9 "Do you feel motivated to participate in decision-making?" And Q10 "What motivates you to participate in decision-making?". Graphically, the correlation between Q9 and Q10 can be represented by Fig. 19

## Motivation to take part in decision making and motivational drivers

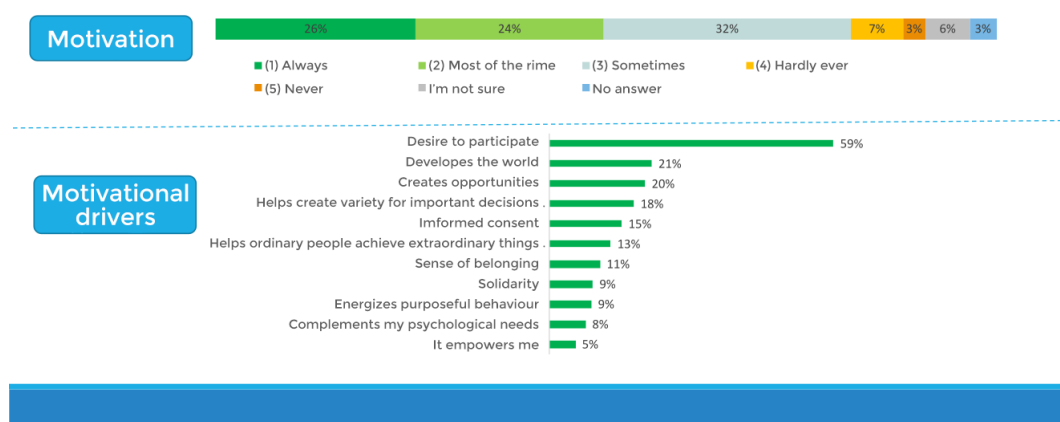


Fig. 19

<sup>10</sup> Vroom, V.H. (1965). Motivation in management. American Foundation for Management Research.

As shown by the data in the following graph, there is a decrease in the definite motivation to participate (19 %) in the range of ages of 13 – 15, while the readiness of participants (32 %) is emphasized in the oldest students. It is noteworthy that 1/3 of the respondents in each of the age categories indicate "sometimes" (Fig. 20):

## Motivation to participate in decision making

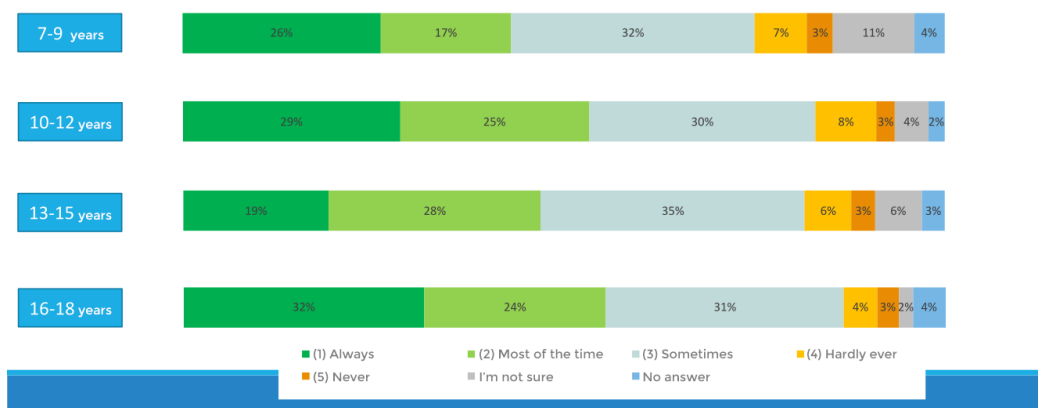


Fig. 20

Andrew Kydd emphasizes that mistrust can hinder cooperation and on this basis, develops a theory of encouragement. According to the same, encouragement is possible between reliable players in balance who are more likely to take risks to achieve cooperation than distrustful participants<sup>11</sup>. According to the data from the accumulated answers, the most reliable for each child age category are the parents (2/3), followed by the teachers, in whom the encouraging presence decreases in early adolescence (13-15 years). As the age of the respondents' increases, so does the impact of encouraging other family members, siblings as well. The same trend is observed in the encouragement of other young people - the gradation is not less than 7 % between each age category (Fig. 21):

## Encouraging opinion expression during last 12 months

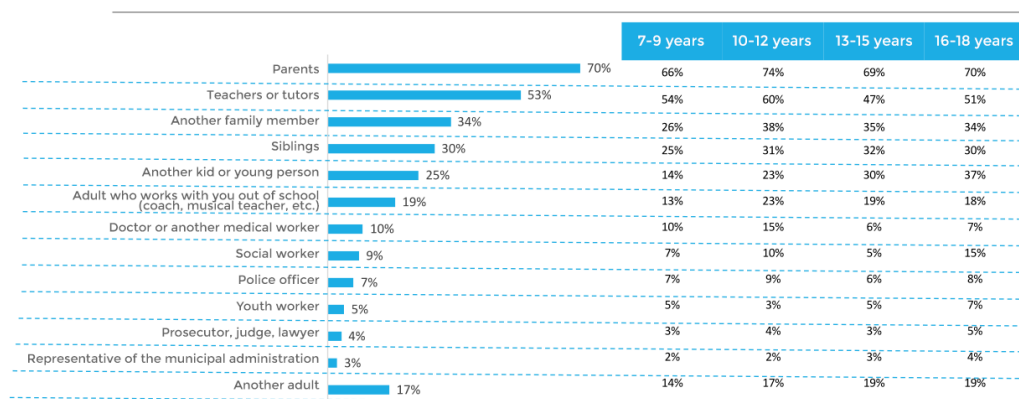


Fig. 21

<sup>11</sup> Kydd, A. (2000). Trust, reassurance, and cooperation. International Organization, 54 (2), pp.325-357.

Placed on a common stage, the data from the survey on the degree of children's participation in decision-making in educational organizations highlight the insufficient preparation of pedagogical specialists for children's participation as a resource of social development and educational potential (Fig. 22)

## What actually happens at school ...

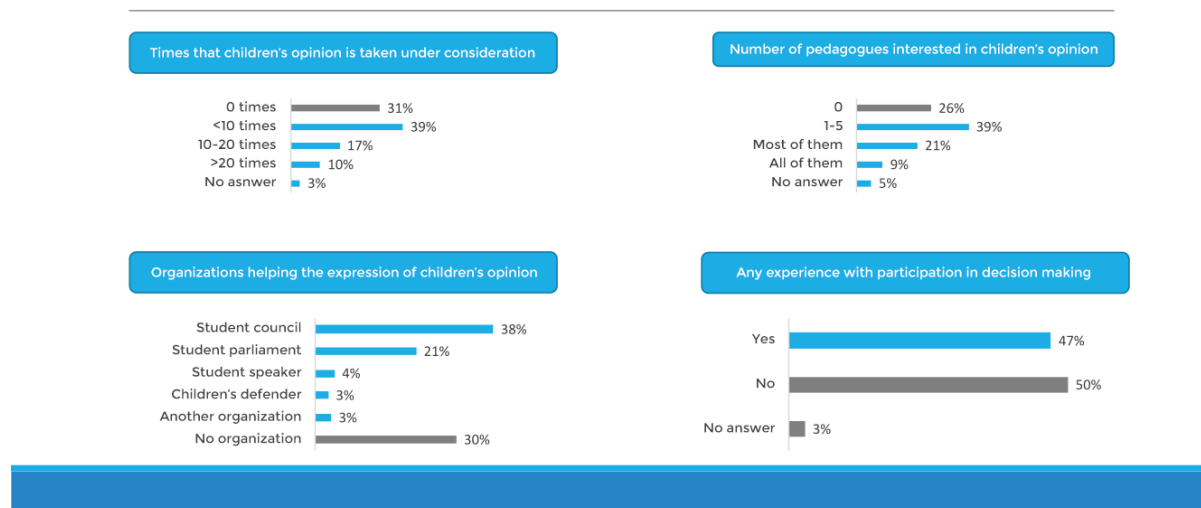


Fig. 22

The main observations of sociological data can be summarized as follows:

- Children between the age of 7 and 18 (that attend school) consider it important for them to be involved in decision-making process, especially when they are with their family or at school. Only 2 % consider that their participation in decision-making in these circles does not concern them, and for the rest, it is important. By comparison, between 18 and 30% say that participation in the decision-making process in other communities (such as social workers, police, journalists, judges, and prosecutors) does not apply to them.

- About overall 40% of the students consider that their point of view is always or most often taken seriously by older people (regardless of the community). The share of children who share that their opinion is always taken seriously is always lower among students at puberty (13-18 years) than younger children (up to 13 years).

- About 64% of students consider that they are most or always listened to by their parents, and 56% say that they are heard with the same frequency by their teachers. While there is no significant difference in the responses of parents of different ages regarding the frequency of hearings from parents, the frequency of hearings from teachers is significantly lower among students over the age of 13 compared to younger ones.)

- According to the children, the most well-known organization which should take care of and protect their rights is the School Council, that's the reason they mostly believe in this institution its function. There are no significant differences in attitudes about the functions and beliefs in the School Board between children of different ages.

- Children express strong motivation and willingness to participate in decision-making processes as the main motive for this is their desire to participate (59 %) to develop the world (21 %) and create opportunities for improvement (20 %). In addition, they believe that the diversity of opinions in decision-making (18 %) is important for the process itself and have a strong desire to contribute to their participation.

- In the last 12 months, however, children have been mostly encouraged by their parents (70 %). Only half of them say teachers have done so.

- In practice, about 1/3 of the students in school share that their opinion has never been taken into account and none of the teachers is interested in their opinion.

- Only half of the students confirm that they have had the decision-making experience at least once.

Based on everything presented so far, the statement can be formed that a change in the attitude and how children's participation in the school community is understood is necessary, to be able to apply modern pedagogy at all levels and in all areas. The lack of experience, practice, and attitudes for interaction and specific communication with children is visible as a white spot in the answers for the children themselves - meaning it is necessary to form bilaterally skills, approach and attitudes for interaction - both on the part of adults and the part of children. It is necessary to further capacity building (but also attitudes) not only among pedagogical specialists in the school environment but also among employees in-state/municipal institutions - for skills in partnership with children and the creation of space and mechanisms for children's participation.

## **B. Challenges to decision-making processes with children**

The school can be a factor in social progress and the use of pragmatism as a universal progressive method of problem-solving. For this aim, it is necessary to promote research intelligence, instrumentalism, liberalism, advocacy for democracy – i.e. preparing the young person for free expression of opinion to form a quality public opinion. All this, without neglecting the main emphasis in the developments of Alexander Neill - happiness, which should be a determining factor in making decisions about raising a child. This is because, according to Neill, the source of this happiness is personal freedom.

The role of local government and the management of individual institutions is crucial to show that not only the institutions are interested, but they are ready to work for change, based on the suggestions of the children and on the priorities important to them, their concerns and the feedback they receive. The study shows that, in general, children have the opportunity to put their concerns to the attention of parents, teachers, politicians, and institutions but so far, they have only minimal impact and the opportunity to have a real impact on government or local government policy or the sectoral institutions, including the school. It can be believed that the inert reactions of the institutions demotivate children and make them withdraw from the right to participate. The degree of real listening and commitment to give due attention to the positions expressed by children still needs to be improved and institutions need to be trained and encouraged to build these partnerships and to create space and effective opportunities for children's participation. But as mentioned earlier, children's capacity should also be developed and encouraged in an effective partnership, true adequate and efficient management of the spaces for participation in decision-making processes.

The institution that most actively provides information to children and young people should be the school. The reason is that children at this stage of their age have the strongest connection with this institution and it would be easiest to implement strong and well-organized practices for giving and receiving information from children. In schools, the biggest difficulty is that children's representation depends entirely on school management. At the same time, it is in the school that best practices related to feedback mechanisms can be found, while in other institutions and units such are usually lacking. In general, however, the degree of success and activity of children's participation in places and within the school depends very much on the school authorities or other adults and their willingness to support children.

As it can be seen from the data presented, there are significant challenges for the participation of children under 13 and disadvantaged children, which is why special commitments should be made in educational terms to encourage the participation of children with special needs and younger learners.

The existing forms of child participation are not unambiguously understood neither by the directly involved child-participants, nor by the other children, nor by the adults. Understanding can be considered

both at the personal level and at the institutional level, as demonstrated by the data from the presented survey of children's opinions. As a result, interaction cannot be seen or is significantly low as an accumulation in the local government, in the judiciary, in the police, in the media, in the central government, including in parliament.

### C. Children's participation as a managerial opportunity

Children show positive interest to participation in decision-making, as well as speak in favour of the opportunity given to participate in decision-making. Students are able to research (to make observations, to conduct interviews, to work with documents), to have analytical thinking (argumentation, drawing up diagrams, graphs) and to design (drawing and modelling). Children involved in the process of critical thinking can actively challenge the ideas proposed for their consideration. Many researchers note the impressive ability of children to express their thoughts honestly, independently, and enthusiastically while demonstrating the ability to perceive someone else's point of view. Sheridan Bartlett<sup>12</sup> describes the abilities of children acquired at different stages of psychological development and also emphasizes several competencies needed to participate in solving the problems of local self-government. By analysing the competencies of children of different ages, such as the ability to take into account the perspective of another individual, the ability to perceive complex systems, the ability to understand the principles of logical thinking - the author concludes that opportunities for participation in decision-making must be provided to children aged 7-12.

Both in theory and practice, many myths and arguments can be found to support or challenge children's participation in decision-making processes. This could initiate consideration of the reasons supporting or rejecting participation, as well as outlining an indicative list of activities to be followed as part of children's inclusion programs and so on. From the managerial point of view, however, it is worth following the main positive reasons, among which the most distinguished are:

- the ability to take into account the alternative point of view (Salvadori<sup>13</sup>, Alparone, and Rissotto<sup>14</sup> describe how children become acquainted with the points of view of others through interviews, as well as in the process of role play);
- the ability to make a collective decision (Breitbart<sup>15</sup> and Speak<sup>16</sup> describe cases in which children jointly develop formal principles of the decision-making process, choose their representatives. Working as a team, children formulate ideas and analyse results, and also show interest in solving similar problems in other groups<sup>17</sup>). However, it should be borne in mind that sometimes children face the same problems as adults.

<sup>12</sup> Bartlett, S., 1999. Children's experience of the physical environment in poor urban settlements and the implications for policy, planning and practice. *Environment and Urbanization*, 11(2), pp.63-74

<sup>13</sup> Salvadori, Ilaria. (1997). Adragon in the neighborhood: City planning with children in Milan, Italy. *Social Justice* 24(3): 192—202. 65. Schwab, Michael. (1997). Sharing power: Participatory public health research with California teens. *Social Justice* 24 (30)

<sup>14</sup> Alparone, Francesca Romana, and Antonella Rissotto (2001). Children's citizenship and participation models: Participation in planning urban spaces and children's councils. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 11(6)

<sup>15</sup> Breitbart, Myrna Margulies (1995). Banners for the street: Reclaiming space and designing change with urban youth. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 15

<sup>16</sup> Speak, Suzanne. (2000). Children in urban regeneration: Foundations for sustainable participation. *Community Development Journal* 35 (1)

<sup>17</sup> Lorenzo, Ray. (1997). Case study on children designing the future in a disadvantaged rural setting, Aspromonte, Italy. In *Children's participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*, by Roger A. Hart, London: Earthscan

• The opportunity of social and political mobilization. Studies show that children have a limited understanding of the socio-political situation and often do not know how to defend their point of view<sup>18</sup>. Meanwhile Schwab<sup>19</sup> notes that this skill comes with the age, and older children are better adapted to express their interests. Typical social and political mobilization strategies used by children are establishing contacts with stakeholders, connecting with local authorities, connecting with public organizations.

Children's thinking may be different in different conditions of participation, although the scope is the same. The social significance of the reflection itself is one aspect of the importance of the process itself, the meaning and effectiveness for the children themselves is different, and the individual impact on each participating child is, of course, the third section of each child's participation.

Tracking generated datasets can (and must) include indicators that highlight the selection of participating children, the regulation of participation, the level of respect for the proposals they generate, the possibility of involving more young people, the transparency of the process and the responsibility of the children themselves to the child population.

The presented data from the research highlights on the lack of mechanisms for respecting the opinion of children in the development and implementation of policies for them. In this regard, school organizations should be encouraged to reap some benefits from developing strong and productive cultures, such as:

- Better coordination of the organization/school towards achieving its vision, mission, and goals.
- High motivation and loyalty of staff (internal users).
- Increased team cohesion.
- Promoting consistency and coordination and control within the organization
- Forming the behaviour of staff/internal users, which allows the organization to be more efficient.

Students' participation in decision-making processes can be defined as mental and emotional involvement in group situations that encourage them to personally contribute to the team's goals and share responsibility. The main ideas of this management move are commitment, contribution, and responsibility. Mental and emotional participation presupposes not so much the physical as the psychological significance of the thinking person in the management process, and not only the skills and competencies.

According to Gerison Lansdown<sup>20</sup>, the best way to promote students' responsibility is to give them certain rights and freedoms. If children understand that their voices are heard and taken seriously, they will be able to express their opinion on their own and this basis will be more serious about the opinions of others.

Children, like all people, make decisions all the time. Therefore, it can be argued that their participation does not complicate the decision-making work much. In addition, many children, especially in developing countries, have a large number of responsibilities, so the granting of additional rights related to their participation is not superfluous, but entirely in the context of the natural course of events. In the decision-making process, children learn to listen to and respect the opinions of others. Thus, these skills help children and adults to understand each other better, which contributes to improving relationships and reducing the number of conflicts.

The presented data from the empirical study emphasize the timely and certain commitment in the educational management in terms of the inclusion of children in decision-making processes. At the same time, the simultaneity, multicolour, layeredness of children's experiences are highlighted to make it clear that they are in contrast to most of the communication channels used, which creates conditions for inefficiency, resource intensity and demotivation in participants. The presented data substantiate the

<sup>18</sup> Sutton, Sharon Egretta, and Susan P. Kemp. (2002). Children as partners in neighborhood placemaking: Lessons from inter-generational design charettes. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 22

<sup>19</sup> Schwab, Michael. (1997). Sharing power: Participatory public health research with California teens. *Social Justice* 24 (30)

<sup>20</sup> Lansdown, Gerison. (2002). The participation of children. *Changing Childhoods: Local and Global*. by Montgomery, Heather, Rachel Burr, Martin Woodhead (eds.). The Open University and John Wiley & Sons, Milton Keynes, UK

managerial basis for searching and finding effective solutions to ensure adequate protection of the interests of children in the modern educational and social environment.

## CONCLUSION

The management of education raises high expectations and requirements for pedagogical science in general. At present, on the one hand, it must perform tasks through the most modern systematic approach, on the other hand to ensure successful professional development of teachers, on the third hand to meet modern socio-economic needs and specifics of work in educational institutions. But the philosophy of management always emphasizes the so-called. public foresight, through which the management of education is burdened with commitments for generations to come - both socially and theoretically, economically and administratively, incl. with regard to educational policies as well.

By researching the attitudes of students regarding their participation in decision-making processes, a sustainable holistic approach can be formed, in which children and young people have a high-quality and regulated contribution to personal and socially significant decisions. It became clear that the theoretical basis successfully articulates the possibilities for involving the child in the decision-making process, emphasizing the positive contribution both to the child's inner world and to the educational system and the community as a whole, proving it with the good practices of Dewey, Neill, Parkhurst, and others. Each of these experiments (for its time) was deprived of a sustainable holistic approach, in which children have the opportunity to gradually engage with adequate responsibilities (in addition to rights) in social systems where good practice is implemented; to be able to achieve direct impact on the planning and development of specific tasks, services, activities, programs, strategies, and so on.

It was clarified that children's participation in decision-making takes place as a practice only in individual schools, and at the system level, there are serious problems related to this participation. The main difficulties can be found in the lack of macro and micro educational and socio-pedagogical policies for children's participation, as well as the insufficient training of pedagogical specialists, to effectively support the process of (student self-government and) children's participation in decision-making. At the same time, it is necessary to form bilaterally skills, approach, and attitudes for interaction - both on the part of adults and children, and it has already been proven that the most effective environment for this is the school organization.

It is indisputable that the school environment in modern times is developing and exists in an inseparable connection with the socially significant elements and processes at local, regional and transnational level - both in political and in community-personal reading. For this, it is necessary to further build both capacity and attitude among employees in state and local institutions - for skills in partnership with children and the creation of space and mechanisms for child participation.

The data prove the influence of the local government and ministerial administrations, as well as the police and forensic specialists is not noticeable for the learner in everyday life. Besides, it highlights the fact that for the young person the specific form of organization in the political world (parliament, ombudsman, even non-governmental organizations) is not important, but the essence of the process is important. All this emphasizes the different views of children and raises doubts about the attitude of adults to include students in attendance rather than participation, questioning the understanding and knowledge of adults about the opportunities and forms of participation of young people. It is, therefore, reasonable to emphasize that participation must be real, filled with content and respect by the adults themselves (and the institutions they represent).

All this gives grounds to claim that it is necessary to enrich the scientific summaries and the public debate on issues affecting the pedagogical, philosophical, legal, and ethical aspects of children's participation and finding effective solutions to ensure adequate protection of children's interests in modern times, educational and social environment. By methodological point of view, it is important to emphasize the clarity of the goal; the comfort for the children at meetings, structuring the events; earliest

possible participation of children; providing training to support children acquire the necessary skills; participative methods developed in collaboration with children; helping the elderly when needed; strategic sustainability developments.

The development of modern pedagogy confirms the feeling that the idea of involving children in decision-making and life management in the organization or the local community is viable. In each presented school or model of children's participation, there is a certain social philosophy and new understandings of freedom, happiness, democracy, and so on. These are (recognized) basic human values. Thus, the changes regarding the vision of children's participation adequately follow the changes in the development of man and society.

At the same time, it is realized that children grow much faster than professional progress can. That is why it is very important to understand the children's reading of the pace. In this way, in combination with the competencies of adults, professional leaps can be built, anticipating children's needs - to optimize the waste of resources and to base qualitative progress on development in the management of education.

Meanwhile, there is no lack of motivation among individual pedagogical representatives, which is why it is assumed that there are conditions for a positive approach and development of children's participation at the school level.

Children's participation seeks and expects increased effectiveness and quality from the education of civic competencies, the rationality of personal choice, adequate preparedness for growing responsibilities, the promotion of cooperation and interaction, increased social responsibility, and social progress in general. This is a pursuit of self-improvement and exercise for a broad public activity through inclusion of pedagogical research space in the context of building a European Knowledge-based Economy process.

Taking into account the fact that education management is targeted at providing an integrative and interdisciplinary approach, it is scientifically true to claim that children's participation in decision-making is a pedagogical innovation with a solid foundation in the theory and management of education. And as such, it connects with the basics of management, economics, finance, educational management, human resource management, trends in the development of educational policy, and pedagogical counselling of children, students, teachers, and parents. Thanks to the network of knowledge, competencies and abilities areas thus identified, the work on children's participation in decision-making processes have every reason to be and to become a challenge and a circumstance that satisfies high public expectations and attitudes in a modern and operational way with responsible look and commitment to the future.

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