**

Seminar on ‘Community schools’

Brussels, 23-24 May 2013

INPUT FROM EUNEC MEMBERS

## The Lithuanian Education Council

Is this theme part of the policy debate in your country?

The programme of the 16th Government of the Republic of Lithuania for 2012–2016 envisages the establishment of multifunctional centres for the provision of preschool, pre-primary, primary and other forms of informal children’s and informal adult education. The Programme also governs the creation of the conditions for the provision of cultural, social and other services for the local community. This is a relevant subject, as is reflected in our legislation and activities (for more details, see answer to the next question).

Is the definition set forward by EUNEC relevant? Are essential elements missing?

Currently, municipalities in Lithuania, especially in rural areas, are establishing universal multifunctional centres (UMCs) as well as schools–multifunctional centres (SMCs) that, among other functions, also offer either primary or basic education. The aim of establishing both types of centres is to address the problem of insufficient quality, supply and accessibility of educational and social services in rural areas by creating, implementing and developing a modern infrastructure of educational and social services.

The Pre-primary and Pre-school Development Programme for 2007–2012, approved by Government Decision No. 1057 of 19 September 2007, defines the UMC as an institution providing educational, cultural and social services to children and local communities. The UMC activities may include: pre-primary, pre-school and informal education for children, child day care, informal adult education, educational assistance, special education, distance learning under formal and non-formal education programs (curricula) or modules, entertainment, socio-cultural and artistic activities for children and adults and other services. The target groups and functions of UMCs are determined by the local municipal authorities in view of the needs of the local community. UMCs are also seen as a tool to increase access to pre-primary and pre-school education, especially in rural areas, as illustrated in paragraph 1.8 of the Action Plan of the Pre-primary and Pre-school Development Programme for 2007–2012. The Programme provides for both the establishment of new UMCs and the adjustment of the existing facilities for running pre-primary and pre-school education programmes and for offering other educational, cultural and social services for children and local communities.

The School Improvement Programme Plus (hereinafter referred to as SIP Plus) was approved by the Minister of Education and Science by order No. ISAK-2331 of 3 December 2007. SIP Plus is designed to reach the objectives under priority 2, Lifelong Learning, of the Human Resources Development Action Plan for 2007-2013 and priority 2, Public Service Quality and Availability of Health, Education and Social Infrastructure, of the Cohesion Promotion Action Plan for 2007 – 2013 drafted in order to reach Lithuania’s priorities, goals and objectives under the Strategy for the Use of the European Union Structural Support in 2007–2013.

In SIP Plus, the concept of UMC does not differ from the way it is defined in the Programme approved by the Government referred to above. SIP Plus defines the UMC as a new and innovative unit of the educational system and a new tool to ensure better access to and quality of educational services in view of the existing problems of schools being closed, pupils not being assured of learning options, and lack of adult education services. SIP Plus also stipulates that establishing UMCs in rural areas will help to build active communities and strengthen the existing ones, as well as create conditions for social partnership, develop social capital, give an impetus to innovative solutions and improve networking capacities. Thus, the UMCs are seen not only as an embedded segment of the educational system, but also as institutions established in specific localities in order to analyse and meet the needs of the local communities, support the community-building process and strengthen relations between the members of every community.

In addition, under points 15 and 24.2.1.3 of the Rules for Establishment of Formal Education Schools approved by decision of the Government No. 768 of 29 June 2011, schools with vacant premises may change their mission and be reformed to serve either as schools–multifunctional centres (hereinafter SMCs) or special schools–multifunctional centres.

The Lithuanian SMCs are most likely to be compared to community schools (as UMCs do not run any formal curricula). The Rules for Establishment of Formal Education Schools stipulate that schools with vacant premises may be reformed into SMCs and that multifunctional centres can be established in former school premises to provide informal education, education assistance, cultural and health care services as well as meet social needs of the community. SMCs are intended to cater for pupils aged between 7/6 and 16 by offering primary and basic education. In addition, SMCs offer informal education programmes for children and adults and enable the local community to cater for its cultural, health, social, and other needs. Thus, in the case of Lithuania, apart from networking and improvement of the quality of education and training, there is an additional aspect, namely, lifelong learning. The activities of the said multifunctional centres are oriented not only at pupils, but also at meeting the needs of the local community.

Do you recognise the differentiation between community schools and multifunctional schools?

There are no community schools in Lithuania in the sense defined by the EUNEC. However, schools in the regions and rural areas may also traditionally act as centres offering cultural services, sports and education to local communities. Nevertheless, this is not formalised as a school type. By and large, this depends on the initiative of the communities at individual schools. Joint activities of schools and local communities, such as running various projects, social services, etc. may also be initiated by the local authorities, e.g. wardens and municipality representatives. However, this only amounts to initiatives of individual communities of individual schools. As for cooperation between schools and local communities, school councils play an important role as the supreme institution of self-government of schools. Under Article 60.3 of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, the role of the school council is to represent pupils, teachers, parents (foster parents, guardians) and the local community. Notably, the engagement of the local community in school management through the school council is an officially established and regulated form of cooperation.

Both UMCs and SMCs are new to Lithuania. They came about as a result of addressing the problem of the falling numbers of pupils, especially in rural areas. The UMC means more than just multifunctional use of the existing premises, which the name seems to suggest. In our case, the Lithuanian UMC is comparable to the community school because of the partnership between UMCs and social partners, joint coordination of activities, design of a joint vision and analysis of the needs of the local community that informs the planning of the relevant activities by the UMC. Currently, the Education Development Centre is running a project entitled Development of Lifelong Learning Opportunities in Rural Areas funded by the European Social Fund and national budget of the Republic of Lithuania. In the framework of this project, the concept document on UMCs (including SMCs) is being drafted, which will offer a definition of the UMC and cover its objectives, principles of operation, organisation, engagement of the local community, specificity of the work with various target groups, and other matters.

What is the perspective from which the issue is raised?

Enhancing the availability and quality of educational and other services (schools are being closed, the opportunities to choose learning are not ensured for pupils, the availability of adult education services is insufficient, etc.)

How does your council consider the debate on the embeddedness and the partnership of schools with the local community? Do you have any relevant recommendations on this theme?)

In the framework of the project Development of Lifelong Learning Opportunities in Rural Areas run by the Education Development Centre in 2012–2014, twenty municipalities, alongside the universal multifunctional centres or school–multifunctional centres, set up coordination groups comprising local community representatives and local bodies or institutions providing public services. The mission of the coordination groups is to help the multifunctional centres to identify the real needs of the local community, offer proposals on ways to meet the potential needs and solve the problems. On the basis of the experience and the insights from the project, proposals on the most effective ways of cooperation between schools or informal education institutions and the local community will be drafted and presented.

Is the concept of “community schools” known in your country? Or is it used with another name? Are there schools in your country working with this concept? What priorities have they chosen? What are their experiences of difficulties?

Since the concept of community schools is not defined in the legislation, schools do not use it. It can be seen in the context of the project Development of Lifelong Learning Opportunities in Rural Areas mentioned above and in the examples of joint activities of schools and local communities (see materials attached). Currently, Lithuania has 26 multifunctional centres, including 7 universal multifunctional centres, offering no formal education, and 19 schools–multifunctional centres offering primary or basic education. Schools–multifunctional centres also include three special schools–multifunctional centres. Twelve (both universal multifunctional centres and schools–multifunctional centres) out of 26 centres mentioned above have been opened in municipalities in the framework of the projects under the measure Establishment of Universal Multifunctional Centres in Rural Areas under priority 2 of the Operational Programme for promotion of Cohesion for 2007–2013 titled Quality and Availability of Public Services: Health Care, Education and Social Infrastructure. In line with this measure, 78 universal multifunctional centres should be opened in Lithuania’s municipalities in 2015.

We believe that cooperation among schools (networks, teams) is addressed under the eTwinning programme run by the Centre of Information Technologies in Education. Recently, the results of a case study of teacher collaboration, eTwinning School Teams, have been published. They describe cooperation experience of 24 European schools on the basis of the following parameters: institutional factors and organisational climate in schools (school context, school innovation history), human factors (eTwinning team), institutional factors (team activities, opportunities and challenges), influence of eTwinning teams in schools and future plans. Although there are no Lithuanian schools among the 24 aforementioned schools, similar processes can be observed in Lithuania, too. The results of the study show that:

1. Schools have a wide variety of eTwinning teams, where the support of school leadership for the establishment and functioning was essential. It allowed for more flexible planning of activities of school teams not only between teachers and pupils but also with parents and other external stakeholders.

2. eTwinning school teams form part of school vision and are conducive to innovation in schools. Two groups of schools could be identified in the study. Some schools already had considerable experience of cooperation with other schools in Europe before engaging in eTwinning projects, while for other schools, eTwinning projects were the first step towards European cooperation. The study revealed that it does not matter were cooperation begins, most importantly, both ways lead to the same objective.

3. The level of development of eTwinning school teams varies. Some teams are only at the point of formation, while others continue an old tradition of cooperation. It is known from previous experience that innovation is not a one-off phenomenon but rather a complex process, which develops in time and involves many actors (Forkosh-Barush, 2008). The study has also demonstrated that the activities of eTwinning school team influence the pedagogical objectives of a school by contributing to the existing activities and bring about either some minor or radical changes into the learning environment. The flexibility and adaptability of the eTwinning programme is basically compatible with both the introduction and adjustment of pedagogical innovations and transition and transformation.

4. The role of a lead teacher (teachers) is another important factor. These people inspire other members of the team and bring some fresh ideas into school life. Previous studies have shown that leader’s motivation is the main stability component in innovation and one of the most effective factors of pedagogical innovation based on the use of ICTs. It is equally important to motivate and support leaders and focus on building school teams.

5. Uneven distribution of innovation models among schools is determined by time and context, i.e. school environment, teachers, pupils, content, etc. It also depends on the author of the innovations (one of the teachers or school leadership).

6. eTwinning is referred to as the community for schools in Europe that helps not only to build e-communities, but promotes the establishment of local school communities or school teams and enables local school teams to collaborate with e-communities of other schools in Europe.

Currently, over 1,100 Lithuanian schools and 2,700 education specialists (teachers, head teachers, librarians, social workers, etc. working with 3–20 year-old pupils and students) are engaged in the programme with 1,690 projects (369 running and 1,324 completed).

On the European level, the programme is run in over 104,000 schools by 200,500 education specialists from 35 countries and involves over 27,800 projects.

Teachers engaged in the eTwinning programme are encouraged to integrate the projects into the curricula and informal education and invite their colleagues, pupils, parents and the local community or local authorities to join. The activities and results of the projects are published on the European website, at: www.etwinning.net, on the national website of the programme, at: www.etwinning.lt, the education portal, at: http://portalas.emokykla.lt, the websites of the schools engaged in the projects, as well as in local, regional and national press, on the municipal websites, at events organised in the framework of the programme (over 50 events are held annually), etc.

Every year, the best projects are awarded the National Quality Label or the European Quality Label. The projects are evaluated according to the following criteria:

* Pedagogical innovation and creativity: can certain aspects of the project, such as content, objectives, methods, activities and methodologies, end products, promotion and publications, be considered as more innovative and creative than others?
* Curricular integration: integration of project activity into the existing curricula.
* Collaboration between partner schools: interaction and collaboration of teachers and pupils from different schools when running the project. (e.g., not simply sharing results, but also engaging in active cooperation).
* Use of ICT: creative ways of using ICT during the project apart from e-mail.
* Sustainability and transferability: ensuring the continuity of the project by engaging the entire school and sharing benefits with other stakeholders, such as the local community and local authorities.