

THE BENEFITS AND OBSTACLES OF PRIE-SCHOOL EDUCATION SERVICE CO-PRODUCTION IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract

The article analyses the benefits and obstacles of pried-school education service co-production in Lithuania. The methodology of the current research is based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. During the present research, the managers of the kindergardens and the active parents (involved in NGO's) were surveyed. The questionnaires were developed based on the contemporary literature in the field of co-production. Three focus groups were organized by interviewing NGO's representatives, local politicians and public servants from the Klaipėda municipality. According to the research findings citizens' involvement in co-production implied as political participation. There are few main obstacles for development of co-production at local level: lack of clear tool for the involvement; the question of legitimacy.

ПОЛЗИТЕ И ПРЕЧКИТЕ ЗА КО-ПРОИЗВОДСТВОТО НА УСЛУГИ В ПРЕДУЧИЛИЩНО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ В ЛИТВА

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Резюме

*Предучилищното образование е особено подходяща сфера за клиентите (родители, разбира се), за да станат ко-производители на услугата. Доказателствата от предучилищното образование в Литва показват, че услугата все още е под силното влияние на „класическата“ бюрократична публична администрация, която обаче, вижда родителите като хора, които „само получават тази доставена им услуга“. Съветското предучилищно образование е било част от по-силната интегрирана система на съветското образование. Услугата е работила като интегриран инструмент за създаването на *homo sovieticus*, докато въпросът за участието на родителите е било невъзможно. 26 години от усилията за разчупване на леда като че ли са безплодни, докато по-голямата част от участниците в предоставянето на услуги (както и потребителите на услугата) все още имат съмнения относно стойността на съвместно създаване.*

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Предучилищното образование в Литва спада към компетенциите на местните органи на самоуправление. Град Клайпеда е изключителен случай сред общо 60 общини, в които за първи път в историята (през 2015 г.) повече от 2200 родители подписват петиция в протест срещу пренебрегването им при предоставянето на услугата.

Текстът има за цел да открие пречките пред ко-производителите на услуги и съвместно създаване на ценности в предучилищното образование и да предостави (на базата на теориите на Е. Остром, Дж. Алфорд) най-доброто решение за увеличаване на участието на родителите. Въз основа на опита на общината в Клайпеда се създава модел, който може да се приложи и в останалите общини в Литва, както и в чужбина (по-специално в страните от ЦИЕ). Въз основа на концепцията за теорията на заинтересованите страни се прилага многостепенна методология. Теорията на заинтересованите страни е полезна, тъй като се основава на предположението, че една организация не обслужва само нейните създатели, но трябва също така да отговоря на интересите на служители, доставчици и клиенти и дори да се разгледаат ползите от други заинтересовани страни.

Introduction

Pre-school education is a particularly suitable area for the clients (parents, of course) to become the co-producers of the service. The evidence from Lithuania's pre-school education routine proves the service still to be under the strong influence of the 'classic' bureaucratic public administration conceiving, however, parents as people who 'only receive this service delivered to them'. The soviet pre-school education was a part of a highly integrated soviet education system. The service served as an integrated tool for the creation of the *homo sovieticus* while the question of parents' participation in the co-production was a kind of *mission impossible*. 26 years of the efforts to break the ice seem to be fruitless while the bulk of the service provision participants (as well as the consumers of the service) still doubts about the *value of the co-creation*. Pre-school education in Lithuania belongs to the competency of local self-governments. Klaipeda city municipality is an exceptional case among the total of 60 municipalities where for the first time in history (in 2015) the more than 2200 parents² by signing a petition expressed their protest against being neglected in the provision of the service.

This encouraged making a research *aimed* to evolve the challenges of coproduction for all the participating stakeholders: providers of the pre-school education (namely, local authorities, the managers of the kindergartens, and the teachers) and clients (namely, parents as well as parents' representing NGO's). **Purpose:** This paper is aimed *to find* the obstacles for the *co-production* and *value co-creation* in the pre-school education and *to provide* (based on E.Ostrom, J.Alford theories of coproduction) the best solution for the increase of parents' involvement in the co-production. Based on the experience of the Klaipeda city municipality a model is created that

² Parents representing the total of almost 8500 children.

could be applied for the other pre-school education provision in the other municipalities in Lithuania as well as abroad (namely, CEE countries).

Design/methodology/approach: Based on the concept of *stakeholder theory* multilevel methodology is applied. The stakeholder theory is useful because it is based on the assumption that a organization does not serve only its founders, but should also address concerns of employees, suppliers and customers and even look at the benefits of other stakeholders. Stakeholders include local communities, political parties, trade unions and trade associations, potential customers, potential employees, governmental bodies, interest groups and others. The data for the analysis were collected using the conception of triangulation and using several sources: (i) quantitative survey of pre-school organization managers; (ii) focus group by interviewing NGO's representatives, politicians and public servants from the municipality.

1. The main reasons for citizen participation in the public services

Traditionally, the participation of citizens is associated with forms of political activity and citizen participation in political decision-making, while citizen participation in the administrative processes is less analyzed, and in particular the direct participation of citizens in the implementation of public policy issues, participating in public service delivery and quality improvement processes. Public administration in the context of citizen participation is defined as "interaction of citizens and administrators, concerned with public policy decisions and public services" (Callahan, 2007). In this sense, citizen participation is understood as having a direct impact on public policy creation and implementation, and citizens are regarded as an integral part of *governance* process, significantly influencing important decisions affecting the community (Roberts, 2004). Among scholars and practitioners (Baccara, 2006, Hirst, 2000; Pierre, 2000; Sorensen, 2002) the view is increasingly accepted that the management or *government* age is moving to a system of *governance* in which public authorities are no longer directly responsible for the provision of social services, and this feature takes the third parties, mainly non-governmental organizations (Eikenberry, 2007). The ideal management is defined as the one, which finds a balance between the rational and efficient provision of public services, and open and democratic process (Box, 1998). In the new model, the decentralization process is very important when innovative forms of horizontal cooperation between governments and civil society replace a strong state power. Polycentric decision-making model for supporting the idea of citizen participation in decision-making, first of all emphasizes the principle of interdependence, rather than hierarchy and subordination. The shift towards the new forms of government and citizens interaction is identified differently by authors: Wamsley and Wolf (1996)

indicate the idea of a democratic administration; Frederikson refers to the new trend in public administration as new public administration or neoinstitutionalism (Hansen, 1998), while Fox and Miller (1995) in the context of the post-modern ideas use the concept of discourse associated with less formal communication structures.

Many states' attempts to create management systems that are able to engage citizens and identify their needs of public services often have failed or have given unexpected results. On the scientific level such failure often is interpreted as shortcomings of today's representative democracy, which is unable to solve problems of the complex heterogeneous societies and interests, together offering the activation of citizen participation as one of the possible solutions. Implementation of citizen participation idea in public services is not an easy task. The experience of different countries shows that it is insufficient to establish legal measures to ensure participation in the proceedings, it is also very important that both- providers and users- would like to work together and would be motivated to improve public service quality. The participation is an essential part of democratization; however more active participation does not necessarily lead to more democracy. Legal possibilities of participation and expression are important and the abundance of formal procedures may be viewed as a supportive factor for participation, however, bureaucratization of participation is also possible, which means that the democratization is declared but not implemented.

Public service provider's task is to provide citizens the services they need. It is important that citizens (customers) could get rid of often-unrealistic expectations from the state and could actively participate in service provision. Service marketing researchers have recognized the important role of the client's participation in both private and public institutions; the participation influences the quality of service and productivity. Studies have shown that the active participation strengthens the user's skills to use the service, increases the probability that needs are being met, and helps to reach mutual benefits (Raipa, Petukienė, 2009: 55-58). However, the organization does not benefit from the participation of citizens if the organization and the recipients of the service are not ready to actively cooperate and exchange information. Despite the similarities of public and private sectors management models, the role of public and private service user is not the same. Public services are associated with specific properties, such as equal access for all on non-profit basis, stability, effectiveness, as a control measure, the possibility to improve the quality of service, ensuring the implementation of citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms. It is difficult to achieve a high level of citizen satisfaction with public services, because of differences in public service as of a nature of public goods, and because of different recipients' roles and expectations for the same service.

2. Citizens as participants in public services: the case of Lithuania

The most significant factor, which determines the participation of citizens in municipality government and public services, is legally defined possibilities of participation. Republic of Lithuania ensures for the citizens the opportunity to participate in the process of local governance and public services by national and international law: the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, Act of Local Self-Government, Public Information Act, etc.

In the context of citizen participation in the public services, the term "citizen" includes also those persons, who do not have citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania, but the law gives them some opportunities to participate in decision-making process (Viešasis, 2010: 203). In addition, the provision of public services is linked to the category of the population, rather than the institute of nationality. Persons, who do not have citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania, shall have the right to petition, complaints, and requests to participate in the activities of associations. This is particularly relevant in the municipalities, as permanent residents of the municipality, with a residence permit, are using both active and passive suffrage, i.e. they have the right to elect municipal council or to be elected to it.

Municipalities (in total 60) are responsible for the provision of public services for the people. Public services are provided free of charge or for a fee. Municipality organizes the provision of public services through the public service providers (budgetary and public agencies, municipal enterprises, joint-stock companies), by the establishment of new public service providers, or by the conclusion of public service contracts with individuals and legal persons. Municipalities has to continually look for ways and means of their statutory functions as efficiently as possible, taking into account the needs of local communities and the use of advanced economic methods. However, in spite of Lithuania's rather comprehensive regulatory options for public participation in local governance, few citizens are involved not only in social activities, but also in political processes. A small population activity trends through its statutory opportunities to participate in decision-making processes may be significantly associated with awareness of the local (municipality) dysfunctions. Research data shows that about a third (33 percent) of the respondents thinks that the information about the activities of the municipality or the eldership simply does not exist, while 43 percent of respondents receive it only upon arrival in the municipality (Savivaldybių administracijų, 2010:48).

The involvement of citizens as recipients of public services in the process of public service provision is not required as the implementation of the various quality models in state and municipal institutions. The democratization of public services significantly depends on the

individual efforts of local governments and on the opportunities created for residents to participate in various stages of public service provision and development. The positive trend is identified that the number of municipalities, implementing the quality management system instruments, all of which are somehow related to the improvement of the quality of public services and citizen satisfaction, increases. The usage of European Social Fund support significantly influences the growth trend. The most common Lithuanian municipalities select measures of quality management system as one stop shop principle, Harmonic Organization, Co-assessment model, the ISO 9001 standard.

One of the ways for citizens to participate in an organized provision of public services and quality improvement is the participation in non-governmental organizations. In 2011 the public opinion survey on voluntary regulations of Lithuania was conducted. The results showed that 34 percent of people are involved in volunteering and further 35 percent, who has never been involved in such activities, and would like to participate in the future, if they are offered. Even 40 percent of respondents complained about the lack of information about volunteering and a weak volunteering tradition through education in schools (Nevyriausybinij, 2011). Despite the positive attitudes of the people to participate in non-governmental organizations, local non-governmental organizations are included only in a few public services. The experience of EU countries shows that NGOs provide services with lower price due to lower costs of administration, in comparison with private and public sector companies; moreover, the members of communities, particularly the consumers of social services, accept and attract NGOs service providers than private and public sector companies. In Lithuania, however, NGOs in most cases are not taking part in service provision, and if employed, their market share is only about 20 percent at best, i.e. their services are not sufficient in the market. The development of their activities is interfered by non-separated funding support for NGOs from NGOs participation in public service provision. NGOs development activities should be targeted to the programming principle, strengthening the capacity of NGOs and training of personnel; therefore procurement of services should be held by using public contracts or concessions with NGOs (Savivaldybių organizuojamų, 2010:69).

Active participation of service users depends on the public service, people motivation and present alternatives to public service. Civil Society Institute already has been doing survey of people for four years in order to determine the civil power index: the general civil power, though not significantly, but has been rising since 2007: increased from 33.9 to 35.5 points. The survey of 2010 showed that most residents of Lithuania are willing to take actions to promote local problems that they face themselves or people of their environment: 19 percent of respondents said that they would take efforts to organize such activity and 55 percent indicated that would

contribute to local problem solving, but still 26 percent would stay away (Pilietinès, 2011). Thus, it is possible to assume that people are more interested in participating in areas, where their presence could influence someone to change the development of own quality of their life. In other words, people are more involved in public administration at all levels and in areas that directly affect the population in the form of various services. The studies confirm this assumption, because many people are involved in the three civic activities in Lithuania: donate to charity (56 percent), participate in environmental management works (50 percent) and participate in local community activities (34 percent) (Pilietinès, 2011).

The local government administrative-territorial units, named elderships (or elderates, *lith. seniūnijos*), have a significant impact on citizen participation in the promotion and coordination of local governance structures. In total there are 551 elderships in Lithuania, of which 450 rural-type and the remaining 101- urban-type (Petukienė, 2010:113). The Local Government Act since 2008 provides the possibility that the community residents of residential areas (one or more) can elect the community residential delegates, who are called *seniūnaičiai*. The main task of this delegate *seniūnaitis* is to take care of the community and represent the interests of the community in the municipality, and if necessary, in municipal authorities and local public bodies, operating in the territory. Many problems of the elderships should be solved on the basis of cooperation between *seniūnaitis* and elder (*lith. seniūnas*). Although official statistical data, counting the number of elected *seniūnaičiai* is not yet given, in 2010 the Ministry of Internal Affairs has made the research “Analysis of Local Government administrative structures” (2010:59), where it is noted that elderships have been established in most rural-type of elderships. Moreover, it is observed that many residents of rural areas are more involved in *seniūnaičiai* elections. They have their hopes for their community activities. In the view of this practice, the structure of local administrations should be improved in such a way that would create favorable conditions for local residents to participate in local activities. This is realized in two main ways: the establishment of small municipal authorities or territorial structural units of municipality administration. In large municipalities, the community is not active. The size of the territory has a direct impact on the people’s participation activity in the local governance. The smaller the area – the greater the probability to bring local residents together is. In order to make the community more involved in local affairs, it is suggested to establish elderships (elderates), which provide their service in a small area. Lithuania’s case presents the contrary arguments to Ebdon (2002) and Soos (2003) researches, regarding the impact of municipality/city size on the civic participation; this argues for a more detailed investigation of territorial administrative unit’s *seniūnaitijos* and evaluation

of opportunities, created at lower local government levels, as well as their impact on citizen participation activity.

It is noted that the municipal administrations of territorial structural units exist in most countries that have large municipalities (such as Portugal, Bulgaria, and Great Britain). In each country, they have specific historical names – quarters, parishes, city districts, and villages. The main advantage in the service provision is that the services are brought closer to the people, stronger relationship between the municipality and the community; more people have the opportunity to visit the local branch and join in affairs of their residence place. The structural territorial units are the alternative to municipality size reduction to smaller units. The municipalities, through the creation of territorial structural units bring their activities to the population and facilitate the development of local democracy.

However, it is worth noting that the establishment of the structural territorial units of municipalities is not sufficient factor for the activation of citizen participation. The real citizen involvement in local affairs largely depends on the staff's ability of local structures to employ a variety of citizens in the current decision-making or methods to improve public services, and how the efficiency of the citizen participation in the improvement of service quality is valued. The research results of the local administration directors and elders show that generally passive forms of civic participation are applied: the draft decisions are published and awaiting the assessment of the population (42 percent) or draft resolutions to be discussed with the population in public meetings (31 percent). (Savivaldybių administracijų, 2010:86). Although the elderships are the closest local structures for the community, the more active involvement forms of residents are very low, such as work with young people and older people's groups, citizens' initiative, promoting the various interests in drafting decisions, involving people in working groups and commissions. The elders are very skeptical about the involvement of residents in the functions of elderships and the activity of community delegates *seniūnaičiai*, suggesting that there is a shortage of initiative to look for the most diverse and effective forms of public participation at the local level. The main determined reasons for this are: inadequate legal framework, absence of reference material, lack of enthusiasm of the population, negative interaction dominates, when the citizens complain, but do not propose the salvation of the problem, lack of material resources, especially in the rural-type elderships.

In Lithuania the citizen involvement in public services at local level is a new idea and practice, which just has been started to be implemented, by applying the different tools of quality improvement, by training of local government staff, and educating the people about the main benefits of their participation and importance of addressing common issues. The mutual-citizens

and local government staff, confidence building has a great importance to the positive outcomes of participation too. It is appropriate to exclude a number of mutual confidence-enhancing policies:

1. Municipalities should examine the shortcomings and problems of citizen participation in public service quality improvement process and develop it in accordance with citizen participation in the process of public service strategies that would provide the monitoring of the dynamics of civic participation.

2. In order to have people satisfied with the public services received, it is necessary to determine the expectations of the community; and to promote cooperation between the elders and community delegate's *seniūnaičiai*, in order to strengthen trust *seniūnaičiai*. The communities need more possibilities and support for the community activity together promoting more responsibility to all community residents, participating in the salvation of problems.

3. To provide information in such a way that it could reach all the residents and make them be interested; to regularly provide information that could be easy accessible to residents; to present the examples of good practice of cooperation between municipalities and the people.

4. To enable the people themselves to ascertain that they are able to influence the quality of public services in the municipality. An effective measure would be the publicity of the appropriate examples of people/communities that have managed to find a solution, acceptable to all.

5. To organize more trainings for local government officials, politicians and residents, which are related to the methods of citizen participation and possible techniques to clarify and use the opinions and preferences of citizens in developing and evaluating the changes in service quality (Savivaldybių administracijų, 2010:105).

6. To encourage non-governmental organizations not only as an element of civil society, but also as full-fledged participants of the local public services market. At the same time it is necessary to note that NGOs also lack the skills to participate in the market of public services (skills of people, knowledge, resources, etc.). The municipality has to provide financial and technical assistance in the development of NGOs to provide public services.

3. Coproduction imperatives: battle for *kinderevolution*

Short pre-history. Pre-school education in Lithuania belongs to the independent competency of local self-governments. Klaipeda city municipality is an exceptional case among the total of 60 municipalities where for the first time in history (September, 2015) the total of

more than 2200 parents³ by signing a petition expressed their protest against being neglected in the provision of the service. The stimulation for active actions arose when the Klaipeda city council at the end of June (2015) approved the project (prepared by the local administration) changing the system of the pre-school education tax's calculation. Parents' dissatisfaction was caused, first of all, because of the withdrawal of the tax's reduction possibility in case of child's illness. The second reason for the dissatisfaction was caused by the process itself: none of the parental organizations' (parental NGOs) was involved in the municipal work group (it was the only one municipal work group that year, where parents' participation was (consciously or unconsciously) ignored). The protest, led and coordinated by the biggest parental NGO – the West Lithuania Parents' Forum (WLPF), resulted on the 27th of May 2016 when the Klaipeda city council (after a tough and hard work of all the stakeholders) approved the new (acceptable for all the sides) project of the pre-school education tax system. The process itself has got a title from local media as “*kinderevolution*”.

The pre-school education system in Lithuania and in the Klaipeda city municipality.

According to the Law on Education (article 6, 1991, as last amended on April 2016), pre-school education is a part of non-formal education. According to the 7th article of the Law, “the purpose of pre-school education shall be to help a child satisfy inherent, cultural (including ethnic), social and cognitive needs”. Despite the provision of pre-school education being an independent function of a municipality, the Law regulates the pre-school curriculum to be “prepared in compliance with the criteria of pre-school curricula approved by the Minister of Education and Science, shall be implemented by pre-school education schools, general education schools, freelance teachers or other education providers” (article 7 part 4). The ownership of pre-school education facilities (namely, kindergartens) according to the Law could be public (state's or municipalities') as well as private. According to the Law on Local self-government (article 6, part 8, 1994, as last amended on January 2016), “organization of pre-school education” is an independent function of any municipality meaning, thus, that all the 60 municipalities are able to organize the implementation of the function according to their own will (according to the national education standards, of course). There are 54 public (owned by the municipality) organizations, providing the pre-school education in the Klaipeda city municipality and 9 private organizations. Only 44 of the 54 organizations are providing the only pre-school and pre-primary education, the rest 10 are providing the mixed education services, integrating pre-school education in the broader

³ Parents representing the total of almost 8500 children.

scope of education services. The research, therefore, concentrates on the 44 public pre-school education service providers.

The main stakeholders and the main levels of the research. Bearing in mind the above described national and local systems of the pre-school education, we identified the main stakeholders of the research: (i) the owners of the public entities (namely, local council and local administration), (ii) the managers of these public entities (directors and their deputies for education in the kindergartens), (iii) parents, and (iv) parents' representing NGOs. Parents' participation in the co-production of the service, therefore, could be divided into several levels: the first level (*micro-level*) – participation in the co-production of the service in the kindergartens' (in the direct implementation of the service), the second level (*macro-level*) – participation in the co-production of the service at the municipal level (in the organization of the implementation of the service).

At the *micro-level* (inside each organization) parents are able to participate at different stages of the service provision: starting from the parents' committee at every single group in every kindergarten, then a representative from each of the committee is delegated to the parents' council (that should be formed in every kindergarten, as a part of self-management), finally, a few representatives from the parents' council are delegated to the organization's (i.e. kindergarten's) council. Such a structure of self-management should exist in every pre-school organization. The active participation in the process revealed, however, the existence of the triple folded situation: (i) the self-management structures are active and working (the parents themselves, however, say their voice in the top organizations' councils usually is in minority), (ii) parents actively participate in the parents' council not knowing about the abilities to be represented in the organizations' councils, (iii) parents do not know even about the abilities to be represented in the parents' councils (the later functioning only in "paper"). This leads to the problem that parents in some (or even most) of the kindergartens are hampered (by the managers!) from the participation in the service co-production.

At the *macro-level* (city's level) parents as members of local community (as well as all the rest inhabitants of the city), should have ability to participate in the decision making process. As it was mentioned above, participation has been patchy until recent. The main reason (one of the reasons) was the absence of a capable parental community (NGO) able to unite (first of all) parents and to represent them (secondly) as an equal stakeholder in all the stages of the decision making: at local administration (namely, in the work groups), at the respective Committee by the local Council, and finally, at the local Council itself.

The problems. The 8 months of the process revealed lots of different problems concerning parents' abilities to be involved in the co-production of the pre-school education service at local level. We identified these following problems:

- The first and the biggest problem is the patchy involvement of parents (as the main stakeholders) in the production of the pre-school education service both at the micro- and macro-levels.
- The second problem is the question of legitimation.
- The third problem is the skills (and readiness) of all the stakeholders to work under the conditions of parental participation.

Methodology. According the revealed two levels of participation, the research has been organized using the conception of triangulation and using several sources: (i) quantitative survey of pre-school facilities managers and active parents; (ii) focus group by interviewing NGO's representatives and the officials from the municipality.

For the quantitative survey, two overflowing questionnaires were composed: one for the top managers, the second for active parents. Both sides of the service provision were asked the same questions about (i) the abilities of parents to be involved in the different parts of the service provision and about (ii) the merits and demerits of parental involvement. The questionnaires were distributed by using the electronic means (specialized portal www.apklausa.lt as well as by e-mail, and by using the social network of the *WLPF*). We distributed the questionnaires to all of the 44 pre-school organizations and received 42 filled by directors of their deputies for education. Then we distributed the questionnaires to the active parents. Active parents, according our definition, are those who participate in the activities of the *West Lithuania Parents' Forum*. Meanwhile this NGO accounts for about 800 members (on the list). Not all of them are from the Klaipeda city (the Klaipeda city, though, could be treated headquarter of this NGO), not all of them have pre-school age children (finally, not all of them are truly active). The number of parents, suitable for the survey, thus, was reduced to some 130. We distributed 130 questionnaires and received 98 filled (returned 75 %). Results of the survey were calculated used the SPSS 22.0. For the comparison of the position of the top-mangers and parents the statistical mean was calculated.

The second part of the research was interview with a focus group. Our focus group was composed by 2 local council Committee members, 2 local administration officials, and 2 parents' NGO representatives. All of the participants were asked (i) to articulate their position on citizens' participation generally, (ii) to remember their emotions of September-October 2015 when the process of "kinderevolution" started, (iii) to reveal the merits and demerits of parents' participation, (iv) to reflect the experience gained through the process of "kinderevolution".

4. Research results.

4.1. The survey of the kindergartens' top managers and the parents.

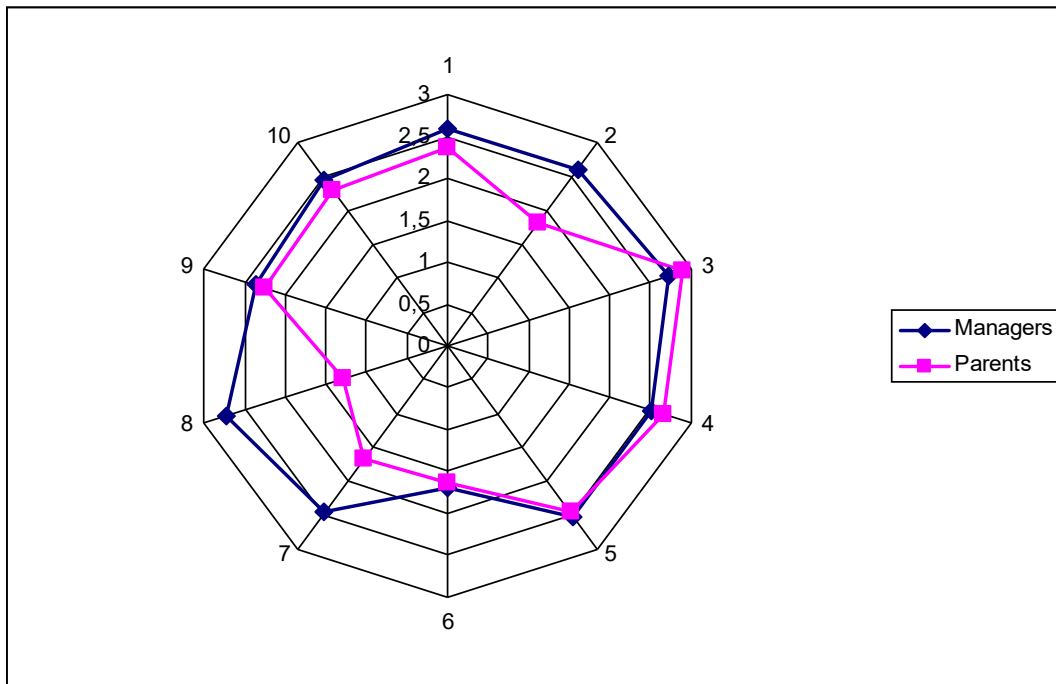
For the both of the respondents' groups the same questions about the involvement of parents were provided. In this paper we reveal the main three questions most actual for the topic.

The first question concerned evaluation of the parents' abilities to be involved in the different parts of the pre-school education service delivery (total of 10 positions). Table 1 presents the statistical averages (means) of the managers' and parents' answers, the Figure 1 presents these means in the form of radar graphic.

Table 1. Managers and parents assessment of abilities to be involved in pre-school education service delivery

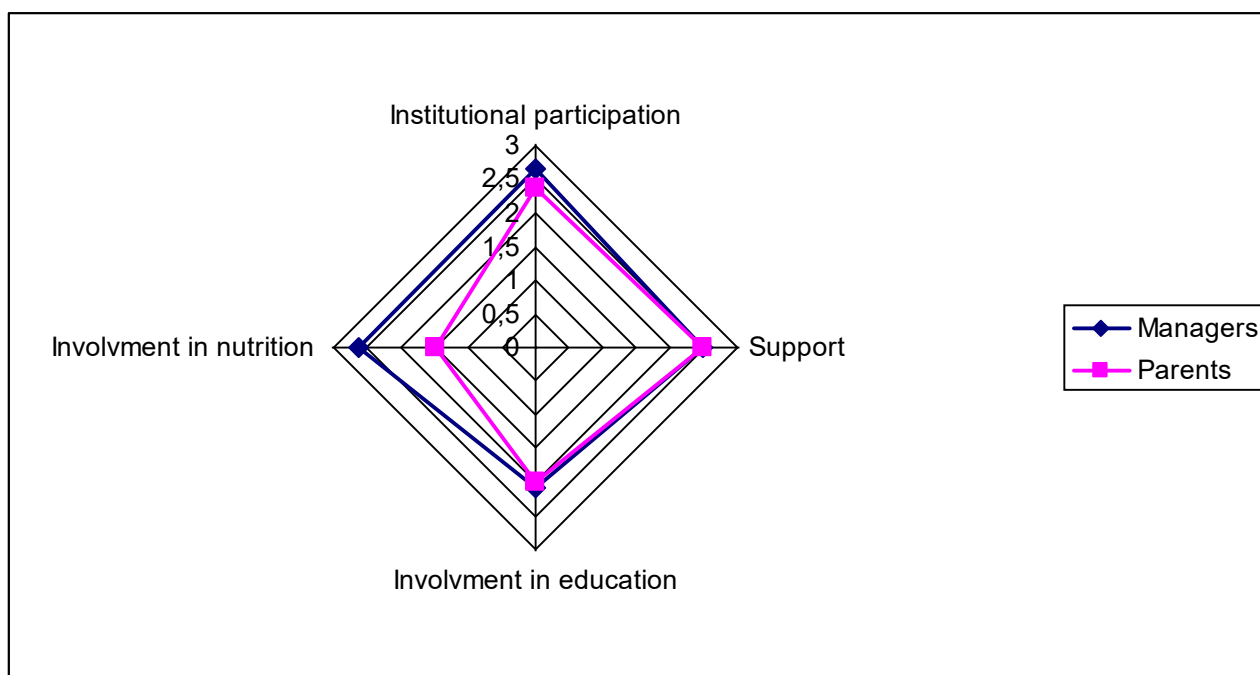
No.		Means (3 max.)		Percentage	
		1	2	3	4
		Managers'	Parents'	No participation abilities	Do not know about the abilities to participate
1	Parents' council	2,59	2,36	2,4	14,3
2	Kindergarten's council	2,59	1,82	6,0	36,9
3	Parents' meetings (in the groups)	2,74	2,89	0,0	3,6
4	Financial support	2,52	2,66	2,4	22,6
5	Organizational support	2,52	2,44	3,6	31,0
6	Creation of education programs	1,70	1,64	23,8	45,2
7	Menu composition	2,44	1,65	34,5	38,1
8	Preparation of meal	2,74	1,29	40,5	39,3
9	Care of environment	2,37	2,24	20,2	36,9
10	Ability to participate in teaching	2,44	2,3	17,9	45,2

Figure 1. Managers and parents assessment of abilities to be involved in pre-school education service delivery



As presented in the 1st table and in the Figure 1, it is obvious that parents evaluated the abilities to be involved in the service co-production lower than the top-managers of the kindergartens'. For the parents we provided a few additional answers' selection variants and it appeared that for some parts of involvement abilities parents indicated either the absence of the ability to be involved or the ignorance of such ability (see columns 3 and 4 in the table 1). The biggest surprise was to reveal that almost 37 % of the questioned parents did not know about their abilities to be represented in the kindergarten's council. This confirmed the premise that top-managers of the pre-school organizations are not willing to involve parents in the decision making process inside the organization.

Then we grouped the list of the service provision process in the four main parts: institutional participation, involvement in various support activities, involvement in education process, and involvement in nutrition process. The composite averages were calculated. These composite averages are presented in the figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Service coproduction ability according four indicators

The second and the third questions concerned evaluation of parents' involvement merits and demerits. Table 2 presents the statistical averages (means) of the managers' and parents' answers, the figures 3 and 4 present these means in the form of radar graphic. It is interesting to note that while evaluating the merits of parents involvement in the co-production of the service both parents and managers were almost unanimous (see the figure 3).

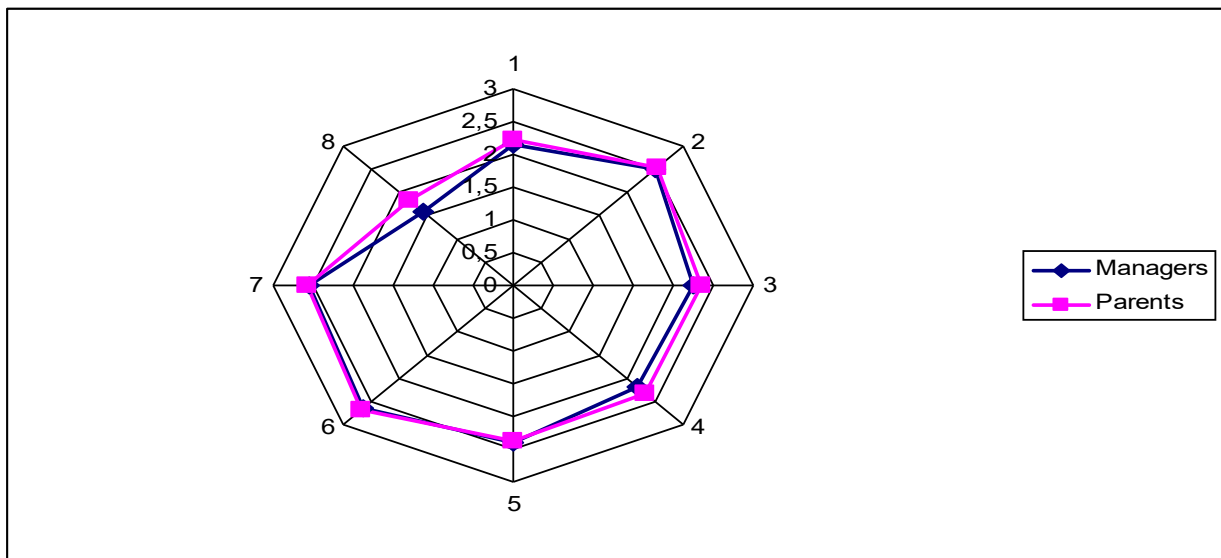
Table 2. Managers and parents assessment of parents' involvement of merits and demerits in service delivery

No.	Features of involvement	Mean (3 max)	
		Managers	Parents
Merits			
1	Better management of the service	2,14	2,23
2	Better satisfaction with the service	2,51	2,56
3	Effective and quick provision of service	2,24	2,35
4	Effective management of resources	2,21	2,34
5	Better satisfaction of the parents' needs	2,4	2,38
6	Better cooperation of parents and managers	2,66	2,7
7	Better information/communication	2,55	2,58
8	Reduction of costs	1,59	1,86
Demerits			
1	Potential loss for the organization	1,27	1,06
2	The resist from the employers	1,76	1,62
3	The loss of control in the organization	1,41	1,43
4	The potential problem of the active parents' accountability to the other parents	1,55	1,62
5	Impossible to satisfy all the expectations of parents	2,14	2,42

6	Complications in management of the organization	1,72	1,55
7	Unreasonable expectations	2,03	1,71
8	The lack of skills to work together	1,86	2,38
9	The stretch of time on decision making	2,0	2,03
10	It is more difficult to make a decision	2,17	1,9

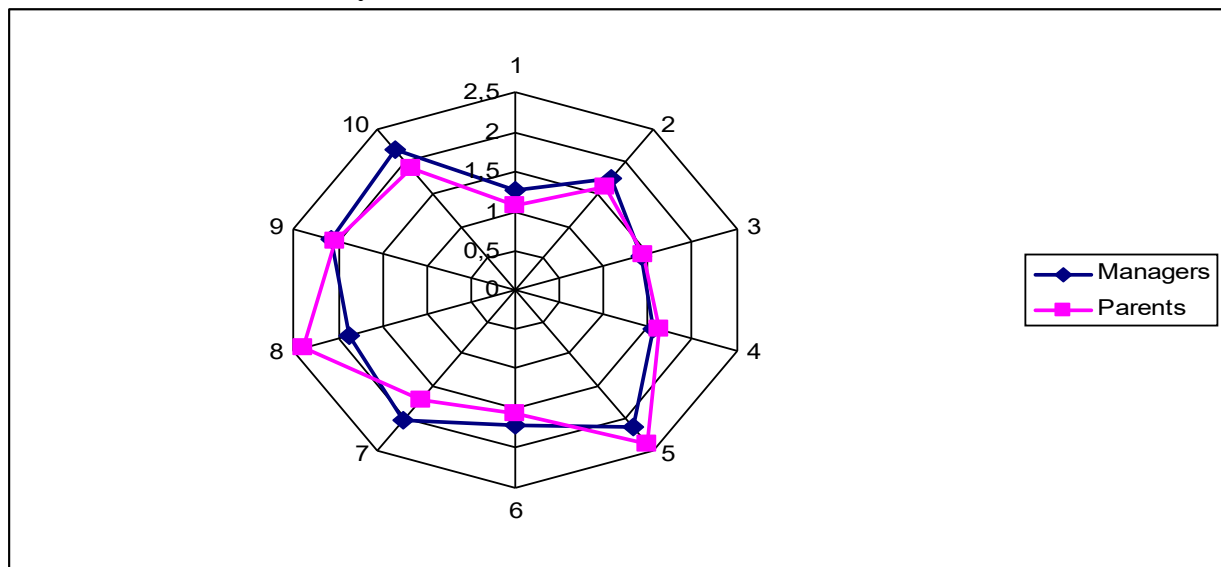
The majority of the surveyed managers noted that there are three main merits of parent’s involvement in coproduction. As the table 2 shows, better cooperation of parents and managers (2,66), better information/communication (2,55) and better satisfaction (2,41) of the parents’ needs were often mentioned as merit of parents’ involvement. Parents’ suggested two factors which were common with managers. Parents’ thought that better cooperation of parents and managers (2,7) and better information/communication (2,58) are main merits of involvement parents’ in coproduction. The third merit of parents’ involvement in coproduction was indicated – better satisfaction with service (2,56).

Figure 3. Managers and parents assessment of parents’ involvement of merits and demerits in service delivery



We tried to find out what are demerits of involvement of parents’ in coproduction (see table 2 and figure 4). As we can further in the table 2, both parents’ and managers agreed that the stretch of time on decision making (m=2,14; p=2,42) and impossible to satisfy all the expectation of parents (m=2,07; p=2,03) are the main demerits of involvement. Moreover, managers indicated that due to involvement of parents’ it is more difficult to make a decision (2,17). From other hand, the parents’ recognized that the lack of skills to work together (2,38) can be considered as main demerit of involvement in coproduction.

Figure 4. Managers and parents assessment of parents' involvement of merits and demerits in service delivery



Conclusions

From the discussion with the focus groups' members we made a conclusion that citizens' involvement still is in the embryonic stage while the politicians and local administration revealed to be understanding citizens' involvement as *political* participation but not as involvement in the co-production of services. NGO, contrary, revealed to be willing rather for the participation in the co-creation of service delivery (leaving all the political questions aside). This contradiction is a big obstacle for the creation of appropriate service co-production.

The results of this case study revealed these very obvious obstacles for the citizens' involvement in the co-production of services at local level:

- The *lack of clear (and really functioning) tools* for the involvement. Local administration usually uses very traditional (even, obsolete) means for the preparation of decision projects.
- When there is a lack of appropriate tools, *the question of legitimacy* is always on the tape: who should represent citizens on every different question?

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