

## MANAGEMENT OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: INCORPORATION OF STRATEGIC IDEAS INTO SCHOOL PLANNING

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**Abstract:** Strategic management has become a vital part of the entire school environment. The effective strategic planning and management decisions are key to focusing on the future, planning a road and following actions to meet the needs of the education system and the entire society. To put more light into this issue, we studied the relevant literature, used results of the visits of 20 schools in Kosovo and results of the questionnaire with directors, teachers and students in 10 Kosovo schools.

The aim of this article, based on the findings of the qualitative and quantitative research in Kosovo schools, is to analyze the context in which strategies decision are made, identify and suggest some managerial tools that can be used by school's management when planning, developing and monitoring school development plans, and analyze to what extend the environmental strategic ideas are incorporated into the school planning. The suggestions can be used by school management and staff to amend the current planning and plan successfully the next strategic management cycle and develop school plans for a number of years.

**Keywords:** strategic management, school development plans, strategic ideas, environment management

### INTRODUCTION

Kosovo in post-war years has brought a number of policies, strategies and laws that regulate school competencies in developing long term-planning, mid-term planning and short-term planning. This process was initiated and commanded to schools as an instrument for becoming self-managing within the processes of integration into the European family.

In doing so, the school management is directed to conduct strategic analysis by involving managerial, pedagogical and organization aspects of the school, which provide important contribution in development of school strategy through analyzing of the school environment, the strategic capabilities and the culture of the school. The results of the strategic analyses will produce school strategic options oriented towards improvement and future. A school strategic plan will have a number of sub-plans divided into years and action steps to achieve the target planned, by incorporating priorities that work in practice. This means that all problems like resources, co-operation, staff preparation need to be considered as well as the daily operation of the plan.

The legal framework for defining the requirements and standards for the preparation and management of school development plans has been developed by local and international experts. It includes few stages: planning of a dynamic plan through action plans and projects, implementation which marks realization of what has been planned, and regular monitoring and evaluation. This makes the management cycle complete.

### THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Strategic management defines the long-term performance of the organization with the decision and action needed to be taken by the management<sup>436</sup>, it consist of all the “analysis, decisions and action an organization undertakes in order to create and sustain competitive advantages”<sup>437</sup>. The management should understand their role and position in a company, decide about the choices and manage the future of the company<sup>438</sup>, “it is long term-management not simply a response to current events, it will extend over a period of years and be reflected in the development planning”<sup>439</sup>.

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<sup>436</sup> Toma L. Weelen and J. David Hunger (2009). Basic Concepts of Strategic Management. Prentice Hall, Inc

<sup>437</sup> Gregori Dess, Tom Lumpkin (2002). Strategic management: Creating competitive advantages. USA: McGraw-Hill.

<sup>438</sup> Gerry Johnson, Kevan Scholes, & Richard Whittington. 2008. Exploring Corporate Strategy: text and cases (8th Ed). Harlow: Pearson Education.

<sup>439</sup> Tony Bush, Marianne Coleman, M (2000) Leadership and Strategic Management in Education. London: SAGE.

According to Mintzberg, through the development of the strategy we are directed toward the future, we think about the future, make plans about the future and make decision for implementation of the planned activities<sup>440</sup>. “Strategic planning is concerned with identifying a future state and trying to plan a route map to get there”<sup>441</sup>. In order to make the plan successfully there is a need to make a detailed plan of action<sup>442</sup>.

Management of school improvement is performed within the framework of school planning, it includes evaluation of the internal and external resources and how they are used, buildings, staff, assets and finances but also the reputations, what has been achieved until now, and identification of gaps and obstacles within and outside the school<sup>443</sup> (Fiddler, 2002). The quality of leadership and management is an important component in defining the successful and unsuccessful schools. Bush and Coleman highlight “good management makes a difference to the quality of schools and to the educational outcomes of their students”<sup>444</sup>

### **AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to analyze the context in which strategies decision are made, and analyze to what extent the environmental strategic ideas are incorporated into the school planning. When it comes to environmental-related challenges facing the world today, pollution and global warming have come to represent a real threat to our communities. It is crucial to join forces to prevent and avoid further risk incurring more damage to our planet. Living more environmentally friendly should not be perceived as a tough task. It rather requires small and balancing changes in thinking, collective behavior and individual, day-to-day practices. The positive change in a transitional society and in a country like Kosovo is a duty of everyone, especially when it comes to developing friendly environmental behaviors and providing education on environmental issues for a sustainable socio-economic development. This is because the long-term development of society depends on the qualitative transformation and the way the education system operates, how the governing institutions are governed and directed, but also the results they aim to achieve and the direction the whole system intends to change the society for good. This is especially important when it comes to education and environmental management.

Within the school development plan, environmental activities are also planned. Each school is supposed to define the environment vision, aims and objectives, through which they agree with the main stakeholders for certain actions. Schools should identify and prioritize the environmental problems faced by the school, and create an action plan. The school planning is very important for all participating / interested parties including - teachers, students, parents, community and external partners.

The paper studies challenges and opportunities of school environmental planning, and is focused on aspect of long term and short-term planning, leadership, resources and their management, and monitoring and evaluation.

### **SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL PLANNING**

The Ministry of Education Science and Technology has set out challenging and ambitious program for education reform in Kosovo. The Law on Pre-University Education (2011)<sup>445</sup> has brought some innovations to the education system, including deployment of competencies at local level, which guides schools to develop school planning, that represents the first step in managing the quality of schools and developing strategic planning for improving.

A policy for development of school strategic planning provides possibility to school management to identify areas for improvement, develop a concrete strategy, and offer possibility to implement changes that will bring better outcomes for students. The process of planning will help schools to identify progress and challenges through analyzing of the current situation and plan strategically for the future through development of planning in three levels:

- thinking about the future / long-term planning (3-10 years);
- mid-term planning (2-3 years); and

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<sup>440</sup> Henry Mintzberg. 1994. *The rise and fall of strategic planning; reconceiving roles for planning, plans, planners.* New York: The Free Press.

<sup>441</sup> Brian Fiddler (2002). *Strategic management for school development: Leading your school's improvement strategy*, London: SAGE Publication.

<sup>442</sup> IBIDEM

<sup>443</sup> IBIDEM

<sup>444</sup> Tony Bush & Marianne Coleman. 2000. *Leadership and Strategic Management in Education.* London: SAGE.

<sup>445</sup> MASHT (2011). *Korniza e Kurrikulit të Kosovës.* Prishtina: MASHT

- short-term planning / annual plan

The school development plan is a project, covering a number of smaller projects. For the management of such a project, usually four stages are involved: the beginning of the process, planning, realization and evaluation.

### **METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS**

Data for the survey were collected through a number of instruments. A total of 300 school staff (management and administrator, teachers and students) were involved focusing on the school planning, and to what extent the environmental strategic ideas are incorporated into the school planning.

In addition, the plans of ten schools have been analyzed, the integration of environmental ideas into the school planning, their implementation and resources available, involvement of teachers, pupils, community, as well as the communication and promotion of environmental regulation in school and community as a factor in improving the school environment. It becomes evident that not all schools have a clear vision of integration of the environment within the school vision and strategic choice, even though in most of the schools the environmental activities have been incorporated within the school plan. Within the framework of the SWOT analysis, considering the deficiencies and risks, most of the schools emphasize, that the school budget does not provide funds for implementation of the environmental activities and failure to obtain timely provision of funds, it hinders the achievement of the results. There is a lack of engagement and lack of interest of the school staff on school ecology. All schools have a monitoring and evaluation plan but not detailed one, how they will monitor the implementation of the activities or projects envisaged in the school planning. Within the long-term school plans, environmental issues are not foreseen, and the majority of school's lack concrete projects with work action plan, implementation and monitoring. Basically, there is a lack of engagement from leadership and staff for undertaking initiatives and development of environmental projects. The questionnaires were analyzed by drawing percentages from school staff responses while qualitative data were analyzed through drawing categories and themes from interviews and other materials.

### **THE RESULTS**

#### *Understanding strategic planning*

Strategic planning is a physic product of the process of planning and includes school orientation toward the future. The school council composed of management and school administrator, teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders like officials from the municipalities, representatives from the businesses, are responsible for development of school strategy. However, not in every school the school council was part of the drafting process, and its periodical evaluation. The process of development of school planning requires effective leadership from the school management and school council, and during the interview the process of responsibility shifted from directors to the school council and vice versa. The process of strategic analysis is the first step toward development of schools planning, which requires evaluation of the internal and external resources, and evaluation of what has been achieved until now. All the data collected need to be interpreted objectively as possible, and take a good decision about which direction to head in the future. During the interview it become evident that not all schools went through the evaluation process by identifying strengths, opportunities, weakness and threats. During planning most of the school lacked to consider the tangible resources, staff, assets and finances which will be reflected during the implementation phase. The implementation of activities and project foreseen lacked due to unclear delegation of duties, lack of staff engagement, and lack of resources. Another obstacle identified was the lack of regular monitoring and periodic evaluation of the plan.

Based on the opinions from the school management and other staff during the interview, they are aware of the general concept for preparation of the school long term planning and short-term planning, but there is a lack of engagement and knowledge to follow the necessary steps when preparing the strategy, especially during preparation of dynamic plans with concrete actions. Basically, there was no clear understanding and application of the strategic cycle management when preparing the school strategy.

### **SCHOOL VISION**

Asked about the development of the school vision for the environment most of the respondents (64%) answered that there is no collective or written agreement on the environmental issues faced by schools. There is no approach on environmental learning assessed by the school and community, and where the ideas and interests of school and community are represented there. While 36% of respondents' state that there is well written vision statement for the environment reflected in the objectives of the school. It recognizes the potential environmental impact on students,

parents, staff, and the community. Students understand the vision and have the opportunity to contribute to what they want to learn and what they want to do.

Likewise, asked about school policy for environmental regulation, 55% of respondents answered that the school does not have certain policies or any statement about environmental regulation. While 25% of respondents' state that there is a coherent and detailed policy statement that reflects on current work, in line with the vision and objectives of the school. It is regularly reviewed and regularly updated by all relevant stakeholders, including a student committee. Asked about the environmental development planning at school, 60% of respondents answered that there is poor planning of environment activities within the school strategic plan. School staff does not have access to information and many of them are not interested about the vision of their school, objectives, and performance results, which would enable staff to focus on the implementation of planned activities. Meetings and discussions between teachers, students, directors and the community are rare and there is a lack of regular distribution of planned documents through the school web site.

While 30% of respondents answered that there is a mid-term plan for the development and management of environment activities and ideas supported by the school objectives. The planning process involves staff from different levels. Environmental subject leaders have a lot of will to involve the students in this work. There is communication between school staff and community. The plan includes specific references, including priority activities for the school, global aspects, sustainable schools, etc.

Asked about the level of school staff for management of the environmental activities and initiatives, everyone agrees that the school has trained some teachers to manage environmental issues at school. However, some of these leaders have few skills, lack of knowledge and understanding, and have minimal impact. While other respondents highlight that they have environmental leaders with extensive knowledge on the field who run and coordinate the entire school approach. Students are encouraged by environmental teachers to contribute to curriculum planning and non-curricular environmental activities.

Asked about school initiatives and decision-making on environmental issues, 44% of respondents answered that responses to initiatives are very limited and occur without proper consultation, 15% of respondents answered that the environment is regularly discussed at staff or government group school meetings, where students' needs and opinions on environmental issues are considered.

### **RESOURCES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT**

All respondents agree that the implementation of many environmental activities in the school is related to the resources available, and broad participation of teachers, students, school staff and parents. It is very important to include all the above actors in environmental activities, but it is very important to establish a group of activists who will lead and manage environmental issues and will be active in involving the school and the wider community. 53% of respondents responded that the direct involvement of different representatives such as school staff, students, and parents in environmental activities is missing. While 35% of respondents answered that usually when there are environmental initiatives within the school, the presentation of the different stakeholders is satisfactory. The school director and staff, the students and the parents have participated in the organization of various environmental festivals and environmental days. However, realization of many activities and environmental projects requires financial and human resources. Schools have their own budget but this budget is not enough for the implementation of planned activities and projects. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the other opportunities and search for funds.

In order to approach these institutions, schools need to develop a work plan for the selected project and the activities identified, and in most of the cases the director is engaged in other management duties, teachers do not take responsibility, students need facilitation, so the initiative fails. Asked who is responsible for providing funds, 20% think it is the school principal, while 60% think that this task should be promoted through the creation of working groups within schools. Asked who supports schools for carrying out environmental activities and projects, 40% answered that parents usually do, and 30% answered that municipality, the ministries and the local businesses support. While 10% of funds is generated by student activities through the recycling where students collect plastic bottles, and sell to the recycling companies.

### **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Asked about the ongoing monitoring of the environmental projects and activities and if there are evaluation mechanisms in place, 60% of respondents answered that there is no formal monitoring process and a regular assessment. Although these processes are foreseen in school planning, they often lack in implementation. There is no monthly / quarterly monitoring of results and at the same time no staff responsible for this is assigned. While

20% of respondents answered that regular and planned monitoring of environmental activities and projects for the entire school is done, including monitoring of activities, analysis of work and plans. The Self-Assessment Tool is used during planning.

With regard revision of the environmental planning, 60% of respondents answered that there is no review of the planned environmental activities and projects. While 20% of respondents answered that in their school environmental activities and projects are discussed regularly in meetings and issues are identifying for future development. Environmental management is reviewed annually by key personnel and an action plan is developed by the leaders dealing with environmental activities and projects.

## CONCLUSIONS

The process of design and build of long-term approach by schools, as part of the education reforms in Kosovo is an important step toward understanding the concept of strategic management. A clear understanding and application of the strategic management phrases, analyzing, planning, implementation and evaluation will facilitate school management in development of sustainable and quality strategy. Through strategic analysis schools are involved in evaluation of the internal and external resources, identification of opportunities and obstacles and making predictions about the future. Creation of the school vision which correspond with the present situation as a starting point, and a clear picture about the future produce school strategic options. Planning and implementation of the strategy choice should be considering as interactive with lessons learned and their application in the next planning process.

Implementation of strategic management concepts in development of school strategy, and specifically in our study incorporation of the environmental strategic ideas into the school planning will depend on the ability and knowledge of the school leadership, management and other staff to obtain and process information, build strategy that works in practice and support its implementation.

The entire strategic planning process faces a number of challenges. Schools face lack of staff capacities and capabilities in project cycle management, it is relatively a new process that requires creation of the new structure for planning, coordination and managing of the processes. This requires training and capacity building in project cycle management and commitment of the staff to contribute in all stages of the planning process and strategy implementation. Meanwhile, there are financial constrains that school faces in implementation of strategies. What is planned it is never supported, and as result many planned projects and activities remain in paper.

With regard to incorporation of environmental activities and projects within the school planning, the entire school culture needs to change, and it requires a serious commitment of all parties to consolidate their approach during planning, division of responsibilities, procedures, and resources for development, implementation and review of environmental projects. It also requires a sub-plan for monitoring, evaluation and promotion, and disseminating of the strategy, how to gain support from different stakeholders, and increase the public image of the school. Such a change needs to be driven by the need to bring significant improvements in shaping attitudes and creating knowledge for people. Transformations will bring the educational system as close as possible to the European and international standards and practices and to make sure that it reflects societal needs.

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