



NAOS . Professional Capacity dealing with diversity

REPORT

Study visit in Zagreb, Croatia,
19 & 20 of October, 2015



The Topic

School and the local community

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The context

X. Gimnazija „Ivan Supek“ (secondary school)

Elementary school Nikola Tesla

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1. INTRODUCTION: methodological notes

The study visit in Zagreb, Croatia, took place from 19 to 20 of October 2015.

X. Gimnazija „Ivan Supek“ (secondary school) was the first school the peer review team visited, following a small meeting in NEPC office. On October 20th 2015 the



NAOS team visited the Elementary school Nikola Tesla. The implementation of the study visit was done following a specific schedule (see appendix I)

During the presentation at X. Gimnazija „Ivan Supek“ were present the Headteacher; coordinator of the bilingual program; pedagogue (expert staff, make proposals of workshops to support teachers. Works as a mediator. Take cares of surveys, data relating students); professor of Music Arts and head of the school choir; psychologist and one parent.

Elementary school Nikola Tesla was visited during the second day.

In each school after the formal presentation NAOS team divided into small groups to interview parents, school principals or teachers. The interviews and discussions were recorded, transcribed and analysed.

This is a case study, involving two schools and part of their actors. Pupils are not represented and sometimes the moment dedicated to parents interview just had one parent. The thematic content analysis took into consideration that some interviewees' discourses are just representing themselves. However, the diversity of information and data from interviews allowed having a vision, some trends, main concerns, priorities and actions in two urban schools from Croatia. Interpretations and reflection were done with that assumption.

The methodology

2. NAOS TOPIC at a glance: schools and the local community

Considered by Severiens and colleagues (2013) as one of the teachers' competencies, Community and School integrates the idea that only community integrated development can results into successful educational and future life pathways, shifting the focus from the individual to the context. However, those researchers found in their curriculum content analysis that "school and community relationships also receive very little attention in the current intended curriculum" (Severiens, Wolff, & van Herpen, 2013: 8)

Little attention to school-community relationship



Accordingly with Gross and colleagues “school–community partnerships can impact student success and post-school outcomes as well as positively influence and benefit the community in return.” (Gross, Haines, Colethea, Blue-Banning & Turnbull, 2015: 10). Partnerships based on networking modify experiences and structures by linking individuals, groups and organizations.

Partnerships and networking

Additionally to this, Actor-network Theory (ANT) is also relevant when we try to understand how schools actors make reasoning to explain their school system, schools contexts, pupils and school practices. School actors generate knowledge in a way that “becomes enacted as a network effect” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010: 4).

Considering that schools capacity and willingness to stimulate and be engaged in networking processes involving school and community actors vary for a number of different reasons it could be referred, however, that network analysis considers social capital, and particularly discussions on bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2001; Prell, 2012).

Understanding school as part of the local community, agendas definition and strategies to take collective action might be started by school, improving participation and stimulating a common ground to engage and promote approaches to problems and adversities. Green points out “expanding equity and



access are central to doing community development linked with school reform, because these efforts all provided students, families, and community members access to a range of resources” (Green, 2015: 704). Resources from different social spaces can be used and are part of the school culture. For example, “engaging with local colleges and universities to draw upon their resources and expertise can support school initiatives and contribute to strengthening the community overall.” (Yull, Blitz, Thompson & Murray, 2014: 27).

Community development

Resilient schools and communities grow from a common work on positive responses and shared responsibilities. In more poor neighborhoods, the involvement of community is a means to achieve a more sustained development of schools (Severiens et al., 2013). On the other hand, partnerships need to be appropriated by school and community actors avoiding communities to “continue to be erased, ignored, or constructed as a problem” (Perkins, 2015: 333-334).

Can we discuss the role of schools as privileged spaces to empower local actors less engaged with schools, as parents from poor neighborhoods? Can schools empower communities to take action for education for all?

These issues are even more relevant if we take into consideration that, despite all changes and efforts, schools have a particular and difficult relationship with diversity, often seen as an obstacle or something that needs to be solved. If we add late challenges coming from the refugee crisis, to promote networking between school and local communities is a priority to increase security and safety among vulnerable populations.

Under this particular organizer topic, the study visit was structured in a way that this theme could be described and analysed in various aspects.

3. CROACIA: THE PAST¹



The breakup of Yugoslavia, when its constituent republics declared independence was not peaceful and as early as April 1991 serious armed conflict started and it first occurred in Croatian territory where ethnic Serbs with help of the Yugoslav national army occupied about 26.5% of Croatia (an area of some 15,000 km²); the “Republic of Serbian Krajina” was declared in part of that territory (19 December 1991). The Croatian population was terrorized and driven out; by the end of 1991 there were about 550,000 internal refugees (IDPs) fleeing armed conflict, joined later by a further 200,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992 – 1995). In the period of 1991 – 1995 many Croatian towns were exposed to artillery and mortar attacks and armed conflicts spread throughout Croatia and later in Bosnia & Herzegovina. The war and arm conflicts in Croatia lasted until August 1995 when

¹ <http://croatia.eu/article.php?lang=2&id=24>



Croatian army forcefully regained most of the territory and driving out numerous ethnic Serbs living in the area. Final region that was reintegrated was the Danube region through peaceful reintegration finalized in January 1998. This had direct implications on education system, number of refugee children that were absorbed in schools (1991 – 2000s), “new” minorities (Serbs) that had a right for education in mother tongue increasing the tendency of education different ethnic group in separate schools.

Progress in Croatian relations with the EU was marked by the signing of the Agreement on Stabilization and Association on 29 October 2001 (entered into force on 1 February 2005). After an agreement between all Croatian parliamentary parties on accession to the EU was reached, the application for membership was submitted on 21 February 2003. Croatia was given the status of candidate country for EU membership on 18 June 2004, and accession negotiations began on 3 October 2005. Croatia achieved an important foreign policy goal on 1 April 2009, by becoming a member of NATO. At the end of June 2011, the accession negotiations were formally completed and on 9 December 2011, the Agreement on the Accession of Croatia to the European Union was signed (entered into force 1 July 2013). A referendum held on 22 January 2012 showed that two-thirds of those who voted (66.27%) were in favor of accession. At the end of 2011, the fifteen-year-long work of the Organization for European Security and Cooperation (OESC) came to an end, which had been initiated in order to process war crimes committed in Croatia between 1991 and 1995, and supervise the return of refugees and the exercise of their rights.

4. THE PRESENT: taking care of children and young people²



Bearing in mind the best interests of the child, in September 2014 the Croatian Government adopted the National Strategy for the Rights of the Children in the Republic of Croatia for the Period from 2014 to 2020 (hereinafter the National Strategy). Starting with the Strategy of the Council of Europe on the Rights of the Child and the EU Agenda for the Rights of Children, the National Strategy focuses on four strategic areas: (1) Improvement of the system and providing services adapted to children, (2) elimination of all forms of violence against children, (3) ensuring the rights of children in vulnerable situations, and (4) ensuring active participation of children.

Children and youth protection

In September 2011, the president of the Republic of Croatia H.E. Mr. Stipe Mesic formed the Expert Working Group on Youth in which representatives of the three national youth civil society organizations (secondary students, university students and youth) are participating.

Education responsibility

Participation of youth in decision-making processes in the Republic of Croatia is organized through Youth Advisory Boards

Law on Youth Advisory Boards (LYAB), adopted in 2007 (Official Gazzete, No. 23/07): According to the LYAB their members, following the propositions of

² <http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/documents/croatia.pdf>;

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=14269&langId=en>



organized forms of youth, are elected by the representative body of the local or regional self-administration. The primary role of youth advisory boards is counseling local and regional representative bodies on issues of interest to youth. National Program on Youth from Year 2009 to 2013 (NPY) adopted by the Government of the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette No. 82/09) with the general goal of improving the activities of the state administration bodies and public institutions which contribute to **improving the quality of the lives of young people**. There are 7 areas of action determined (**education** and ICT, employment and entrepreneurship, social policy, healthcare and reproductive health, active participation of young people in society, youth culture and leisure time, mobility, informing and counseling), with specified goals which should be achieved through the implementation of 53 measures and 157 implementing activities, relating to young people aged 15 to 30. For the purposes of implementation and monitoring of the NPY, competent authorities (12) appointed coordinators for its implementation. Briefing forms for the implementation during the elapsed year and Implementation Plan for the following year are adopted every year.

To improve
young people
and children
quality of life

5. THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The Education System in Croatia is divided in ages and levels: kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and higher education.

There are approximately **450 kindergartens** in Croatia, although not all are public. Many are also linked with primary schools. Kindergarten is not compulsory, but children can enter as early as one year old. **Primary education** is compulsory in Croatia, and starts at the age of 6 and goes to age of 14. There are nearly a thousand public primary schools, directed by the municipalities themselves. Primary schooling is divided in two levels:

- 1st through 4th grade, with one teacher per class focusing on subjects such as: Croatian, mathematics, visual art, nature and society, physical education, music, religion, and at least one foreign language (normally English);
- Specialized teachers for each subject teach 5th grade to 8th grade. New subjects are also introduced: history and geography, chemistry, physics, biology, informatics, and a second language (German, Italian or French).

As determined by the Croatian state, people who only complete primary school are categorized as “unqualified workers”. **Secondary schooling** is optional. There is a strong movement to make it compulsory. There are different types of secondary education:

- General secondary education taught at Gimnazija (offers four different tracks, based on your specialty);
- Art education taught at umjetnička škola (art schools);
- Secondary vocational education taught at vocational or trade schools

The **higher education system** in Croatia has undergone a comprehensive reform within the framework of the Bologna Process and is structured in three cycles: undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate. In Croatia, schools have been involved in a few initiatives that aim to involve young people in programmes on justice and post-conflict social recovery³. This school was one of them.

³ <http://www.icty.org/en/press/tribunal's-outreach-programme-launches-series-high-school-presentations-croatia>



5.1. Changes and reforms in the Education

The Croatian Educational System is going under a comprehensive curricular reform for early and pre-school, primary and secondary education. This profound reform aims:

- Developing basic competences for lifelong learning;
- Linking education to needs and interests of students;
- Linking education to needs of society and the economy.

The Comprehensive Curricular Reform

“The reform includes drafting curricular documents, establishing a system for evaluation, assessment and reporting, training of teachers and other staff and preparing new manuals, textbooks, auxiliary teaching resources and digital content. This will be performed by special expert working groups composed mostly of practitioners”⁴

This reform affects not only curricula, but also teachers’ expected competencies and profiles, expecting schools to become more open to the community (FFE) This pilot experience is from 2016 to 2017 and started with a public call. 100 teachers were selected to participate in this strategic reform- their full time involvement will be during one year.

⁴ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/croatia-comprehensive-curricular-reform-its-way>

6. THE STUDY VISIT: Schools

6.1. 10th gimnazija "Ivan Supek": «Škola po mjeri učenika»

«The students have to be happy at school and then after finishing school they won't forget their school days» (School Principal)



X. Gimnazija „Ivan Supek“

10th gimnazija "Ivan Supek" is one of the largest high school in Croatia, with 1140 students, 111 employees, 4 professional associates (being those a pedagogue, a psychologist, and two librarian), plus 18 nonteaching staff.

Considering the school teaching structure, «Ivan Supek» has 42 classes, being 31 from the general program gymnasium, 11 from natural - mathematical gymnasium. The school shares the building with the I. tehnička škola "Tesla". The school includes different strategies to involve

parents (some students parents have master or PhD degrees) and students in school, namely through parents' and students' council. Each class has a representative from students and from parents. Every year students evaluate teachers' pedagogic quality. Surveys and questionnaires (once a year) are the most popular used methods in gathering information about the quality of the teaching.

The school seems to work accordingly with the students' needs. As it was mentioned several times "the norm are the students".

The school is very much concerned with global education of their students, improving their access to high quality education and to promote conditions for them to have extra curricular activities. As mention by the only parent interviewed in the secondary education school:

«There are many students that have a lot of **extracurricular activities**, so it is good that school is open for students needs. School has a lot of activities, but students can't take part in them because they have their own activities".

The interviewed parent's perception is that the school has no violence and considers that "the procedures for identifying violence are much stricter now. What is considered to be violent depends on the students and teachers perceptions of violence".

6.1.1. Programs and projects

The school has 8 classes included in the Bilingual program. The school is also a Cambridge International Center and a Pasch Schule, a world network initiative to promote and learn German language. The school has a coordinator of the bilingual programme.

Concerning their experience on bilingual teaching, a past agreement with Cambridge turned into a relevant experience. As explained during the interviews with teachers, the national agency for education and Cambridge "got together and they organized a seminar of language and learning which was basically done on level of the all community because we like teachers

**ERASMUS +
Teachers'
engagement
and
investment**

from other regions to learn more about schools in Croatia and Cambridge”
(Teacher).

The school is also involved in an Erasmus Plus project - DISCO PROJECT - Different School for Creative Outcome. Within the experience of ERASMUS +, this school develops several initiatives:

“For teachers we have **workshops**. Especially for this project, Erasmus+ project, we have this quite short presentation of education and then teachers can invite other teachers to join these workshops. They present in a few weeks and we are trying to **share all our knowledge to education**. During this project, we also share something that we know, about other subjects. For example, we talk about something that it’s not connected to my subject but we learn some skills that we can do in our subject. **We learn not just skills, but also this way of communicating**, and for me are very precious! So, we have this kind of sharing our experience. We have this project of **supportive learning**. We have to write some reports but these reports help me to organize what would I liked to share with my colleagues. That is important!”
(Teacher).

**Sharing
knowledge**

**Integrating
knowledge**

This experience and how this teacher integrates it in their general practice is interesting and worthy of attention when thinking about good practices for professional development. We can consider this as **transference of knowledge and also peer-based training experience**.

The **cooperation with the international community** is working very well and is organised under processes of collective learning. Teachers seem to take advantage of several **international opportunities**, namely those supported by the Agency for Mobility and EU programmes.

This involvement is meant to promote **key competences** as cultural awareness, attitudes adequate to the context, among others.





School Presentation at X. Gimnazija „Ivan Supek“

6.1.2. Integration of Students with a migrant of minority background

This school is not confronted with many issues respecting cultural diversity and integration. The School Principal mentions, “There are no migrant pupils at school. But there is an interesting experience to teach pupils from the Czech families their Mother Tongue (Czech)”.

They have 3 students from other countries (Italy, for example) and they participate in bilingual classes. As the coordinator of the bilingual program mention:

“we have students that parents are from Italy and they came to work in Croatia and they take the bilingual... They are integrated very well and our students want them to participate. (...) **They enjoy having her in class, they enjoy talking to her, they enjoy earing about these experiences**” (TI).

However, “We can’t generalize. We don’t know how they take care of students from other countries, especially from Middle East, from Syria...” (T1).

The situation of Croatia in the political landscape of the region brought changes to schools, namely concerning refugees: “We have students from Serbia in our school. In our classes we have multinational students. It’s not a problem!” (Teacher).

Even if this is not a problem, recent changes in Europe are felt in schools bringing very different reactions as teachers’ told us. School is aware that some work needs to be done: “we should spend some more time preparing the children on some of these issues.” (T1)

“We had last year one student from Australia (?) And she wasn’t very fluent in Croatian and parents also and **we managed somehow**. We don’t have a protocol for that situation, but our students help **to learn Croatian language**”. (Teacher).

Although experiences with diversity in what concerns minorities or migrant pupils are not much, other types of diversity exists in school: “We have a clear role, that the main role of the teacher is not to discriminate any student. Special needs students get extra programs in school and an assistant in class to help them “ (School Principal).

6.1.3. Professional development for diversity

“there is a sharing of knowledge culture amongst teachers in the school”
(School’s Principal)

This school is sensitive to cultural diversity, cultural exchange and to become involved in initiatives that can promote that. Some international projects in which some school’s teachers are involved are a proof of that.



Particularly, language teachers are considered as having advantages as is part of their pre and in service training to contact with other cultures, other educational realities and pedagogic strategies that contribute for their professional development:

“First of all, being a language teacher... I went to a professional development, **had a lot of professional development. So, I think that foreign language teachers had a step forward earlier in time that maybe than other subject teachers’**. It’s my opinion **because we travel a lot for seminars...** It’s all in the purpose of promoting your language but in some way you were exposed to a different culture and we were exposed to a different ways of being with other students” (T1)

There are other aspects considered as relevant when thinking about what counts for promoting good practices in schools. One teacher, with 44 years of experience reaching, refers that personality plays an important role, as the type of person reflects on the students: “if you are enthusiastic, if you are positive, if you are ambitious, if you radiate these ideas in students” (Teacher). Nevertheless, as other teachers mention, **professional development and, not only personality**, plays a crucial role in good and innovative practices.

In what concerns teachers’ training and diversity, teachers mention that *in service* training is not mandatory to progress in their careers. Is the **teacher decision** to select subjects besides their own and to choose for example “diversity and citizenship” (NPEC meeting). Professional training is not mandatory. As mentioned by a teacher: “In the future it will be in legislation, but not yet! It always had these seminars going on but if you don’t want to go, don’t go!”. Although this training activities are not mandatory they are considered as **having an important impact in school environment and general behaviors towards inclusion**. Seems, however, that intercultural activities and actions towards diversity are not integrated or transversal.

“The **activities in the school are very good for intercultural relation**, creativity, for friendly and democracy tolerance, friendship... We had a few groups, **some make shows** and also we can see it at the end of the year, presentation... Our school newspapers and also **have group or readers books** and some go to the theater and many of the activities like this are a great potential” (School Principal).

The perception of the interviewed parent is that this is an inclusive school.

When asked about relevant teachers’ competences the parent interviewed in this school mention “**social sensitivity**” as one very important aspect: “no matter of social class, we are all equal. Material differences should not be taken into consideration when working with students” (Parent)

When discussing about how schools can contribute to professional development, the principal refers that “**each teacher has all opportunities for personal development**. The **internal motivation** of each teacher is very important”. Teachers, additionally, mention the benefit of **peer observation**, which could be an interesting strategy when it comes to mention the benefits of **having visits from faculties’ teachers**:

“**We should open our classes more**. They should be more a lot... you know... teachers visiting each other... I have a great class, they should visit my class and **we are comfortable with this!** Not all!”

There is a new initiative in this school promoting peer observation. Being a new project it is not easy to be accepted by all. This initiative is ment to **improve team work and professional competencies**. As mentioned by the School Principal:

«The school tries to use internal reserves for development of teachers and for increase of their qualification. After visiting of interesting seminars the **teacher share the gained knowledge with their colleagues**”.

Professional development seen as an individual choice and investment

Peer observation



Another examples related to teachers' personal skills that can be shared with other colleagues: **“one teacher has skills in cooperative learning and she gives seminars about this topic to colleague teachers.** And they have routes for personal development: if they wish to become better in something they can asked for it” (School Principal).

The recognition that “professional learning is a social enterprise in which professionals rely upon the expertise and support of one another to adopt innovative new practices” (Zwart et al, 2009: 243) can have special benefits to the development of new and needed skills as the same time that “all the activities teachers undertake within the context of a reciprocal peer coaching trajectory can potentially produce professional growth” (Zwart et al, 2009: 243). However, these strategies rely on a strong leadership and local supportive network in order to sustain the efforts, motivation and results. This is an aspect that we think needs further development.

Nevertheless, the school seems to create some conditions for professional development, stimulating their participation in training courses: “If the training programs (courses) are interesting and important, the school replaces lessons of the teacher visiting courses. Nevertheless, the teachers are trying to attend courses which take place in the evening” (School Principal”. There are competencies and skills that additionally teachers need to acquire: how to motivate pupils to learn better; to be more informed in their own subject; mmodern teaching methods; communication tools and skills (School Principal). However, not all teachers are open to teachers training and demands other type of strategy from the SP, like participating herself in training activities, attending classes of teachers more involved.

6.1.4. Cooperation with the local community

As considered by Swafford and colleagues, “Community involvement in schools has long been valued in our society.” (Swafford, Ramsey & Self-

Mullens: 19). In 2007 in the Strategy for the Construction and Development of the National Curriculum for Preschool Education, General Compulsory and Secondary School Education, Zagreb, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia, it is written that “constructing a school curriculum, each school has the possibility to create inter-subject contents and/or optional subjects for acquiring intercultural, entrepreneurial and social competencies, for promoting specific values, but also the possibility to create a network of programs in the socio-cultural, local and regional community” (2007: 20).

The interactions between schools and their communities can assume different levels of intensity and complexity and varies from a diplomatic interaction to a more complex one. Partnerships can take place to develop a specific activity or event. Networking to a common good in order to provide pupils with quality education, trying to overcome social inequalities and disadvantages demands a strong school leadership, training teachers to be able to read contexts and willingness locally grounded.

A more diverse and reciprocal nature of successful school–community partnerships seems to be needed as schools benefit “from the increased resources, supports, and relationships resulting from the development of trusting school–community partnerships (Gross, Haines, Colethea, Blue-Banning & Turnbull, 2015: 18).

At Ivan Supek secondary education school, and maybe because school does not have to deal with strong social and economic difficulties among their students and the fact that is located in a middle class urban area, the relationship with the community has another portrait. The cooperation between the school and the community, at this level, is networked by involving different partners:

- Ministry
- City Department of Education, Culture and Sport
- Agencies (AZZO, AMPEU)

- Centers (NCVVO, CZSS)
- NGOs
- Red Cross, Caritas
- School doctor and hospitals
- Faculties, secondary schools, primary schools
- Institutes, museums, theaters, galleries
- National Tourist Board
- Children's homes, homes for the elderly, public kitchen
- public media
- parents, former and future students
- the wider public

Students involved in volunteer activities

Students are involved in several activities community based. As an example, can be mentioned that the school have volunteers collaborating with NGO. We found a particular involvement with NGO **Forum za slobodu odgoja**, namely in voluntariat programmes, mediators program; education for students and teachers (eg. introduction to the project planing), and a collaborative work in various publications. There is also an involvement of school with the Volunteer Centre Zagreb (NGO). In this matter, Volunteering management, Volunteering club and Various volunteer programs and activities are some of the initiatives. This type of School–community partnerships might “impact student success and post-school outcomes as well as positively influence and benefit the community in return” (Gross, Haines, Colethea, Blue-Banning & Turnbull, 2015: 10).

Other institutions from the community are also schools partners, but with a less structured action. Apparently, **nothing is very much related with diversity**, although in a broader sense, it is underlyed the involvement with the community and civic participation.

An example of the school-community activity, and often mentioned, is the event called **Ivan Supek Days**. During 3 days the school is open and, accordingly with the School Principal, “is an opportunity for students to show their abilities, interest, skills in different aspects (social-cultural subjects) or in curricula subject (...). On these days **local community**

organizations come inside the school to see what the students have come up with”.

The collaboration with the community is mainly coming from teachers' own initiative. Parents' involvement, if they are considered as part of the idea of community, is not very strong, although there are a few informal initiatives:

“We have a father that is doctor and offers formation about epilepsy. **We have some parents that are willing to participate and just a few of them show some initiative!** We have, few years ago, some parents of different working areas, and **they offer workshops** and tell kids about their jobs. There are so many activities, but we know that **is difficult for parents to be in school**”.

Words from the school director are clear considering that now, more than before, the relationship with parents are taken seriously: “What the school is doing now is calling parents also to school to participate in projects”.

An example is given: a project about puberty, drugs, smoking, alcohol abuse and they want to do more with parents about *topics* they want to discuss about.

“One instrumental step in promoting overall children’s academic success across the trajectory of early childhood, elementary, middle, and secondary grades is purposefully establishing positive linkages for families and schools through a shared partnership”
(Tran, 2013: 18)

The parent’s voice participating in NAOS study visit cannot be considered as representative but indicates what is the understanding of school-community relationship:

“As a parent **I don’t see how can a school cooperate with local community**. I see cooperation with local community through helping social cases. Maybe



school can organise a humanitarian sport competition where they gather resources which can be donated to local community”.

Parents' involvement

Schools have means of communicating what is going on in schools, as the public media, the webpage or the open day. The parent, although recognize that they are involved in meetings to discuss curricula, also recognizes that **is not easy to participate and become involved in school activities** as it means additional efforts. There is involvement at some extent, but the suggestion from the parent would be that “Parents meetings can be used for transmitting information about how the school works with local community, but in most instances that is not the case”.

Being aware that the school is not very connected with parents, the school invited parents to NAOS meetings in order to confront themselves (teachers) with the little relationship that they have with families.

Other initiatives demonstrate, at least, the willingness to **involve parents together with students and teachers in planning school activities**. As mentioned by the school principal “A parent council and a student council are actively involved in the development of the school strategy”

The school develops some strategies to help students with more difficulties. Students and parents recognize school as a good one because the school adapts to children so children can achieve their capacities (School Principal).

6.2. Elementary school Nikola Tesla (Elementary school)



Elementary School Nicolas Tesla

Elementary School Nicolas Tesla is located in the surroundings of Zagreb, has about **500 pupils in 24 classes** with about 20 pupils per class, and one extra Macedonian class. There are **64 teachers**.

The school presentation⁵ showed a committed staff, a focused leadership and teamwork. **Involvement with European projects**, contact with the local community and the recognition of the added value, which is parents' involvement, the school community seems to know their main objectives and strategies. Teachers' are aware of educational changes as well as children expectations.

Nikola tesla has 500 pupils, 64 teachers and 24 classes. The school offers an after school curriculum that includes astronomy, history, visual arts, choir and sports, among others.

⁵ Besides the ppt presentation, in part done by two pupils, NAOS team watched a video that can be accessed at <https://vimeo.com/94405169>

Accordingly with the School Principal, families are from middle class, working in their own private companies, craftwork, industry. There are just a few parents who work in public service.

The school has also a parents' council that works as an advisory board and works as a form of bringing together different school actors. There is also a students' council. Students and parents fill up a questionnaire to evaluate the school and teachers.

School is involved in several projects as **Globe, Time, Comenius, Rario5+, Erasmus +, and e-twinning**. This last one includes cooperation with 135 schools. They have teachers involved in an Erasmus Plus project with 5 more countries on ***Increase your mind and internal motivation***. In the school presentation is mentioned that teachers disseminate the knowledge and skills acquired within the project activities on teachers' meetings.

**Teachers'
involvement in
European
Projects**

6.2.1. The school diversity

From the conversation with School Principal, the NAOS team had a picture of the school population related with diversity. The community/area in which school is located have a population from all parts of Croatia, but also Croats from the Bosnia and Herzegovina. This school has a **C programme for Macedonian language**, and all Macedonian students (Macedonian Minority) from more than 120 schools from City of Zagreb come to this school to learn about Macedonian language and culture. 28 students, being 4-5 from this school, learn about Macedonia language and culture. They have a part-time teacher from Macedonia approved by the MoE. However, inter-culturality does not exist. Therefore, the school has some diversity in what concerns national minorities, although this issue either it is not visible or worthy of much concern. As one parent mention, the school has just a few students from Macedonia.

“I think they have some Macedonian group... I don't know how it's organized... maybe some of the teachers are originally from Macedonia or maybe they have three or four or five students... It's interesting to learn about some other cultures...” (Dad 2)

Besides this, the school deals with other type of diversity, as students with special needs. There are 35 students with special educational needs; two students have assistants who work with them full time. 25 students have individualised programmes, 10 of them have special programs that are adapted for their specific needs.

6.2.2. Important factors for choosing a school

From parents' perspectives, there are many factors when considering choosing a school. **Extra curricula** the School is offering is very welcomed by parents in their decision while they compare schools

“When we wanted to put our daughter in one of these two schools, we decided for this one because it's only morning classes and we saw on the internet, on the webpage of the school that they have more activities, they're more involved in a lot of different things and we thought that she would get better education in this school than in other school” (Dad 1)

Parents still think that this type of involvement in extra curricular activities is important even when their children are attending the secondary education. However, they consider that they will need to select just a few activities.



New skills besides regular subjects in regular classes are expectations parents have.

“I expect that her get more tools to be more organized in life. Of course I expect some education from that activities but also that she learns something those activities, but I also expect to her to grow her... I don't know... her individuality...” (Dad 2)

Initiatives together with the community

The School Principal mentions that there are 523 students at school and 29 optional extracurricular activities. It is difficult to know how many activities students attend because each student may attend more than one optional extracurricular activities.

6.2.3. School-community relationship

This school has some **involvement with the local community** through some initiatives mentioned in teachers' interview and official presentation in which is referred, among others, the **collaboration of 5 volunteers** in helping children with learning. The involvement with the community is mainly coming from **teachers' initiative, but involving actors from outside school**. There are activities that take place in **other local facilities** as the

library, for book presentation, and events that are meant to open the school in a literary meeting or in the European day of languages:

“This year a **teacher has a project with community with the library and kindergartens.**

Once a month they go to the library with the kids to read, also the very little children.

A volunteer is also involved from the project, to stimulate children to visit the library more and more” (teacher)

“We have **open days** organized together with parents to give more view of how we as a school work. Evaluation shows that parents are very satisfied” (teacher)

Teachers recognize the impact that small activities with the community can have:

“We went with Christmas into the community. **The relationships we then build last throughout the rest of the school year**”

Teachers acknowledge that in the past years the relationship with the community was strengthen: “Also the **relationship with the community changed:** we have more and intense contact with kindergartens, library and city gardens” (teacher). The **international day of tolerance** is another initiative that school and the community meet together as well as the European Day of Languages.

6.2.4. Parents involvement as an extension of the community

Parents’ participation and involvement in this school is a plus factor that is recognised by teachers’, especially in what concerns a **sustainable relationship with the community.**

“Parental involvement is an umbrella term for different types of activities that depict the involvement of parents in nonacademic and academic activities that may contribute to their children’s educational success.” (Anguiano, 2004: 62).



As mentioned by a teacher: **“The most important part of the community are the parents.** Without them building up a relationship with the community is not possible”. It is well known the impact that involved parents have in school success of their children, overcoming sometimes constrains related with social class and income (Anguiano, 2004; Martins, 2012).

Since 2000 more research has been conducted “into ways of increasing parental involvement and the role of the school leader and teachers” (Severiens, Wolf & van Herpen, 2013: 5).

Creating conditions for a collaborative work to engage families in different dimensions and actions of the school (Tran, 2013) can turn into a long and sustainable relationship to support children and young people educational development.

Accordingly with Severiens and colleagues (2013) “parental involvement is one of the relevant areas of expertise in urban schools which serve pupils from diverse backgrounds” (Severiens, Wolf & van Herpen, 2013: 5).

Being part of the school community and the local community, interviewed parents are willing and are frequently called to be part of the school life. As they say they don’t represent the majority, although consider that almost all parents value extra activities, but they don’t have time to be more involved. However, they recognize that their involvement makes a difference, becoming a motivation to their children:

Involving the community through parents

“I see how much **he is happy when I’m with him in this or this activity,** I think that the child that’s important! To the teacher, to the parents, to everything... I’m happy!” (Mom 1)

“I give my child motivation to learn when she sees that I’m interesting in what she’s doing for six or eight hours in school; **she has better motivation to learn and that’s my motivation to do it! That’s the main reason why I’m into school!**” (Dad2)

“Because the school want us to be more involved. The teachers and the principal, they are calling us, **they are trying to involve us as much as they can and offering a lot of different things and activities to be part of the school,**

not just to care the child to school here and that's it but that is something in the individual level. I want to be involved, as much as I can be, as much time I have. I will be involved, for example, I took the day off to be here" (Dad 2).

These parents are mainly from middle class and **they are interested in their children educational pathways and are willing to become involved in more school activities.**

"I cannot say that all parents want to be involved. But parents do want to be active, because of their children, because it motivates their children" (dad 1)

Teachers remark the difficulty in involving parents in projects due to their job, but consider that **they are interested going to school to listen project results.**

Teachers also recognize the added value of parents' involvement, their initiative and, above all, they are also recognised by their suggestions that are taken into consideration, also as member of the parents council:

"ICT is the future, we need to update our skills and use it more in lessons. Parents are telling us a lot of things what is useful for the way we teach. **They keep us updated how their children grow up and how their children see the teachers**" (teacher)

The support of the School Principal is a relevant factor to promote this involvement:

"Last year they did a film project with the school. A director came and he went through the filmmaking process with the children: design, script writing, play, editing. And they won a prize by children film festival" (teacher)

These parents are very well informed about schools activities, offers and projects in which teachers are involved to improve teaching practice.

" There's a teacher... she's cooperating with ten schools, ten states, countries in Europe..." (Mom)

" Teachers talk about that! (Dad1)

"They talk about that in parents meetings and in the security Internet, online. We can see some other schools, with some other children...(Mom)

They value being informed and they had experiences in seeing how classes are organised:

Added value of parents' involvement in school



“One time, last year, when we had open day... It was interesting to see...” (Dad 2)

“I think we learn that from this class, from kids, but all the class meetings, this is regular two or three times. Says how the class was, how time is organized... in general, I think it’s very good information...” (Dad 1)

As the study of Gross and colleagues (2015) identified there are four school factors that seem to contribute to the promotion of strong community partnerships. In what concerns the relationship with parents, as part of the community, this school seems to address some of these factors, as having an inviting school culture and a collaboration and communication among partners (Gross, Haines, Colethea, Blue-Banning & Turnbull, 2015)⁶.

There a few problems with divorced parents as they can push their children in different directions. As referred by the School Principal, the school has to educate parents on how to raise their children, so parents, and school have the same approach to the child.

6.2.5. Teachers’ competencies development

“ My opinion is that teachers are a special kind of people, you know? You have to be a kind of a special person to be a teacher because teacher, for my point of view, teaching is not a job, is a way of life!” (Dad 2)



⁶The school factors were a) strong school leadership, (b) inviting school culture, (c) teacher commitment to student success, and (d) collaboration and communication among partners.” (Gross, Haines, Colethea, Blue-Banning & Turnbull, 2015: 23)

Teachers' Professional development will be under great changes in Croatia due to the comprehensive curriculum reform guided by the 2014 *Strategy for education, science and technology*. Accordingly with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training⁷, there will be changing roles for teachers and educational institutions.

An article by Kovac, Rafajac & Buchberger (2014) on Croatian teachers' competencies indicates that "in the (initial) teacher education programs the least represented elements are those that develop competencies related to the social role of teachers, understanding the education system and education policy or raising awareness of the importance of their contribution to the development of education" (2014: 55). One of the mentioned competencies is the willingness to cooperate with the local community, being communication skills the most important ones. This aspect of communication assumes another level of relevance when thinking about the development of school-community partnerships. However, sustainable community development and cross-boundary leadership can emerge from principals (i.e., WHS [Carter G. Woodson High School]) or community leaders (i.e., Garvey [Marcus Garvey Community High School])." (Green, 2015: 702).

Teachers are aware that they need to improve skills. However, they seem to value the extra time to invest in activities to develop with pupils. They use this strategy of dividing among them projects focused on developing a particular competence. They can also be enrolled in specific training activities focused on topics or needs, but is from their own initiative. Some of them take place within the school:

"We are doing **online courses** on school academy; digital skills; professionalization.

⁷ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/croatia-comprehensive-curriculum-reform>



There are mandatory sessions for subject specific courses, 2 or 3 times a year. Others are up to you to choose from. Lectures form pedagogic teachers. There are workshops organized in the school where teachers share their experiences from EU projects or from seminars which they attend” (Teacher).

Teachers’ training with a mandatory status can include subjects as didactics, good practices, educational curriculum, projects and ICT.

School Principal mentions that education is part of their workload. At the end of school year teachers give a report on their achievements and with a certificate included. Teachers often pay for their educations by themselves.

The sharing experience, peer coaching and support seem to be a regular behavior in this school, namely having colleagues attending classes and discussing it:

“Yes, two year ago we did so. **We looked into each other lessons with two colleagues and vice versa.** Then we sat together and talked what went good and what could be done better. **It was stressful in beginning but it was very useful and fruitful in the end**” (teacher)

When asked parents about teachers’ competencies, namely the capacity to motivate, perspectives are different.

“**It comes from the inside!** Motivation thing comes from the inside...” (Dad 2)

“I think that also can be learned from the activity” (mom1)

“ Definitely, I think that this **extra conferences or participating in this programs will bring some additional motivation to teachers** because they will see: ok, in Portugal they do something interesting things, why we do not introduce here? I think it’s important!” (Dad 3)

Sharing experiences among professionals has been recognized as an important tool to the professional development. As mentioned by Eisen “partnerships [that] are reciprocal helping relationships between individuals of comparable status, who share a common or closely related learning/development objective.” (Eisen, 2001: 10).

In what concerns the everyday life in school, teachers consider that communication skills as one of the most valuable ones. However, this group of teachers is very motivated and imprints the school with a particular culture of investment:

“We are also involved in EU projects, we went to seminars in Malta and Czech. That is something completely new. We hear a lot through these active

Teachers’ investment

participation with society. **We as a school go out to look for projects, so we are very *pro* active and that is the opposite from what we and other schools did: waiting for projects to come.** The way we do it now is that we are in the midst of the *process* and most more *involved*.” (Teacher)

Parents mention this fact: teachers are **investing in innovation** through learning from international projects and from sharing experiences. The schools benefit from an organised model for sharing good practices (Leite, Fernandes, Mouraz & Sampaio, 2015). Parents seem to recognise that.

“ I see a lot of **changes from that traditional**... (Mom)

“ And a lot of teachers from this school are taking a lot of things from other schools, from other teachers from Europe and **they are changing those traditional ways of teaching** and that’s good! We like that!” (Dad 2)

“I think they are **participating in extra programs through Erasmus** and other European program for teachers and they bring that different skills and knowledge and I thinks it’s also very important for us as a parent to either decide if your kids go to that school because of that ...” (Dad 2)

The benefits that these parents considering are not circumscribed to curriculum development or pedagogic strategies for improving classroom work and promote success in a restrict sense. They seem to acknowledge that transferable learning from these experiences be useful to promote education as **a context for learning for diversity**.

“Not only curriculum but interesting stories about different way of teaching, learning from other cultures...” (Dad 1)

The fact that parents value these experiences from an educational perspective is visible in their decision when choosing a school. Open minded, involved and reflexive parents seem to make a difference also in the school culture and ethos. This is a valuable aspect when considering the role of school beyond strict teaching learning from a traditional perspective.

School- Community based initiatives: the example of Forum For Freedom in Education⁸

The Forum For Freedom and Education (NAOS partner in Croatia) develops programs that aim to work closely with schools, through a mediation program with schools. The objective is to work on good practices related with conflict resolution in schools, but intentionally to be extended to the community. The project includes teachers' training, and school mediators' training.

This NGO strategy is to develop small-scale activities and develop it at national level.

A programme of school volunteers is also part of Forum For Freedom in Education activities and aims to prevent violence in schools through volunteering. The NGO helps schools to design their own volunteering programme, training young people for that, ending up in a mentoring process. Young people propose topics and when involved they may acquire new skills by knowing different realities. There are regular meetings between schools, mentors and volunteers. These volunteer programs are included in the school curriculum and there is an evaluation involved. Other local NGO support these volunteer projects.

Concerning migrants and refugees, FFE mention that schools are not prepared to deal with diversity. There are some workshops on how to talk to children about refugee crisis. However, these are just punctual initiatives.

FFE works with schools particularly on improving sharing practices strategies among teachers.

⁸ This part of the report is based on notes taken during the FFE presentation done by Eli Pijaca Plausic and Ana Muniurana to NAOS team..

7. Final Remarks

🌀 **Leaderships for education can be based outside or inside schools**

From parents' discourses and standpoints it was possible to understand how parents push and influence each other to participate in school life and that leadership is crucial to engage school and local community can start outside schools.

Schools' Principals type of leadership can be seen as a factor that influences de school culture motivation both for teachers and students. The two schools didn't seem to have very strong leaders, but they didn't made obstacles to teachers' initiatives. Leadership was not structured.

🌀 **Collaborative learning**

Teachers' engagement in both schools was often related to collaborative and collective learning processes, based on sharing and producing knowledge to improve practices. How teachers' and other school actors implement a process and a culture for sharing and for collectively knowledge construction will improve education of (Leite, Fernandes, Mouraz & Sampaio, 2015). However, to what extent the sharing process enters the classroom?

🌀 **Strengthen communities**

Not all local communities have the same possibility or the will to participate and become engaged with schools assuming shared responsibility for education. From this study visit examples, school-community activities and projects are initiatives started by schools. Strategically involve parents to network with the community. However, in one school one of the most important example of the relationship with the community is through parents.

☉ Schools and local communitys as spots to promote inclusion, security and citizenship during and to recover from adversity.

☉ What to learn from non fomal educational contexts

Programs, initiatives and cultures from non-formal contexts might help formal educational contexts to improve good practices in schools. Can teachers' competences develop learning from other professional competencies working in non-formal educational contexts?

☉ Professional development

In what concerns teachers' professional development we might say that exists a self-organisation "model". Teachers are involved by their own initiative in peer learning, collaborative practices, participating in international and national projects.

☉ Peer learning, peer coaching

In both schools, peer learning in one important strategy to improve teachers' competencies. Teachers, parents and head teachers recognize the value of it. The interchanging of experiences can provide a deeper reflection about practices "because it introduces contrasting perspectives, sometimes even generating arguments, about interpretation, meaning and application of the ancient teachings" (Eisen, 2001: 9). NAOS team is also part of this exchange☺: the Lithuanian colleague teacher invited to participate in NAOS study visit gives an interesting example:

«I'm here because my school has three students from Iraq and we haven't got experience about working with foreign people with different cultures at all! And that's why I came: to see how it is going on in other schools and in another countries to get more experience and that's why I'm asking questions like how do you deal with the different cultures students but the situation as I see is relative different..."



The growing of new demands in school system requires new responses. In this way, “peer learning partnerships can be constructive responses to contemporary professional development needs.” (Eisen, 2001: 10). In this sense, peer coaching has become a recognized tool for career learning and development (Parker; Kram & Hall, 2012).

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October 19th 2015	
X. Gimnazija „Ivan Supek“ (secondary school)	
Topic: School and the local community	
9:00 -10:00	Meeting @ NEPC (details about visits to school)
10:30-11:00	Presentation of the school
11:15-12:15	Interviews with teachers Interviews with principal Interview with parents
12:30 - 13:00	Tour of the school
13:30 - 16:00	Lunch
16:30 - 18:00	Post-visit meeting
18:15 - 19:00	Agreement for the other day
20:00	Dinner

Web of the school: <http://www.deseta.hr/>

October 20th 2015	
Elementary school Nikola Tesla (Elementary school)	
Topic: School and the local community	
9:00 -10:00	Meeting @ NEPC (details about visits to school)
10:30-11:00	Presentation of the school
11:15-12:15	Interviews with teachers Interviews with principal Interview with parents
12:30 - 13:00	Tour of the school
13:30 - 16:00	Lunch
16:30 - 18:00	Post-visit meeting
18:15 - 19:00	Agreement for further study visits
20:00	Dinner