

Book Review

Student Cooperatives and Expanded Activity of Schools with the Aim to Increase the Quality of Education and Social Inclusion of School Children in the Republic of Serbia



УЧЕНИЧКЕ ЗАДРУГЕ И ПРОШИРЕНА
ДЕЛАТНОСТ ШКОЛА У ЦИЉУ
ПОВЕЋАЊА КВАЛИТЕТА
ОБРАЗОВАЊА И ВЕЋЕ СОЦИЈАЛНЕ
УКЉУЧЕНОСТИ ШКОЛСКЕ ДЕЦЕ
У РЕПУБЛИЦИ СРБИЈИ

СРБИЈА, ЗЕМЉЕ ЕВРОПСКЕ УНИЈЕ И ЗЕМЉЕ У ОКРУЖЕЊУ

од Миросинке ДИНКИЋ,
и Александра ОГЊЕНОВИЋ
и Александра БРАНКОВИЋ



Београд • 2011

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Institute of Economic Sciences
Belgrade, 2011, 171 p.

This article provides a review of the monograph entitled “Student Cooperatives and Expanded Activity of Schools with the Aim to Increase the Quality of Education and Social Inclusion of School Children in the Republic of Serbia”, that was published by Institute of Economic Sciences in 2011. Authors of this monograph explored the introduction of expanded activity and execution of activities within student cooperatives in public primary and secondary schools in Serbia. They presented both the legislative framework, that outlines realization of these activities in schools, and practical experiences, illustrated by

the results of an empirical research. In addition, authors explored the practice of functioning of similar activities in public schools in selected transition countries and in old member states of the European Union. According to relevant regulation in the area of education, “expanded activity” of a school is defined as an activity which complements, but does not hinder, school’s regular educational activities, and as such it may include production, sale, provision of other services, etc. On the other

hand, student cooperatives are regulated by laws on education and on cooperatives. These two types of additional activities may appear alike, but certain differences are present in terms of procedures that follow registration of an additional activity, obtaining permissions and certificates, establishing the managing bodies, etc. In regard to the aforementioned similarity, they are rather observed as complementary activities of schools

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The monograph includes nine sections. The first two sections provide background, goals and outline of the publication, emphasizing that the main goals of the research are at least twofold. The publication intends, firstly, to stimulate creators of educational policies to boost legislative activities in order to supplement existing regulatory framework, and, secondly, to encourage the schools take proactive approach, if they recognize the purpose of setting up additional activities, and to involve students, teachers and other members of schools’ staff in these activities. The publication continues with presenting a summary of key findings, conclusions and recommendations and description of the methods utilised

in carrying out the research. Analysis of the national regulatory framework for expanded activities and student cooperatives, and comparison with functioning of these activities in neighbouring countries and the European Union, are given as separate sections. The empirical research is divided into two sections: (i) that leads to cognition on functioning of expanded activities and student cooperatives; and (ii) that reveals attitudes, expectations and state of capacities of schools which did not extend their activities. This part of the research was based on especially tailored surveys that were carried out for two nationally representative subsamples of public primary and secondary schools. Both schools with and without additional activities were covered by the research. The publication ends with main conclusions and recommendations. Also, the references used in the research are provided, as well as an annex with the survey tools and a broader overview of relevant regulation in force in selected countries.

This publication abounds with numerous results and statistical figures. However, there are several findings that are worth mentioning. Key findings related to the regulatory framework that guides realisation of additional activities in schools pointed out to the lack of by-laws, other accompanying legislation and internal documents in schools that would significantly improve realisation of additional activities. Missing legislation and other documents need to be adopted in order to make procedures more precise, such as those related to the introduction of a new concept of public education financing, financial reporting, spending of revenues earned by execution of extended activities and activities within student cooperatives, creation of evidences, quality control, engagement of pupils under the age of fifteen, engagement of teaching staff, etc. In comparison with other observed countries, one can conclude that public schools in Serbia have similar problems like schools in other former socialist countries. Some valuable solutions that can be examined as examples of good practice in functioning of additional activities in schools can be provided by the new member states of the European Union. Primary schools most frequently register student cooperatives, while extended activities are more often present in secondary schools. However, secondary schools deal more successfully than primary schools with almost all types of activities registered within student cooperatives. In particular, secondary vocational schools, either due to educational profiles and available capacities or optional subjects, more successfully execute additional activities in comparison with other observed schools. Expanded activities

are found to be more profitable than student cooperatives, particularly if they enable schools to provide various kinds of services. Encouraging children to develop their entrepreneurial skills is insufficiently present in schools without extended activities and student cooperatives. Utilisation of resources earned by execution of additional activities for greater social inclusion of children from marginalised groups is not appropriately recognized by schools.

The general conclusion of the research is that extended activities and student cooperatives are still in the early stages of their developments, although student cooperatives have existed in schools for several decades.

Some important issues recognized in this publication were further explored in scientific articles. Among them, the influence of factors that contribute to the increase in the likelihood of extension of schools' activities was deeply analysed. The estimation of appropriate statistical models extracted the factors that significantly contribute to the predicted likelihood of extension of schools' activities. One of the most important results is that participation of schools in the entrepreneurial skills development programs increases the likelihood of extension of schools' activities by 0.14 percentage points, holding all other factors fixed (Ognjenović and Branković, 2012).

The relevance of the topic explored in the monograph is emphasized by the reviewers, as well as the authors' contributions to illuminating issues that are important for setting up and realisation of additional activities in schools. One of the reviewers concluded that "this monograph, classified as a publication of national relevance, represents valuable source of information, conclusions and recommendations for all participants in the process of making decisions in the Ministry of Education and Science, in other relevant government bodies, and in schools and other institutions interested in functioning expanded activities and student cooperatives, as well as a good scientific and analytical basis for further specific research in this area" (Kovač-Cerović, 2011). These conclusions are confirmed by two other reviewers too. One of them has written that this monograph can be observed as an "instructive document that may be of help to creators of education policies in the conceptualisation of expanded activities in primary and secondary schools" (Maksimović, 2011). The other reviewer stated that this monograph as "the first national publication" which explores setting up and functioning of expanded activities and student cooperatives "will trigger further deeper researches in this area, because of

many questions that have been opened in this book” (Radović-Marković, 2011).

As authors of this monograph we would be more than happy if this publication would contribute to the further development of these additional activities in schools, to the affirmation of active learning through regular and extracurricular activities of schools, to the rise of knowledge on importance of development of entrepreneurial skills in children, and to the greater social inclusion of children in all schools’ activities. We highly recommend this publication to academic fora, the Ministry in charge of education, schools and other interested institutions and individuals, because it contains illustrative findings on the institutional setting and schools’ environment and some practical knowledge on functioning of expanded activities and student cooperatives in public schools in Serbia.

Učeničke zadruge i proširena delatnost u cilju povećanja kvaliteta obrazovanja i veće socijalne uključenosti školske dece u Republici Srbiji: Srbija, zemlje Evropske unije i zemlje u okruženju

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