

Conference on Education for All in Europe and North America

6 to 8 February 2000, Warsaw, Poland



A School in Rural Poland DECENTRALIZATION HITS KRUSZOW

Last year, seventy schools were closed and 400 may well suffer the same fate this year in the Lodz district in Poland. This is just one result of the decentralization of the education system which is taking place in most countries in Eastern Europe. Under communism, both the money and the decisions came from Ministries of Education. In recent years, however, while financing - often reduced - continues to come from the central authorities, school management has become local. Responsibility has been transferred to the regions, sometimes even to individual schools, with numerous consequences and mixed reactions.

The parents of pupils in the village of Kruszow, 25 km from Lodz, are ready to fight to keep their school, built in 1937, to which they are sentimentally attached. But the number of children has dropped year after year, from 100 when it opened, down to 48 today, and the decline is expected to continue. In a decentralized education system, a region simply cannot afford to finance all of the establishments under its jurisdiction.

Here, we live like a family

The region receives a fixed allocation per pupil, on average 2000 zlotys, and it must pay whatever complement is necessary. But when the difference amounts to 3000 zlotys, you can hardly call it a complement. Starting in January 2000, all building expenses are now added to local budgets, so it is not surprising that less costly solutions are being sought. The inhabitants of Kruszow have been invited to send their children to the neighbouring city of Tuszyn, which already has five primary schools (with some 1200 pupils) including one which is brand new. The children from Kruszow would take a bus in the morning and in the afternoon after school. The village is, however, opposed to the scheme. "Here, we live like a family," said Bozena Zaduminska, the school principal. "At School, parents and children work together." Janina Stawinska, a former principal and teacher, agrees. "There are many reasons for keeping the school," she says. "It houses all sorts of extracurricular activities, such as theatre and sport. This school is at the heart of community life."

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Press contact:
Teresa Murtagh
UNESCO
7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
Tel: 33 1 45 68 21 27
Fax: 33 1 45 68 56 29
E-mail:
t.murtagh@unesco.org



“Unacceptable”

We know exactly what we need and which decisions to make, remarks a member of the Lodz municipal council, “much better than someone who works in some ministry miles away.” Dorota Szafran, a regional school administrator, considers that “teaching conditions are far better in bigger schools and it is unacceptable, in the year 2000, to oblige children to share classes with pupils of different levels, as is the case in rural schools”.

The children themselves don’t want to leave their school on the edge of the forest with all its rustic charm. And they are quick to tell anyone who’ll listen that last year’s schoolmates, are now among the star pupils in Tuszyn secondary school. It’s so unique and effective to be able to work with each student, says Marzena Sobkiewicz, a teacher of Polish. “Unfortunately, this kind of school is no longer profitable.” Unfortunate every way. When the school closes, eight of its ten teachers will be out of a job.



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