Analysis of the way the curriculum according to the school's decision is organized and run

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Analysis of the way the curriculum according to the school's decision is organized and run. Key Aspects regarding the operationalization of CSD in Romanian Educational Units

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List of acronyms

R.A.Q.A.P.E. - Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education

B.D - Board of Directors

D.C. - Differentiated curriculum

L.D.C – Locally developed curriculum

C.S.D – Curriculum according to the the school's decision

E.Q.A.C – Evaluation and Quality Assurance Committee

N.C – National Curriculum

N.Q.F – National Qualifications Framework

C.S.R. – Corporate Social Responsibility

I.E.S. – Institute of Education Sciences

C.S.J – County School Inspectorate

M.E.R. – Ministry of Education and Research

M.N.E – Ministry of National Education

N.G.O - Non-governmental organization

P.I.S.A. – Programme for International Student Assessment

R.O.F.U.I.P. – Regulations on the organization and operation of pre-university education establishments

C.T - Common trunk

I.C.T – Information and communication technology

E.U– Education Unit

Contents

1. **Introduction**

The Romanian educational system has remained behind other post-communist states, currently members of the European Union, which have been able to implement effective reforms in education, in recent years. A recent study by the European Commission confirms that Romania has one of the weakest educational systems in the EU, failing to reach any of the targets set for 2020[1]. School curriculum is a powerful tool through which schools can adapt to the needs and aspirations of students, their parents, and the community. However, there are not enough centralized statistics and publicly available data regarding the CSD at national level, on the basis of which public policy proposals by stakeholders can be grounded. In addition, a controversy over the way in which CSD is carried out is that the proposal and the choice of the optional study objects mainly takes into account the completion of the didactic norms[2]. This is one of the reasons why it is necessary to deepen the way in which schools use this tool, in the context in which educational establishments acquire an increasing autonomy but are not balanced by mechanisms of transparency and accountability. At school level, the freedom to decide on CSD courses should be in harmony with the democratization of the current society. Unfortunately, from the point of view of the implementation capacity, CSD seems to be a hindrance to the development of the educational system, precisely because of the difficulties it entails. The need to decentralize the education system is a real and necessary one, but which, in the absence of an education policy and action strategies, seems to be difficult to achieve. Decentralization would give schools the chance to become the main decision maker, as long as it would allow the consultation of all actors involved in the educational act. The research, which was materialized in the current analysis report, looks at how school units use the opportunity of CSD, through which they have the freedom to introduce new study objects beyond those provided in the common trunk.

The "EDUPOL - Public Policies for Education" project aims to develop the capacity of NGOs and other social partners in the educational sphere, such as educational unions and parents' associations, to formulate and promote alternative proposals to government policies initiated by the Government , the involvement of these organizations in the consultations related to the elaboration of the new law on national education and the promotion of monitoring and involvement mechanisms to strengthen consultation, transparency and standardization in public administration in the field of education. In this respect, the partners, the Syneys Center for Education and the Asociația pentru Promovarea Economiei Cunoașterii, developed and implemented a monitoring mechanism supported by the research activities that led to the elaboration of this report, as well as the formulation of the public policy proposals on two themes: the use of ICT in education and the use of school curriculum (CSD). In order to validate the final version of the two public policy projects, the proposals developed will be consulted with stakeholders in Bucharest, Cluj, Timis, Dolj, Iasi, Galati, Bacau by organizing debates. Stakeholders are 50 representatives of NGOs and social partners from across the country with a mission in the field of education, as well as 50 representatives of public authorities and institutions (management and executive staff in educational establishments, county school inspectorates, resources and educational assistance, homes of the teaching staff, Institute for Education Sciences, Ministry of Education, etc.). Also, public policy projects will be validated in the dedicated network, EDUPOL, which is made up of representatives of 15 nongovernmental organizations at national level. In the last phase, public policy projects will be published on the Internet and will be promoted through online petitions, meetings with decision makers in the Parliament, Ministry of Education, Presidential Administration, ITC companies, embassies, the European Commission Representation in Romania, etc. , participation in other public debates organized by public authorities and institutions.

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[1] 2018 European Semester; Country Reports, consulted at 13.12.2018, URL, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-country-report-romania-ro.pdf.
[2] Octavian, Mandrut (coord.), *Report on the Methodology of Design and Application of CDS*, Institute for Educational Sciences, 2010

2. SWOT analysis of the curriculum according to the school's decision

Strengths

- The CSD as a new discipline offers the possibility of initiating students in areas and themes that meet the needs of students' professional training and labor market requirements as well as the preparation of future adults;
- The use of CSD classes to prepare students for admission to university or post-secondary schools;
- Compared to compulsory disciplines, the CSD offers more flexibility, and so students can learn social and emotional skills as well as transversal skills;
- Didactic methods used at the CSD are those borrowed from non-formal education, and encourage student / teacher interaction as well as teamwork;
- Professional teacher training to support optional enhancement and extension of the subject to existing disciplines, so that the CSD can replace private training hours for national exams;
- The availability of teachers to engage in extra-curricular activities in which they engage in new and thematic education methods that they then use at CSD;

Weaknesses and barriers that may affect CSD implementation

- Using CSD primarily as a way to deepen the examination subjects or disciplines where the school curriculum is a very busy one, and thus the confusion by the students of the CSD with a compulsory discipline of study;
- Complexity of the documentation for endorsement of a CSD;
- Lack of material resources and classroom facilities that allow CSD to be run in an attractive way so that students are more easily engaged in contributing;
- Using the curriculum according to the school's decision to complete the teaching rules;
- Insufficient number of teacher training programs in order to be able to run electives on subjects of interest to students other than those stipulated in the compulsory curriculum, and thus limiting the content of the options to the knowledge and training of the teachers;
- Superficial reporting to electives as a new discipline, both by students who tend to consider only the subjects of examination as important, as well as by teachers who are insufficiently prepared to teach subjects other than the subjects they usually teach in the classroom;
- Lack of school infrastructure and overcrowding of many educational establishments which makes it difficult to harmonize school timetables and ensure student mobility from one class to another at optional classes;
- Lack of a real analysis of student training needs underlying CSD proposals;
- Poor communication between school and students / parents about CSD. Usualy, the school does not provide a curriculum or short description of CSD so that parents and students make informed choices.
- CSD information is often unavailable on the school's website and no information sessions are organized with those teachers who want an optional course;
- Formalism of the process of consulting students and parents and choosing CSD from the options available;
- Perception that the optional is addressed only to primary classes and less to secondary and high school cycles, where optional lessons are used to support compulsory disciplines;
- Perception on the optional course of students and parents is that it equals an average of 10, which contributes to the increase of the general average, so necessary for admission to high school, but also to many universities;

- Lack of popularity of the methods of evaluating the effectiveness of the optional, such as questionnaires for assessing the satisfaction of students and parents;
- Existence of a limited system for evaluating school-based options. Lack of methods of continuous monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of well-informed CSDs;

Opportunities to improve CSD

- The generally functional relationship between the educational units and the county school inspectorates in the process of proposal and approval of a CSD;
- Conclusion of partnerships with non-governmental organizations, institutions and companies to support educational units with new themes and information resources, as well as experts and alternative spaces for the development of the CSD;
- Participation in national and international school networks involving several educational units of the same profile, where experience and good practice are exchanged;
- Exchange of best practices through mobility programs and projects of pre-university education teachers, funded at European level;
- Accessing non-reimbursable funds at local and national level for the conversion of optional classes by: remunerating the external experts invited to classes, equipping the classroom with equipment and materials to enable interactive classes;
- Accessing donations from companies' CSR programs to equip schools and involving external experts;

Threats

- High load of school curriculum that limits the number of optional hours;
- Fragmented and abrupt legislative changes in the education system that have reduced the number of hours allocated to optional courses, but have led to a high load of the curriculum, so that the CSD is used as a discipline for deepening the other mandatory ones.
- Lack of extra remuneration for teachers who develop the file for an optional course and run it in class;
- The unsatisfactory remuneration of teachers and the lack of infrastructure and school facilities that reduce the motivation of current pupils and students to practice in the educational field;
- Alteration of the relationship between students – teachers - parents. Teachers and parents are less and less involved in a partnership in the process of educating children, to the detriment of increasingly tense relationships about the role each one seems to have in pupil education;
- Lack of continuity in cooperation with the NGOs and lack of financial resources that can support partnerships with the non-governmental sector;
- Poor image of the school in the media and poor promotion of the successes and efforts that Romanian teachers have in general, implicitly in the CSD;
- High rates of plagiarism on educational platforms to develop the content of textbooks and schoolbooks make teachers not participate with materials in an *online peer learning system*;

3. **Research methodology**

The data provided in this report was collected as a result of a research activity between April and November 2018, which provided a picture of the curriculum according to the school's decision in terms of the data and information provided by the regulations in force, the framework plans and other procedures and strategies at central or county level. At the same time, the report contains information made available on request by the relevant institutions, the Ministry of National Education, County School Inspectorates and Educational Units, as well as perceptions and opinions from three categories of education actors: teachers, students and parents. The research was conducted in three phases: documentary research, qualitative research and quantitative research (CSD mechanism).

Documentary research has been running for eight months and has been based on identifying and analyzing all documents and materials made available by educational institutions and organizations. On this basis, the methodologies and the tools for the other stages of the research were elaborated. The research was complemented by an additional step to clarify the aspects of the documentation stage - the transmission of requests for public information to all county inspectorates and the Ministry of National Education. The action took place in July 2018 and two series of applications were sent, the first of all County School Inspectorates and the second, only those who did not provide an answer within the timeframe provided by the law. As a result of the two requests, less than half responded and offered an answer in the following counties: Arges, Bistrita-Nasaud, Botosani, Braila, Brasov, Bucharest, Caras-Severin, Constantaa, Dolj, Iasi, Olt, Salaj , Satu Mare, Teleorman, Timis, Tulcea, Valcea, Vaslui and Vrancea.

Qualitative research was based on organizing focus groups and interviews in several counties: Bucharest, Cluj, Timis, Dolj, Iasi, Galati and Bacau. The Syene Center for Education carried out four such activities in Bucharest, Timis, Dolj and Cluj, and the Association for the Promotion of Knowledge Economy, three in Iasi, Galati and Bacau. In each location, 3 focus groups were organised with teachers, pupils and parents and 1 interview with a teacher, as well as with school inspectors, employees of the Ministry of National Education and of the trade unions in education. The activity took place between May and September 2018. The purpose of focus groups and interviews was to gather information on the experiences of actors involved in the educational process, as well as to identify practices, values, responsibilities, etc. in the education process, with implications for the CSD. The information thus collected has been used in conjunction with documentary research to develop, first of all, the CSD monitoring mechanism (quantitative analysis) which was subsequently implemented at national level, secondly, this information is the basis for this report. For organizing focus groups and interviews, partners used two methods of identifying and involving participants: direct contacting educational units and public calls to teachers. The selection of participants in focus groups and interviews was based on availability, individually and at the level of education. The research activities were carried out with the help of the educational units in each county, which provided a classroom for the organization of interviews and focus groups, and in Bucharest, it was carried out at the headquarters of the Syene Center for Education.

Thus, 89 teachers were involved in the focus groups and interviews, of which approximately one third are also part of one of the following structures: the School Board, the EQAC or the CSD Commission, and in terms of gender representation, the total number was 80 women and 9 men. The number of students in focus groups was 93, of which 15 were in primary school, 23 in gymnasium and 55 in high school, of which 59 girls and 34 boys. As far as the parents are concerned, 40 focusing parents were represented, as follows: 4 preschool students, 10 pupils from the primary school, 15 from the gymnasium cycle, 14 from the high school cycle. In total, participants from 10 gymnasium schools, 6 public high schools and one private school were involved in qualitative research activities.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS TO OF FOCUS-GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS BY COUNTES
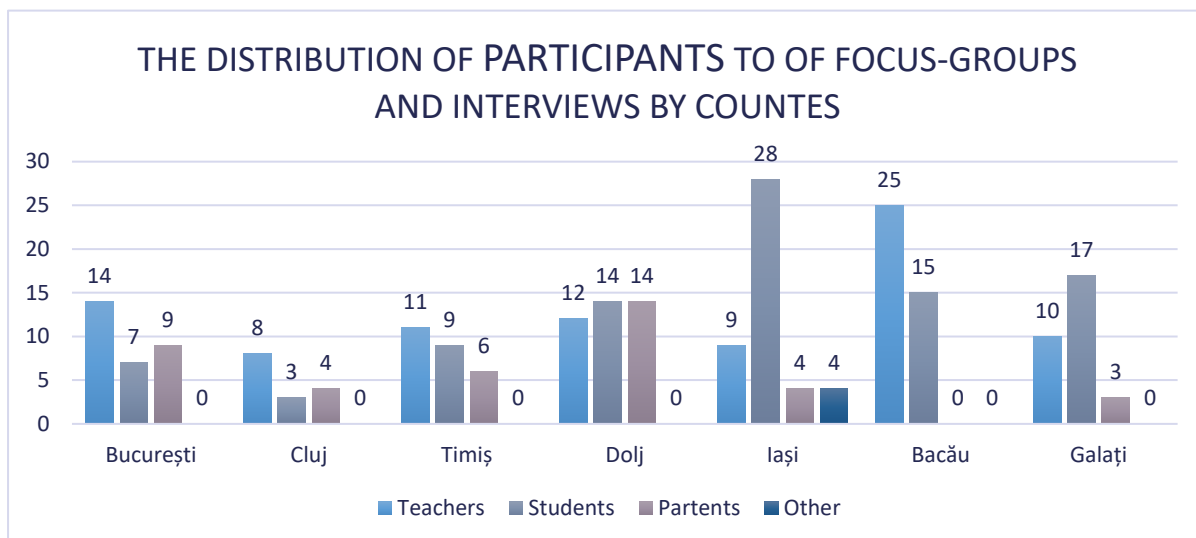
Fig.1. Distribution of participants to focus groups and interviews by counties

The third stage involved organizing and conducting a quantitative research that required monitoring based on a methodology – the CSD Mechanism. The whole activity had two dimensions: on the one hand, the collection of national data to accompany and validate qualitative research, so that the results of the two would form the basis of the formulation of the public policy proposal, on the other hand the methodology together with the research questionnaire compose the CSD mechanism that can be replicated by educational NGOs in order to monitor the way in which local electives are run. This mechanism is designed to help increase the level of transparency of schools that, as they gain autonomy in proposing new disciplines in the curriculum, need a solution that allows the collection of information and the production of statistics in this point of view. Currently, such statistics do not exist at national level, but centralized county data that can be provided on request, depending on the information that each County School Inspectorate requires differently from the schools in terms of CSD.

The data collection was carried out at national level through the application of the CSD monitoring questionnaire available in electronic format and distributed to the selected schools following sampling. The questionnaire aimed to identify curriculum data on the school's decision in general, but also regarding the school year 2017-2018. The questionnaire contains 10 questions, of which 5 are open ones, and require numerical data for quantitative processing. Closed questions are divided into multi-choice questions from which respondents should select the options closest to the particular situation in their school and questions that measure satisfaction on a 5-degree scale, from "very little "to" very much ". The monitoring period was from October 1 to November 29, 2018, and was preceded by a pre-testing phase of the mechanism. The testing took place in the second part of September 2018 and involved the involvement of 10 schools chosen by the Syene Center for Education and the Asociația pentru Promovarea Economiei Cunoașterii, schools that were asked to fill out the questionnaire and to mention in a feedback form, the degree of satisfaction with the clarity, the conciseness, the ease of filling the questionnaire, as well as recommendations.

The sampling technique applied to the sample was three-dimensional layered sampling with probabilistic selection of the elements in the sample. The target population (all Romanian educational units) was divided into subpopulations that do not overlap, called layers:

- The environment in which the Educational Unit operates, containing 2 categories: urban and rural. (Representative for the analysis and reporting procedure assumed by the project).

- Form of ownership of the Educational Unit, containing two categories: public of national and local interest and private;
- Types of Education Unit (specific to each activity environment and taking into account the form of ownership), having specific categories: primary school, gymnasium, high school, college.

For the sampling, the "School Mapping" database was used, available at: https://www.siiir.edu.ro/carto/#/retea. The database is made available by the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research. Because the database facilitated the knowledge of layer sizes (allocation of different types of Educational Unit according to environments and property forms), the overall size of the sample was first fixed and then allocated to the layers. From each defined three-dimensional layer, sub-samples of fixed size were extracted, applying the simple random sampling procedure without replacing the extracted elements. A reasonable margin of tolerance of ± 5% for a probability level of 95% was considered in the design of the sample for the targeted target population. A representative national sample with a volume of 370 items was produced. However, at some levels a non-representation was found due to the low substrate size in the target population. In this case, it was considered to include in the sample the entire volume of the sub-category of the target population, especially as it does not exceed 5% of the volume of the projected sample. At the same time, it was decided to reach a volume of about 5% for each substrate, for those below this ratio, following the proportional representation of the layers and sub-layers within the sample. Thus, the sample was redesigned, resulting in a volume of 405 units of education, as follows:

Distribution of educational units in the initial sample according to the categories of analysis				The environment E.Us carries their activities in		TOTAL
				Urban	**Rural**	
	Primary school	**Private**	No.	18	13	
			% of total	4,44%	3,21%	1%
		Public	No.	18	63	
			% of total	4,44%	15,56%	29,33%
	Seconadry school	**Private**	No.	18	4	
			% of total	4,44%	0,99%	0,49%
		Public	No.	44	138	
			% of total	10,86%	34,07%	54,12%
	Highschool and colledge	**Private**	No.	18	6	
			% of total	4,44%	1,48%	0,88%
		Public	No.	42	18	
			% of total	10,62%	4,44%	14,18%

Fig. 2 Distribution of educational units in the initial sample according to the categories of analysis

Selection of units within the sample was done by selecting a sub-sample from each sub-layer as follows. The sub-layer elements were ordered incrementally, following the SIIIR code variable; a variable containing 6-digit random numbers for each of the sub-layer elements was generated; the items have been sorted out, by the value of the random variable. Then, the first elements were extracted, their number corresponding to the number projected for the volume of the sub-layer of the sample. Last but

not least, the sampling reserves were extracted, the number corresponding to the number projected for the volume of the sub-layer of the sample.

The application of the CSD mechanism was carried out between 1 October and 29 November 2018 by applying the sample questionnaire to the sample schools. Invitations to the questionnaire were sent along with update messages on average once every 2 days. After the first emails were sent from the database, the list of emails was filled with addresses from the backup lists, proportional to the number of those addresses that were not valid and could not be updated. The second addition, with the e-mail addresses in the reserve, was made after the first month of research, the response rate at that time being of 14.07%. Filling in with the addresses in the backup lists was made in proportion to the number of addresses the invitation did not reach due to reasons other than the unavailability of the email address. Monitoring of responses and rate of completion of the questionnaire was achieved using the online QuestionPro program. At the end of the two months of implementation of the monitoring mechanism, 401 schools accessed the online questionnaire, 100 completed its completion and 91 successfully completed and submitted this questionnaire. Education units that started without completing the questionnaire were contacted by phone, but the success of direct communication was limited.

Share of responses by category of analysis				The environment E.Us carries their activities in		TOTAL
				Urban	**Rural**	
E.U. types.	**Primary school**	**Private**	No.	0	2	2
			% of total	0%	2.1%	2.1%
		Public	No.	2	12	14
			% of total	2.1%	13.18%	15.38%
	Seconadry school	**Private**	No.	2	1	3
			% of total	2.1%	0.91%	3.29%
		Public	No.	7	41	48
			% of total	7.69%	45.05%	52.74%
	Highschool and colledge	**Private**	No.	6	1	7
			% of total	6.59%	0.91%	7.69%
		Public	No.	10	7	17
			% of total	10.98%	7.69%	18.68%

Fig. 3 Share of responses by category of analysis

The final response rate from the 2 months of research was 22.46%. Due to the reluctance of educational units to take part in monitoring, research is not statistically relevant, but from the point of view of typology of educational establishments and residence areas it is a general-purpose barometer that can provide information useful about the phenomenon studied - the way of reporting the educational units to the CSD issue. The distribution of responses at national level was relatively balanced between the counties, so that the number of answers received was between 1 and 5, coming from the educational units in 34 counties.

The response rate of the educational units distributed by counties	
1 answer	Călărași, Caraș-Severin, Covasna, Galați, Giurgiu, Sălaj, Sibiu, Teleorman, Tulcea
2 answers	Arad, Argeș, Brașov, Ilfov, Mureș, Prahova
3 answers	Alba, Botoșani, București, Cluj, Gorj, Hunedoara, Neamț, Vrancea
4 answers	Bacău, Bihor, Buzău, Constanța, Dolj, Harghita, Iași, Olt, Vâlcea
5 answers	Suceava, Timiș
No answer	Bistrița-Năsăud, Brăila, Dâmbovița, Ialomița, Maramureș, Mehedinți, Satu Mare, Vaslui

Fig.4 The response rate of the educational units distributed by counties

Of the educational units that took part in the CSD monitoring mechanism, 24 are colleges and high schools, 41 are general schools and 16 are primary schools. In total, 79 are public and 12 are private, 64 are in rural and 27 in urban.

4. Analysis of the regulatory framework and organization of the curriculum according to the school decision (CSD)

Curriculum according to the school decision should undoubtedly represent the expression of curricular decentralization, giving schools the opportunity to adapt and complement the national curriculum in accordance with the socio-economic and cultural specificities of the area in which the educational establishment is located. Several benchmarks have been considered in the development of the national curriculum. First of all, the current needs of pupils and the finality of the Romanian education system in terms of acquiring skills and training for university education, respectively for the labor market. Another milestone that was taken into consideration was the reference to those educational system tales that prove to be appropriate and useful to preserve. Last but not least, reporting to the general conditions of evolution and international standards, to what is performing education[3]. In the 1990s, along with the reforms proposed by the World Bank in partnership with the Romanian Government, the national curriculum underwent several stages of restructuring and reconfiguration, and at that time the idea of a curriculum at the school's decision (CSD) started to appear. At the level of compulsory education, the hours allocated for the CSD were included in the optional courses category and the school's time schedule. CSD was a way in which the school could decide on the choice of pupils' educational path, but it was also a challenge for the teachers

In 2001, following a new Government project in partnership with the World Bank, a broad analysis of the Romanian curriculum reform was carried out, which highlighted the fact that teachers wanted CSD hours to be up to half of the framework plan. In April of the same year, the framework plans for compulsory education and for high school, changed again, by order of the minister. For financial reasons and the desire to reduce the pupils' timetables, it was considered necessary to supplement the number of hours for scientific disciplines, according to the same framework plan mentioned above (thus increasing the number of hours allocated to disciplines such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology). This choice made the number of hours allocated to the CSD to fall, the school having no leverage to change anything in this respect. Two years later, a new ministerial order approves new framework plans for primary and high school classes. This meant that in the primary cycle the number of CSD hours was reduced to 1-3 hours a week, from 2-4 hours per week. Novelty is this time in the framework for high school, which introduced the differentiated curriculum (Dc) for which hours have been allocated from the CSD. In the years following these changes, the CSD received an increasing number of hours, which were most often chosen for items in the common trunk, and in the vocational high schools CSD was replaced by DC, because there were no more hours to be allocated to the former. According to the Framework Plan for Primary Education, students have allocated one hour of CSD. In secondary school, according to the Framework Plan, students can choose one-year study for 1-3 elective courses (grades V-VII) and for 1-4 elective courses in the 8th grade, of which, an optional integrated across multiple curricular areas. Framework plans for secondary education, the vocational pathway, allocate between 2-3 optional courses, of which an optional integrated in the curricular area. High school students, those of lower cycle, theoretical branch, and all-profile students allotted one hour of CSD. In the lower cycle of the high school, in the vocational branches, at all profiles, according to the Framework Plans, students have one hour of CSD, which is allocated for specialized education. As for the allocation of hours for CSD in the upper cycle of the high school, theoretical high schools, at all profiles, they are between 4 and 6 hours. In vocational high schools, the number of CSD hours varies between 2 and 4, depending on the profile.

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[3] Alexandru, Crisan, Matei, Cerkez, Mihaela, Singer, Daniel, Oghina Ligia, Sarivan, Lucian, Ciolan., *National curriculum for compulsory education. Frame of reference*, National Council for Curriculum from the Ministry of National Education, 1998

4.1. Curriculum. Definitions and concepts

4.1.1. Typology of the national curriculum

The typology of the national curriculum that operates within the Romanian educational system is the following:

• core curriculum (CC), which represents approximately 65-70% of the national curriculum;

• curriculum according to the school's decision (CSD), which represents approximately 30-35% of the national curriculum and is comprised of: extended curriculum; deep core curriculum; curriculum developed in school.

The core curriculum is the compulsory commun trunk (TC), which includes the minimum number of hours of each compulsory subject provided in the curriculum. Its existence ensures equal opportunities in the education system and represents the only reference system for assessments and examinations in the system and for the development of the curricular performance standards[4].

School Decision Curriculum (CSD) is the number of hours allocated to the school for building its own curriculum. It covers the difference in hours between the core curriculum and the minimum or maximum number of hours per week for each school discipline provided in the curriculum frameworks (ie for both compulsory and optional subjects) per years of study. In addition to a core curriculum, the school can opt for multiple curriculum variants from the school's own offer or from the Ministry of National Education. Framework plans for secondary education, theoretical and vocational, comprise a differentiated curriculum (DC) as an offer of compulsory courses at the central level, taking into account the years of study, profile and specialization, for each high school category, in part. Thus, the CD is a compulsory discipline, from the central offer, with related hourly allocations, but differentiated by profiles and specializations. For vocational and technical education, the curriculum in local development (CLD) is a component of the national curriculum, which includes the disciplines allocated for the development of the curricular offer, in partnership with economic agents.

4.1.2. Types of CSD

The curriculum according to the school's decision (CSD) can be of several types:

- CSD for deepening knowledge, which is the maximum number of hours foreseen in the framework plan for a discipline, and is used to build the required minimum mandatory competencies (recoveries). According to Order 3638 / 11.04.2001, deepening is possible only in cases of recovery - namely the lack of attainment of the minimum standards by certain students by passing the disciplinary program during the time allocated to the common trunk.
- CSD for expansion of the knowledge implies the formation of new specific competences and the teaching of new content that exceeds those provided in the common trunk. Extending is especially recommended for students with good performance on a particular subject, as this

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[4] http://www.rasfoiesc.com/educatie/didactica/DOMENIILE-CURRICULUMULUI-TIPUR51.php, Accesat la 12 decembrie 2019;

type of CSD involves going through the objectives and contents marked with an asterisk (*) in the discipline curriculum.

- Integrated optional course is similar to the previous type, with the distinction that it involves the formation of integration and transfer competencies, and the content units contain information from several disciplines.
- Pptional course at the curriculum area involves choosing a theme that involves at least two disciplines within an area. In this case, starting from the framework objectives of the disciplines, reference objectives will be formulated from the perspective of the chosen topic.
- Optional in multiple curricular areas involves at least two disciplines belonging to different curricular areas (it allows the acquisition of high-order cognitive acquisitions, such as generalization, transfer)[5].

4.1.3. Types of CSD proposed by the Ministry of National Education

The Ministry of Education issued a central offer of courses for the CSD. This is intended for those schools that do not have the resources to develop their own programs. This type of curriculum has been applied since 1998, along with the current curriculum framework, and the subsequent legislation has not changed the principles of operation. It is important to emphasize that the idea of a central CSD course offer came from a team of researchers from the Institute of Educational Sciences that was based on the framework plan for pre-university education. The process of designing and validating the optional courses offered by the MNE is similar to those of the common trunk

School curricula include details of the number of years and the system where a certain optional discipline (linear, concentric, or modular) will be studied. Packages for optional disciplines can be developed by each school unit, specifying that their choice should take into account the purpose and profile of the school. Thus, for each educational cycle, the MNE has developed optional packages, leaving it to the schools to propose optional themes / disciplines / courses, with the approval of the County School Inspectorates. The hourly schedule thus includes optional courses for the MNE offer and optional ones from the local offer, but does not exceed the number of maximum hours in the frame plans. The MNE offers the following optional subjects: "The recent history of Romania" (for the high school cycle), "Education for health" (grades 1st-12th), "Be active, prepare your access to success" (grade 1st-12th), "Intercultural Education" (grades 9th – 12th), "Project Management" (grades 9th – 12th), "Education for Democracy" (grades 9th – 12th), "Human Rights" (grades 9th – 12th), "Civic Education" (grades 9th – 12th), "Education for Health" (grades 1st – 12th), "Mathematics and Sciences in the Knowledge Society" (integrated interdisciplinary course primary and secondary education), "European Education" (for the primary cycle).

[5] Octavian, Mandrut (coord.), *Report Methodology of Designing and Applying of CSD. Methodological Aspects for Designing and Applying CSD,* Institute for Educational Sciences, 2010.

4.2. Stages of CSD design. Methodology for development and approval of CSD

According to the timetable for the mobility of teaching staff in pre-university education for the school year 2017-2018, approved by the Order of the Minister of National Education nº 5739 / 14.11.2016 regarding the establishment of teaching positions / chairs, as well as those of the Methodology on the substantiation of the tuition figure for state pre-university education, the record of the number of the preschool and school pupils in the private education units, as well as the issuance of the corresponding opinion organizing the network of pre-university education units for the school year 2017-2018, approved by the Order of the Minister of National Education nº 5777 / 22.11.2016, certain deadlines were set for the elaboration and approval of the curricula for the optional subjects / study fields and for the pre-university education modules, respectively [6].

Thus, at the level of the school units, the chairs / methodical commissions elaborate the curriculum offer at the school's decision and propose it for discussion to the teaching council, which must include the offer set at national level. Teachers develop curricula for disciplines / study areas, respectively the optional modules offered at the level of the educational unit. Subsequently, the CSD offer is endorsed by the Teaching Board and goes for approval to the board of the school. The school curricula for CDLs offered at the level of vocational and technical education are endorsed by the Methodological Committee of the Technological Curricular Area of the Education Unit, the Board of Education of the Education Unit and the Local Development Committee of the Social Partnership / Economic Operators, the school and then approved by the County School Inspectorate Board of Directors.

4.2.1. The procedure for drafting CSD

According to Art.15 (1) from the Methodology regarding the elaboration and approval of the curriculum - framework curricula and school curricula, approved by the Order of the Minister of National Education nº 3593 / 18.06.2014, the subjects / study fields, respectively the optional modules offered at the level of the educational unit, will be proposed so as to ensure the diversification of the learning activities, according to the needs and the aspirations of the students, to be derived from any of the educational disciplines thus forming an educational offer that responds to the interest of the pupils for a particular field of study and a new object of study can be introduced in addition to those provided in the common trunk structured around an integrative theme for a certain curricular area or for several curricular areas[7].

According to Article 184 (a) of the Framework Regulation on the organization and operation of pre-university education units (RCOFUIP), the representative council of parents may propose to the educational units' disciplines and fields to be studied through the curriculum at the school's decision, including the national offer.

The CSD / CDL offer is made public, presented to students and parents, and completed before the proposed figures for the schooling plans submitted to the School Inspectorate of Bucharest. Students / parents can express the option of one discipline once without the possibility of returning to the option

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[6] MNE - *Order nº 5739/14.11. 2016 for the approval of the Framework Methodology on the mobility of teaching staff in pre-university education in the school year 2017-2018*

[7] Order of the Minister of National Education nº 3593/18.06.2014, *Methodology on the elaboration and approval of the curriculum - framework curricula and school curricula..*

made, which becomes a compulsory schooling discipline for the duration for which the discipline was designed. Except from the above-mentioned deadline, students from the beginning of the study level (preparatory class, fifth grade, 9th grade) for whom the expression of pupil and / or parental options will be possible during specific periods related to the constitution of the respective classes[8].

4.2.2. Tasks at local and central level regarding the choice and implementation of the CSD

The Ministry of Education (MNE) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) are the bodies responsible for approving the CSD development and implementation rules and the management of offers that are available to schools. Tasks on CSD at school level are to be handled by methodological committees, quality assessment and quality assurance committees, teacher councils, student councils, parents 'associations, and classroom parents' committees. Teachers / tutors discuss CSD options with students, parents, and class counselors. The optional course for one class is set according to several factors. First, based on proposals from students and parents, and then on the basis of teachers' suggestions. The choice and quality of an optional depends on the school infrastructure, the material endowment, and the human resource. Subsequently, teachers make CSD proposals for the following year in the chair or in the methodological committees, which are responsible for developing the educational offer for the annual activity programs. The Teaching Board approves the half-year programs and the annual activity plan, and therefore the CSD.

The CSD is further endorsed by the school curriculum committee / council and finally endorsed at the school level by the board of directors. The local council participates in the decision on the CSD through its representatives in the administrative council. These representatives have the role of identifying local needs that can be solved through the CSD, thus ensuring the consistency between the school's activity and that of the local council. The last step in this process lies with the County School Inspectorate, which, through the specialized inspectors, endorse the CSD proposals or not.

School curriculum must be seen as part of the entire curriculum, students needing to experience a coherent curriculum. Thus, the curriculum according to the school's decision must be planned together with the national one and integrated with it [9]. High schools use the freedom they have in terms of curriculum at school's decision in a variety of ways. Students are offered an extension of the existing curriculum in response to special learning abilities or the curriculum deepening, focusing on the identified needs of those students who have difficulties in one or more disciplines in the core curriculum. However, schools have the chance to propose optional courses introducing new subjects beyond those provided in the common trunk.

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[8] https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gezdqmzygyya/capitolul-v-consiliul-reprezentativ-al-parintilor-asociatia-de-regulament-titlul-ix-partenerii-educationali?dp=geydimjzhe3doni, consolted at 16.12.2018.
[9] Ben, Bennett, *Curriculum according to the school's decision. Guide for High School Teachers,* Edition Atelier Didactic, Bucarest, 2007.

Public Policies for Education -EDUPOL

Respnsibility: E.U. management , the committee for curriculum and quality assurance.	• Drafting the CSD development procedure • DECEMBER
Respnsibility: E.U. management and methodical committiees	• Aanalysis of students' needs • DECEMBER
Respnsibility: Teachers who want to develop CSD	• Submitting the CSD proposal to the curriculum comittee within the E.U. • JANUARY
Respnsibility: Curriculum comittee and E.U. management	• Gathering the proposals and drafting the documentation for CSD. Sending the final proposal to students and parents for consultation. • JANUARY
Respnsibility: Teachers	• Presenting the CSD proposal in class in order for students and partents to to chose and sign for their option/s • JANUARY
Respnsibility: Curriculum comittee	• Drafting the final proposal based on students and parents' options • FEBRUARY
Respnsibility: Teachers' Board and School Board	• Validating the CSD roposal in Teachers' Board and School Board • FEBRUARY
Respnsibility: Teachers who draft the CSD curricula	• CSD manual is registred as school official document within the E.U. • MARCH
Respnsibility: Methodic comittee	• Getting the CSD documentaion ready in order to be submitted to the County School Insepctorate • MARCH
Respnsibility: E.U. management, methodical comittee representatives	• Submitting the CSD documentation to the County School Inspectorate • APRIL

DECEMBER

Updating the CSD approval procedure within the County School Inspectorate
Responsibility: CSI's curriculum comittee

JANUARY

Publishing documentation related to CSD approval process on the County School Inspectorate's website
Responsibility: CSI's curriculum comittee and IT

JANUARY

Inspectors attach CSD documentation drafted in the process of approving
Responsibility: School inspectors

Creating a CSD database
• Responsability: School inspector
• SEPTEMBER (next school year)

CSD documentation is sent back to the school
• Responsibility: School inspectors
• MAY

CSD approval process by the County School Inspectorate Board
• MAY

Analysis of the CSD proposals and documentation and CSD approval
• Responsability: School inspectors
• MAY

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Fig. 5 Timing and stages of a CSD endorsement procedure. This was drafted on the basis of the information contained in the Extract of Procedure 12 / 06.12.2018 regarding the organization and carrying out of the activities for the approval of the CDS and CDL program projects, 2018-2019 by the County School Inspectorate in Brăila.

5. Research results

5.1. Perceptions and opinions about the optional disciplines in relation to the structure and general framework of the Romanian education system - premises and obstacles

Understanding of opinions and experiences on optional subjects can only be achieved by placing in the context of the realities of the Romanian school, starting with the place that the CSD formally occupies in the school curriculum, the regulations in the field, the material and informational resources available to schools and to the way the relationships between the actors of the educational process are based. Students' expectations in relation to school may, however, be disproportionate because most of the time they spend at school or in activities related to school (homework and training), but without feeling its contribution to personal development on a long term, but only in preparation for exams. In this context, optional subjects can meet the expectations of students, in the sense that they can have a complementary character to the obligatory subjects. Asked what they would like to learn at an optional subjects, the answers were: "*how do get by alone if my parents leave me alone at home for more than a week, how to make food, how to go to the store, how to save money in order to get by*" (student from Cluj) or " it *should teach us how to get by with the minimum income in Romania. How to live in a city with high price for a rent (...) there are not too many possibilities.*"(student, Dolj).

In the face of societal challenges, expectations from students and sometimes parents are that part of the education which traditionally belongs to the family, is taken over by the school, but the Romanian school is not ready to fully meet the training needs and qualifications for the labor market, even less, of the emotional and personal development needs: "*it is necessary because we are growing extremely pragmatic, extremely applied children, and the school is very much behind.*" (teacher, Dolj). Teachers speak openly about the limitations they face in terms of resources, sometimes training, but above all about the constraints of the obsolete and inadequate educational system to the current challenges. This is the perspective of a professor from Timis County: "*It takes communication skills and a professional knowledge to change something. A teacher will never be a good directional changer because, first of all, he does not have the time, and secondly, he is not good at it. (...). We need institutions that support us, educate society, understand that school must be respected, school needs to change and adapt to the current demands of society: globalization, migration phenomenon, terrorist danger, economic dangers, and vulnerabilities. We at school do not teach children, but we do not teach them because we do not want this. But because the system does not allow us, because parents, society do not allow us. Society doesn't have an honest dialogue. We have problems, but we put our heads in the sand, we do not see them, we do not discuss them. We have alienated children, children left behind, who have no values (...). Firstly, public debate is needed. (...) *" (teacher, Timis).

OBSTACLES FACED IN CSD IMPLEMENTATION

Obstacle	Value
Admnistrative overload in CSD process of approving	33
Divergent opinions among parents in the matter of CSD topics and evaluation	15
High number of students in one class	23
Poor students' participation in class	19
Curricular overload that limits the number of CSD classes	48
Low level of transparency and poor communication between decision-makers and schools	2
Inconsistency in the legal framework	15
Lack of financial motivation for teachers	27
Lack of flexibility in students' transfering and evaluation	6
School infrastructure and limited number of resources	30

Fig. 5 The barriers encountered in the development of the CSD identified by the educational units that took part in monitoring the "CSD mechanism"

One of the items in the CSD monitoring questionnaire asked the representatives of the educational units to choose between the barriers encountered in the CSD, with the possibility of choosing multiple options and proposing other challenges as well. As a result of the implementation of the monitoring mechanism, 48 out of the 91 educational establishments identified the high load of school curriculum from the common trunk as the main barrier to the curriculum at the school's decision, followed by the bureaucratic requirements in the process endorsement and the limited resources available to schools. At the

opposite end, 8 educational units altogether consider barriers, lack of transparency between decision-makers and schools, and the lack of flexibility of the CSD in student transfer and classroom marking. Among the barriers identified but not found in the predefined list, teachers have mentioned the maintenance of optional lessons at a minimum, but also the difficulty of organizing diversified options for smaller groups of students because they are not feasible for schools in financially.

The Romanian school starts with the handicap of an obsolete educational system in which not all teachers, as they themselves admit it, manage to respond to the needs and problems faced by the current generation of students. Some teachers accept the chair as a compromise or alternative to other jobs for which they did not initially qualify, some "hunt" the opportunity offered by the chair to round out income through individual training with students, others cannot pass the obstacle of the exam for a tenure position, and most of those who have a vocation are struck by the lack of facilities in schools, outdated school infrastructure and systemic obstacles. In this context, the status of the teaching staff in Romanian society has suffered greatly in the last decades: *"In the Nordic countries you are placed at another level as a teacher, here you are a cloth to wipe the floors with. The parent comes running at you, saying that you have something against his child, that you spoke nasty to him, who knows what. On television: teachers are abusing children, but nothing is said of those who work, only the bad things are shown and this influences public opinion."* (teacher, Bucharest) and *"the values in our society are not the right ones, and automatically the public opinion has a very bad opinion about the school and the teachers. And they do not show any respect. Starting with disrespect, that with << we'll be friends >> with the child, does not apply everywhere. Many do not realize that the purpose of the family and the purpose of the teacher is to help them mature".* (teacher, Bucharest)

In relation to the general offer that the Romanian education provides, the CSD is not considered an "educational reality" that is implemented according to the expectations of the students, parents and stakeholders in the community and the labor market. The decision-makers, together with the entire bureaucratic system behind Romanian education, are seen as factors generating distortions. Systemic problems are due to a lack of coherence and fragmentation of educational policies that affect the curriculum and, implicitly, the CSD. Beyond its implicit optional character which, in theory, must be interested in students, CSD fulfills two very pragmatic roles. Firstly, it can substitute an individual training course for disciplines in the common trunk that are also national or baccalaureate subjects, as well as for disciplines where deepening is needed. Secondly, the CSD does not cover concrete educational needs, but is used to complete the didactic norms, and so the content is rather designed to be accessible to teachers who need to complete the norm rather than the pupils.

5.1.1. CSD in the context of school curricula and framework plans

Framework plans and curricula are perceived as obstacles to the CSD progress because it limits the number of optional classes, and in the case of the subjects included in national testing and the baccalaureate exam, the CSD becomes the main additional resource for further development and deepening of matter: *"I think the story should be reversed, starting from the curriculums that need to be airy, so that these optional courses fit the schedule without adding to the enormous load of these children. This is where we have to start, that is the big problem, the common trunk of the disciplines, which is very dense, with many hours, with great stuff, with enormous contents for their age."* (teacher, Cluj). The majority opinion of all participants in focus groups and interviews is that CSD is used in many situations as an extra hour of

preparation for disciplines where the program is highly loaded: *"there are optional courses to deepen a subject, eg mathematics. We have an optional class of mathematics which is practically one hour of applications (...)"* (student, Timis). At the same time, the large number of hours and compulsory subjects reduce the possibility of having more optional because the maximum number of hours a pupil can spend at school is exceeded, hours that are set in the framework plan: *"we would like to, but it's all about the frame plan. If that framework plan is to change, take into account how long the child stays at school. I mean somewhere you have to take out and insert something else, not to increase the maximum number of hours. We come to the 7th and 8th grade (gymnasium) with three possible choices of 33 and 34 hours respectively, that means 7 hours, five days a week, which is very much "*(teacher, Galati).

THE DISTRIBUTION OF CSD TYPES FORM THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF CSDS REPORTED BY E.US

- New subject
- Extention
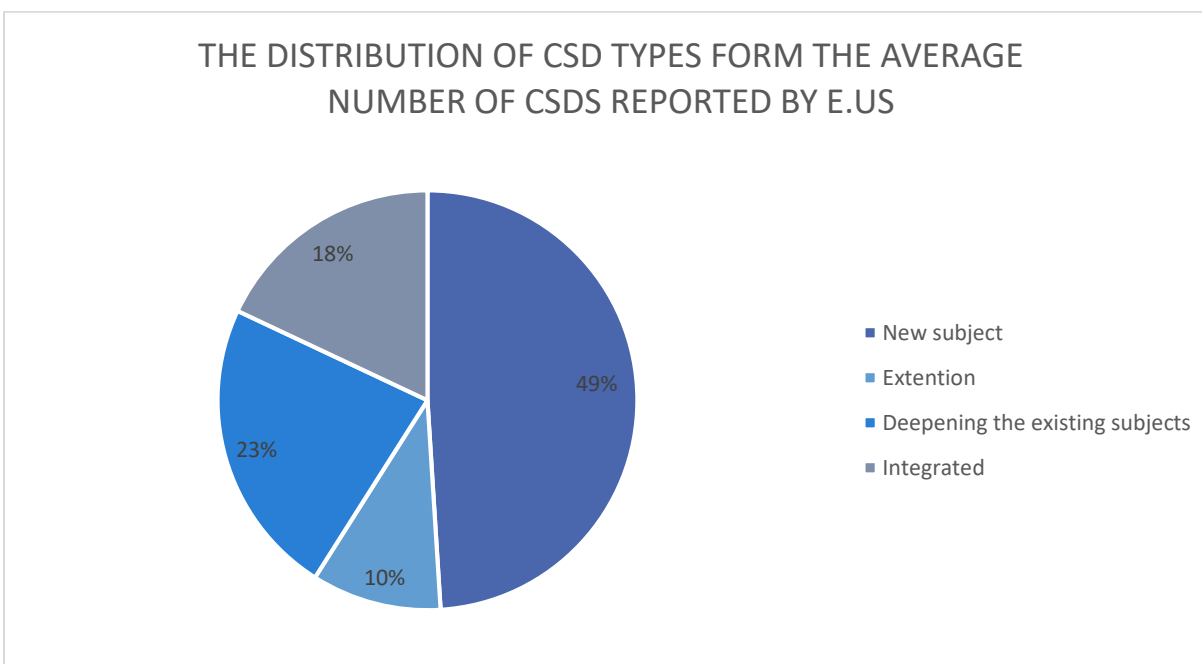- Deepening the existing subjects
- Integrated

49%
10%
23%
18%

Fig. 7 The distribution of CSD types form the average number of CSDs reported by E.Us

The results from the application of the CSD mechanism (quantitative research) show that, in the 91 educational units responding to the questionnaire, 1098 options were used in 2017-2018, which equates to an average of 12.2 optional in each of these units. Deepening is the goal of 23% of the optional and equates to a total of 243, an average of 2.7 electives per unit of education. Last but not least, the integrated and trans-disciplinary content is the goal of 18% of the optional, equating to 187 of the total and an average of 2.07. Instead, the share of electives as a new discipline is nearly 50%, representing an average of 5.65 electives in each unit of education and a total of 509. Optional for the extension of matter is 10% of the total, 101 of the total and the average of 1.1 per unit of education.

Given that only 1 out of 2 optional is a different subject of study, students often confuse CSD with compulsory subjects, the optional idea being in fact related to extra-curricular activities: *"I do not really know, giving the fact that we do not have many optional courses and most of the them are regarding subject that we are already doing at high school ... maybe if it were something new, a music club or sports club, it might have been something else."* (student, Bucharest). This situation is encouraged by some of the teachers who choose to propose to the CSD to deepen the already existing subject matter, on the one hand, to reduce

the speed of passing the subject to a compulsory discipline or for the exam: *"if in the first and second year of implementing this concept, things have been cumbersome from institutional management point of view, I think there is now a question of diluting and going on to meet the needs of completing the national curriculum that is extraordinarily stunning, of which teachers have target examinations."* (teacher, Cluj)
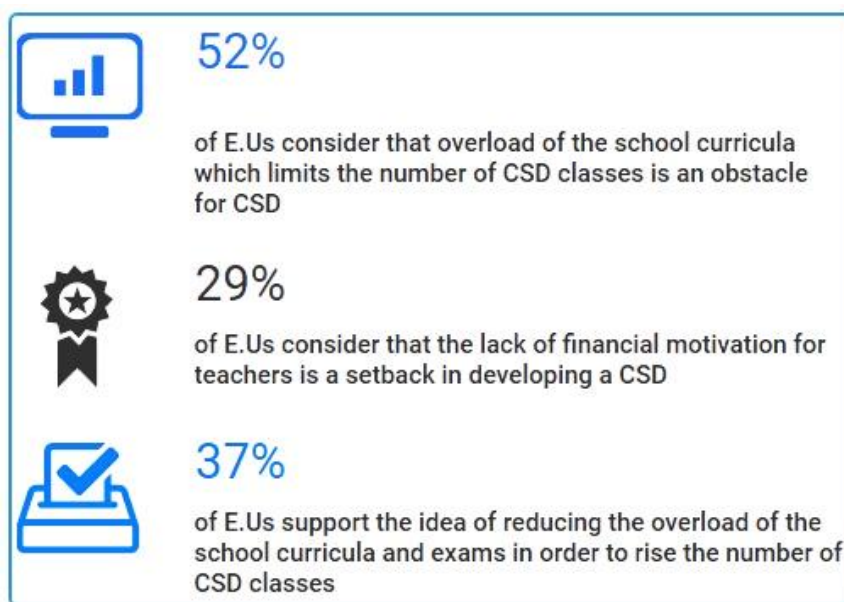
52%

of E.Us consider that overload of the school curricula which limits the number of CSD classes is an obstacle for CSD

29%

of E.Us consider that the lack of financial motivation for teachers is a setback in developing a CSD

37%

of E.Us support the idea of reducing the overload of the school curricula and exams in order to rise the number of CSD classes

Fig. 8 Obstacles related to school curricula and their share, as emerged from the application of the CSD mechanism

On the other hand, drawing up the CSD notification dossier involves a lot of documenting and developing a program with course support, needs and resource analysis, so CSD as a new discipline becomes unattractive for many teachers who do not have to complete the didactic norm: *"for us also, in the primary classes, until a few years ago, each one of us was obliged to have an optional course. Today, there is no longer an obligation, and so many of the teachers have given it up. No one forces me, I'm not paid for it!"* (teacher, Timis). Knowing this set of problems, some of the teachers appreciated that *"in-depth classes and optional lessons should not be overlapped"* (teacher, Bucharest). The proposed solution at national level is the creation of optional offers that can be taken as such but, in the context of specific school realities, some teachers perceive them as mandatory: *"there are so-called optional mandatory ones. Such classes as health education is an optional classnationally agreed, and there is no need for endorsement"* (teacher, Timis).
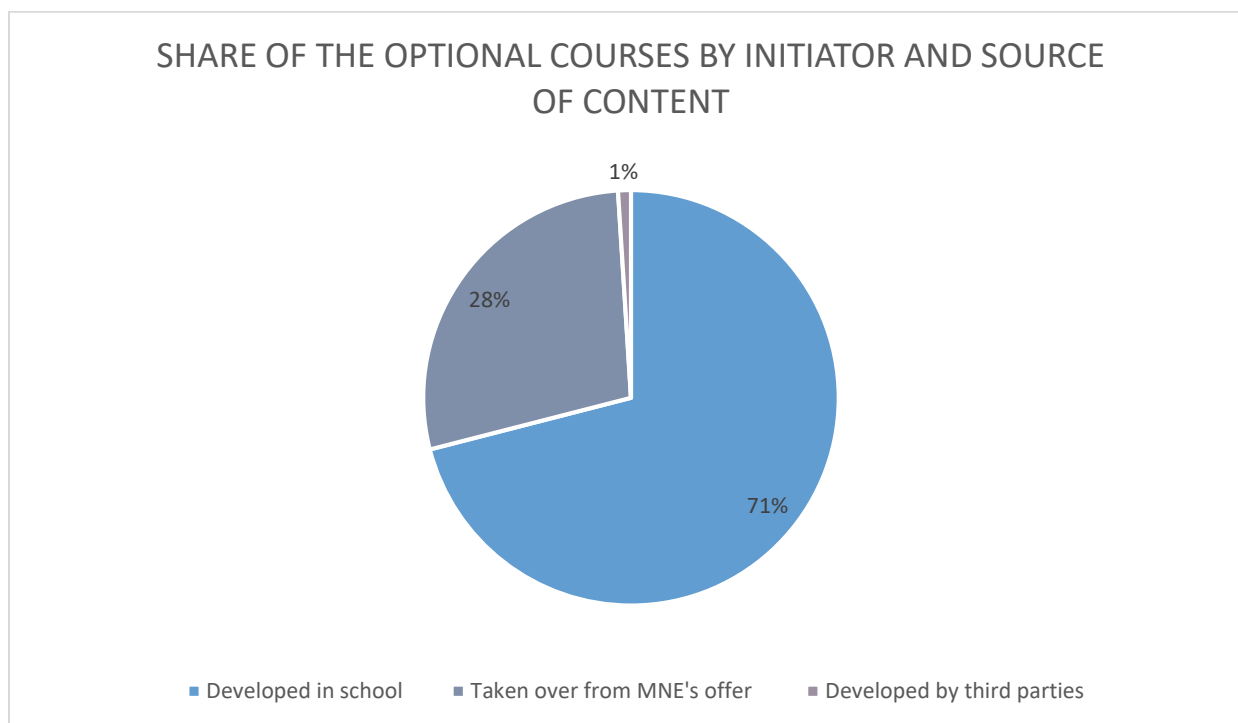
Fig. 9 Share of the optional courses by initiator and source of content

Moreover, the relatively low interest of schools in the offer of the Ministry of Education results from the application of the CSD mechanism. Of the average number of electives in the 91 educational units and 12.2 respectively, only one third is optional, the program of which is part of the general offer offered by the Ministry of National Education to schools. Most of the optional ideas, on average 8 CSDs in each educational unit participating in the research are documented and developed by the teachers, being submitted for endorsement to the County School Inspectorates.

There are teachers who use the CSD to compensate for those subjects or themes that are important but which have been removed from the curriculum. It has to be said that there is a discontinuity and a lack of correlation between high school curriculum and the requirements for admission to college, an example being the grammar of the Romanian language not being studied in high school at any of the study profiles, but it is often encountered in admission exams at faculties with a humanist profile. The optional ones are used to prepare the future students*: "I am a Romanian teacher and giving the fact that there is a big competition to entering the humanities faculties, where the exam is grammar and grammar is not taught in high school, CSD classes are absolutely necessary. Children receive them with great pleasure, they are interested, they are one of the CSDs, where they are very attentive and very active. If it happens that for various reasons, we have skipped a course, the next day we will recover it. If in a class of twenty-eight there are twenty-four who need the class, twenty are present at recovery."* (teacher, Dolj).

5.1.2. Opinions on the relationship with decision-makers and regulations in the field of education, with an impact on the curriculum according to the school's decision

Educational policies and changes coming from the central level, respectively from the Ministry of National Education, are mistrustfully viewed by most teachers. Their perception is that they are not part of a consistent process of educational reform, but aim at constant, but uninterrupted changes that cause much confusion among all stakeholders: "*I do not think that there have been consistent regulations to take us out of the routine. There are those that come with an order if the minister changes (...). In any case, changes in the system are fractured (...)*" (teacher, Cluj). In relation to the CSD, teachers have agreed on a positive aspect: "*As long as you have the freedom to propose, it seems to me democratic and okay, and it is accepted most of the time. It would be a bad thing if it were restrictive, if it were to suggest that you just choose what we propose from this list. As long as you have the freedom to propose whatever you want and it matters to you to be able to implement your optional, it seems right to me.* " (teacher Timis). The overall level of satisfaction with CSD is 54%, which means that almost 1 out of 2 educational institutions receive support from decision-makers at central and local level, and one in three of these units claims they benefit of small and very little support. In fact, the communication between the representatives of the educational units and the decision-makers is among the last identified barriers, as revealed by the research, only 2 out of 91 educational units mentioned the low level of transparency in the communication between the decision-makers and the schools.
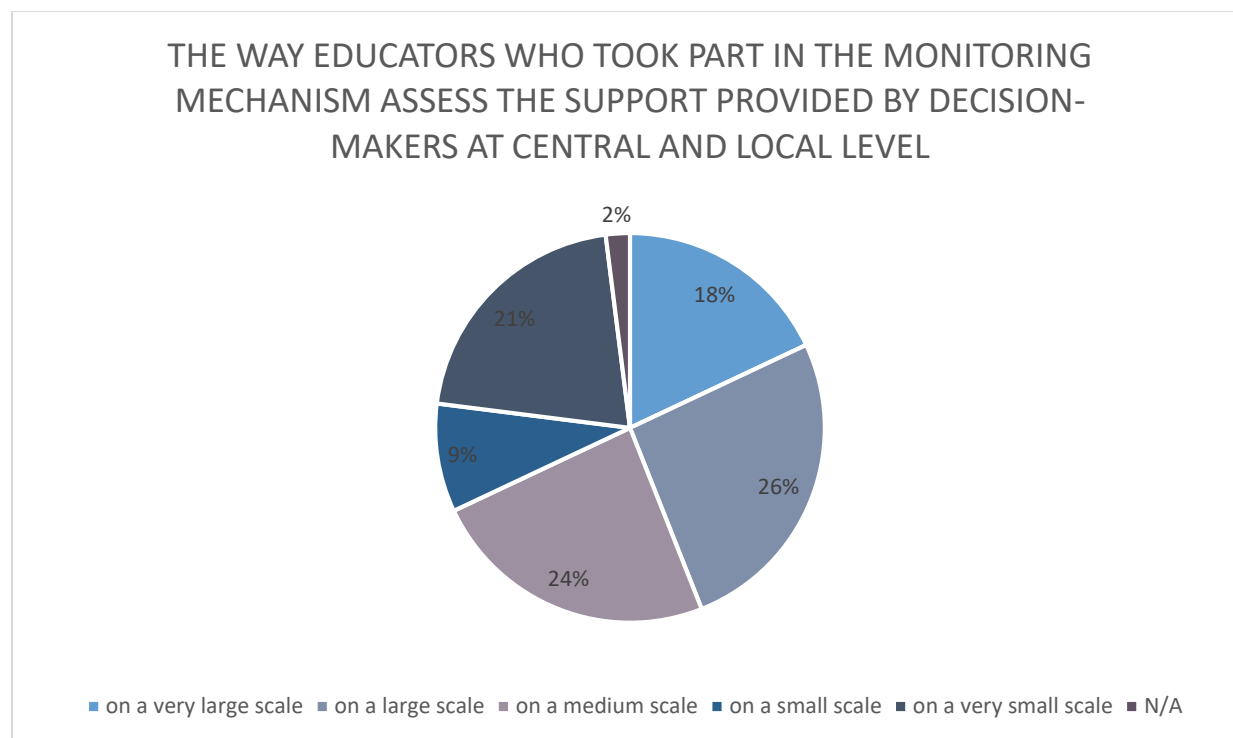

Fig. 10 The way educators who took part in the monitoring mechanism assess the support provided by decision-makers at central and local level

On the other hand, 15 educational units have mentioned the inconsistency or lack of quality of the normative framework in the field of education, which is just over 16% of all those who took part in the research. Asked about what message would the decision-makers convey on the needs and problems encountered in the CSD, some teachers draw attention to the limited resources they have*: "I would ask the ministry to allocate more money for other activities, we want to do something else ... Do it so that you invest in children because you invest in the future."* (teacher, Dolj). Others are accommodated with interventions from the central level with much frustration and even anxiety about the continuing changes in the educational system and tell *"the decision-makers, to decide, not to change so much that we are walking on moving sands, to look at the neighbors and see how education is done there. I have the impression that I'm swimming in troubled waters, that around me I cannot find any island to rest on. Generally, I have certainty in what our decision-makers do, when yesterday some of them decide, today, or tomorrow, others bury and have no stability." (*teacher, Cluj).

Students, however, feel helpless to the educational institutions, pointing to a real resignation over any possibility that their voice may be heard or taken into account: "*we met with people from the minister asking to change one of our teachers and only after one year, parents with memoirs and letters to change her succeeded, so I do not know what can be done to listen to us as children* "(student, Bucharest). On the other hand, among the parents, the approaches taken from the central level are met with much frustration and lack of confidence: *"we would like to have somebody that thinks at our children, because we do not know each year what is happening to this system of education that changes from one side to the other and all things affect the education of our children."* (parent, Cluj). However, in relation to the needs they identify with the students, the CSD is regarded as a real opportunity that could connect the Romanian education system to the European *trends*:

*"I would go straight to the ministry and talk to the minister (...). At least this is a point of change. From here (from the CSD) start and give another picture of what can be done. Here he can try and test any change that can then be applied at a general level, as well as for the assessment, the approach, the content, the schedule, and age. "(*parent, Bucharest). For this, a weak point in the approach so far from many parents' perspective is that *"we have something formal that looks very good and if we put the template we will see that it meets all the requirements, but if we go behind the formalism and see what happens in reality with the children and we find that very few, too few of those formal things really happen*" (parent, Bucharest). Asking how they would undertake a real and coherent change in the educational system in relation to the optional subjects, most of them, as did the teachers, have proposed: *" „to air up the school curriculum, to leave room for optional courses, alternative education, non-formal education, since, thank God, there are many possibilities *"(parent, Cluj)

5.1.3. *Use of optional subjects to complete teaching norms*

A neural point of the talks with teachers about the CSD was the issue of didactic norms. This perspective completely changes any expectation that optional courses are designed and built to meet the needs of pupils' training and development, but on the contrary they are created at school level to be accessible to teachers and to support those who do not have the didactic norm complete: "*in fact, the CSD is actually starting from trying to comply with the number of norms approved by the School Inspectorate (...). The main criterion for CSD implementation is to ensure the number of hours for the holders of the*

educational institution, then to ensure the number rules for competitive professors, and finally, for non-contestants. "(teacher, Iasi).

Fig.11 Data regarding the optional courses developed to complete the didactic norm as it emerged from the application of the CSD

The division of the teaching hours for each tenure teacher depends on the number of pupils in the school, so the decrease in this number is equivalent to the loss of hours that makes it impossible to complete the norm: *"if we have a teacher, I will give an example, which is also the tenure teacher and because of the drop in the number of pupils risks of losing his / her norm, so he / she does not have the maximum number of hours, he / she will receive for the class he / she teaches hours from the CSD. We can not leave without hours an old tenure teacher, a well trained teacher. That is how the hours are divided "* (teacher, Iasi).
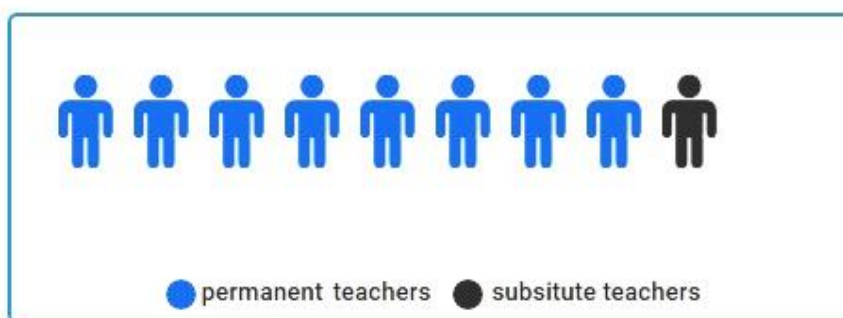
Fig. 12 Share of teachers in the total number of teachers in the educational units participating in the CSD

To avoid such situations, hours allocation and teacher assignments are made by the school leadership without the teachers' involvement: *"if the Board of directors decides so, the director implements it. The decision is taken solely by reason of ensuring the number of hours at the specialized discipline. The teacher has no involvement. The hours allocation and teacher assignments is made by the director together with the heads of the chair."* (teacher, Iasi). In situations where the optional course not only that it cannot

meet the student's needs, but it becomes obvious that it is related to certain disciplines accessible to teachers who need to complete the norm, the process of consulting and choosing by students and parents remains just a formality : "*we read in the application methodology of the optional course and I think that this happens in all Romanian schools, not only fo us and then what should we do according to the law? That's it! The optional courses are suitable for certain disciplines and complete the norms or bring extra hours or other things like this.* "(teacher, Cluj). The impact that such a situation in which the optional course becomes in fact obligatory is described by one of the teachers present in the focus group as follows: *"this also happens [completing the teaching norms with optional lessons], it depends on the class. This is the truth. (...) If children are given a subject that they do not really love, it will not be effective at all,, even if the teacher does their best. It's like taking a medicine that you do not like, you're struggeling to swallow it, and you do not know how to get rid of it sooner. That optional course will have no efficiency, it represents a benefit for the teacher, for the student it is a torture. "*(teacher, Bucharest).

5.1.4. The relationship between the actors involved in the educational process

The relationship between the three categories of actors, teachers - students - parents seems to be quite vulnerable, even tense, and most of the teachers suggested the need to improve communication with parents and students: *"the success of CSD implementation in school, it's about the teacher-student-parents collaboration. (...) We must strive to improve communication! In an era where communication is made less and less directly, one can see the tendency of the use of a wood language, to the detriment of the literary language* " (teacher, Iaşi). In reality, the relationship between the three categories seems vicious on several levels, which affects not only the CSD but also the educational process as a whole: *"there is no collaboration between teachers, students, school leadership. The child is distracted, the teacher applies the rules as much as possible, the parents are unhappy, and if it is a problem with the child, instead of trying to solve that problem, working with the teacher or the head teacher, the parent becomes aggressive. There is no communication. In theory it is, but in practice it is not..* "(teacher, Cluj). On a deeper level, there is an axiological gap and expectations regarding the role and place of education and school in society. This situation is observed even by a teacher: *"we are trying to educate them and give them certain values and unfortunately, society has other values at the moment. Families often have other values. Things that are important to us, they treat them with superficiality and even with contempt. Here are the first conflicts. "*(teacher, Cluj).

As far as the CSD is concerned, beyond being regarded by students with superficiality or as another average of 10, the teachers' sentiment is of maladjustment. Hence the challenge of teachers to rethink their approach entirely, so that the student is interested in school. There are teachers involved in CSD proposal, choosing modern teaching methods, adapting the profile of the class, engaging in extra-curricular activities, and teaching staff who perform their work in terms of norms and qualifications. These differences are most easily felt by students. Besides, there is unanimity among students to say that their pleasure to study a particular discipline is not determined by the degree of difficulty, but by the way the teacher teaches and knows how to make it pleasant: "*I think everything depends on the teacher , if the teacher makes himself being liked, then it gives you the pleasure of learning. The optional course is made by a teacher and he needs to know how to be pleasant and how he can motivate us much more.* "(student, Timiş).

However, there are other types of issues that interfere in this relationship between students and teachers, and teachers are aware of the difference in mentality, family education and media content at which students are exposed without being supervised or guided to critically report to the information they receive, so they would have stopped looking at the teacher as a mediator in acquiring knowledge and values: "*changing the psychology of the Facebook generation is very, very damaging to the educational system. Today the student tells us that they do not allow you to speak to me like this, the student does not greet you, has no respect for the teacher. Changes in the system may not have been so tragic, either at individual wage level or in the teaching process, but student-teacher interpersonal relationships have* been tampered with to an unacceptable extent. I know today we can not talk about rules anymore. (...) society does not know that the student tells you that <I do not care what you say> or does not greet or slam the door in your face or tells you <I'm not in the mood of answering today, I did not do my homework, what can you do? > " (teacher, Timis).

However, there are also ideal situations for teachers, where they manage to be mediators even between students and parents: "*our communication with the students is exceptional. We usually communicate better with our students than parents do ... If you are lucky to develop a relationship, not go by the idea: I, a teacher-superior humab being, you-student. And many times they get confident ... There are many parents coming and asking us to talk to their children, they often went wrong in the relationship with their children.*" (teacher, Dolj). The desirable situation with regard to the CSD for any vocation teacher is to generate common teacher-student-parent experiences, to exploit new areas and to tighten the relationship with students and automatically, get professional satisfaction: *"Madam, I liked this class very much, when do we see each other next time? These are moments that beat any formal feedback and compensate for shortcomings."* (teacher, Bucharest)

The students' perspective on CSD and the relationship with their teachers is therefore ambivalent, at per the expectations and at pragmatic level. Although they want modern teaching techniques, in the use of non-formal education, and sometimes new disciplines, the options are pragmatic: "*we have to sustain the baccalaureate exam at math and then it helps us for an extra hour in which we can develop our capabilities. Other colleagues may choose something that does not help us or does not give us any use as drawing because we do not have to sustain any exam at it"* (student, Timis). In fact, at the level of perception, there is a hierarchy of disciplines that are considered "useful" and "useless" based on the values and education offered by parents, school education, but especially on the constraints of national exams. Thus, in choosing their training, pupils do not seem to consider a future profession they would like, but only passing the 8th grade national examinations and especially the baccalaureate exam.

As far as parents are concerned, the first problem identified by teachers is to withdraw them from the traditional role of educating pupils in the spirit of values with which they have to come to school. In the perspective of teachers, parents expect school to make up for the time and effort made at home to fill the gap between them and their children: *"there is a very big issue at the level of parents who are busy at work, the child is left somewhere in school's care from morning school until 16.00 or 18.00. High school classes choose their activities in order to complement this, but the child is actually harassed. In the small classes, the child has no childhood because he is left at school until 16.00 or until 18.00 after dinner, when he arrives home at night what else can he do more? Then surely it is very difficult to compensate for the need for what you can do with your skills".* (teacher, Cluj).
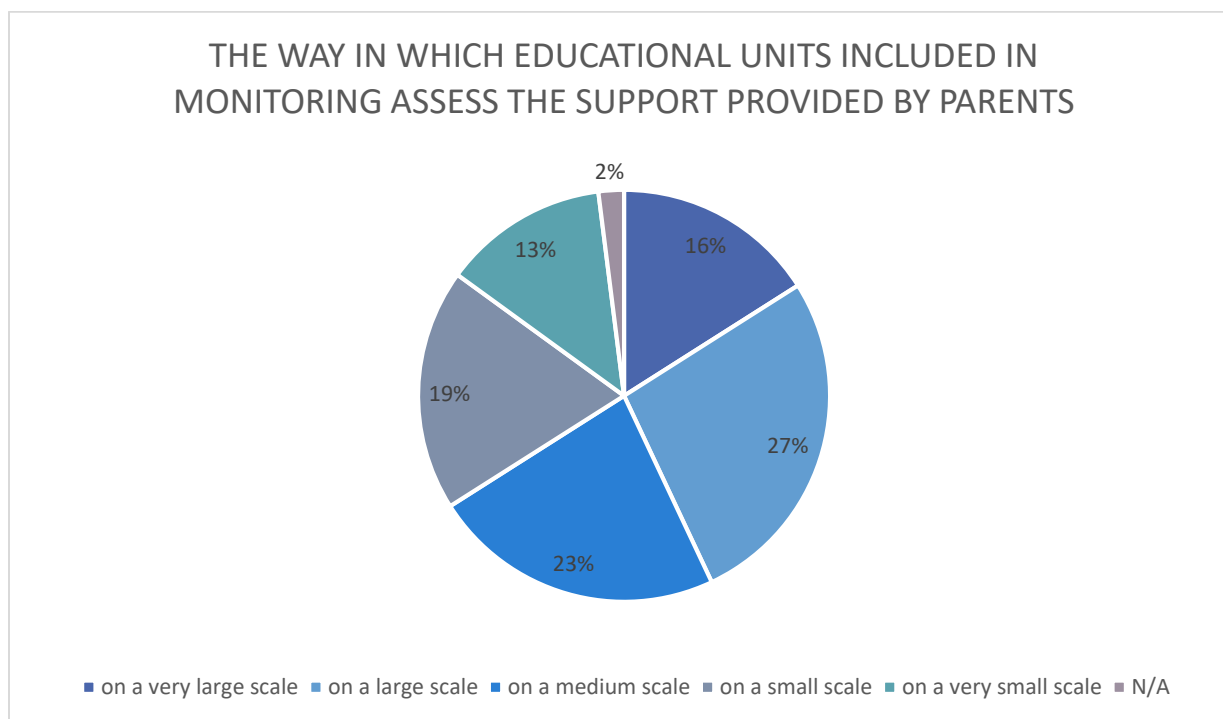
THE WAY IN WHICH EDUCATIONAL UNITS INCLUDED IN
MONITORING ASSESS THE SUPPORT PROVIDED BY PARENTS

Fig. 13 The way in which educational units included in monitoring assess the support provided by parents

The parents' contribution to the educational process is low as teachers and some of the pupils observe. In general, they do not use the dedicated program for consultation and opportunities to get involved in school activities. There is a dysfunctional communication between them and teachers, at the expectation level, parents tend to exacerbate the role of the school in the preparation of the child and delegate some of their own responsibility and their own role in the child's education to school: "t*he fact that the society is not ready for this way of thinking. Rather, they choose not to be responsible and enroll the child in school as they know the state is supposed to offer and do not get involved with added value in the school offer. To come up with proposals, with resources, to bring ideas, to bring people and to create communication networks between schools, between institutions. Parents should be more involved, and we need to make them understand, educate them to understand that today education is not a strict student-teacher relationship*, but there are three actors involved: parent-teacher-student. All three count in this equation! "(teacher, Timis). Instead, children's education becomes a target of personal performance, a matter of competitiveness and a family status, leaving the competencies or wishes of students who spend most of the day at school in the second plan. That's why even the teachers' perception is that parental support is below average. Out of the 91 school units that took part in monitoring, only 43% believe that they can rely heavily and heavily on parental support for CSD.

Teachers insist that parents 'responsibility is to get involved in students' schooling, to propose and monitor the way they go through the subject matter, and not just to give interest in school results following the scoring: "*personally, with regard to the CSD I think the parent*, *firstly*, *does not realize he can have a word and force the school to offer something interesting. (...) This responsible discussion and debate on the educational issue of children is a formal one at the level of papers signed by the parent and the parent I think, it's not a matter that he does not care, I think he does not know. << Did I send you to school? Did I send you there? Go and do what you need to do! >> And because they have no time, they aim and want for*

their child what they think is the best. As a result, he enrolls the child to a prestigious college, trains him <<go to school, come back from school, what did you do, was it okay? Ok! >> ". (teacher, Cluj). Other parents, on the contrary, interfere with school activities, and in particular with the CSD, the parents' tendency to opt for deepening optional courses to replace home-payed classes in order to prepare for national exams. Teachers' perception is that parents take into account what they consider to be the children's needs in terms of education and less what their students or teachers think: "*we choose what the parents demand or indirectly impose. If I go and tell the parent that an optional course about the Holocaust would be useful to the child, he will laugh in my face. His child needs math, informatics. What does he need personal development, character cultivation for ?! This is the main challenge. Somehow, we do not have to adjust to what we want to propose, but to what we are asked for. Unfortunately, society is so pragmatic, so focused on tangible values that some of our ideas seem, let's not say ridiculous, but exaggerated*" (teacher, Timis).
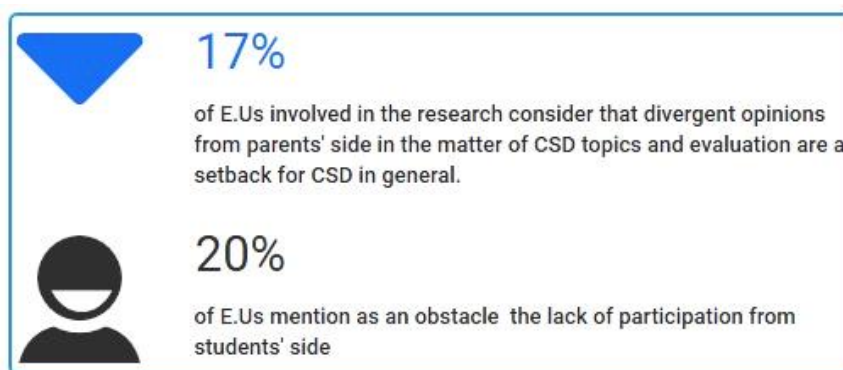

Fig. 14 Obstacles in the relationship between teacher-students-parents and their weight as they emerged from the application of the CSD mechanism

The lack of effective communication, involvement and mutual inability to meet the expectations of the other parties, overlapping the frustrations generated by the system as a whole, lead to the irreparable erosion of the relations between the students - teachers - parents: "*I think we do not matter, I think that society considers us unnecessary officials in a process where from a productive point of view, we do not count. All society is dissatisfied with us, and you see, students are functional illiterates but everybody seems to forget at the fact that in the educational process there are three factors involved: parents - students - teachers. But when we are held accountable, we are the only ones to blame. (...) We are but civil servants, we are not those lightmen who need to be seen with respect and obeyed because they carry a system of values that they convey out of goodwill, not necessarily out of duty, maybe out of love, but we no longer have values in society. Unfortunately, in society, we are officials who do not have to bother, speak respectfully, have no claim, no opinion, and especially, not set any standards.*" (teacher Timis). The status of the teacher today reflects the way in which it was invested in Romanian education, both from the perspective of the motivation of the active and potential teaching staff, and from the point of view of the values that a society with aspirations as big as the Romanian one, cultivated in the last three decades on education.

As long as the remuneration of teachers remains unsatisfactory, parents suspect teachers and accuse them of lack of training; failure to adapt to the expectations and needs of their children, the profession of teacher will not become attractive to those with pedagogical vocation, but only a compromise of those who

are not entitled to br at the chair. From this equation, the main losers are current and future students: "*it's not about the system; it's about our approach, the parents, the new generations of parents because they want everything from us without helping us. They are always suspecting us, you see so many media reports, so how many of them highlight the qualities that we have? The many activities we do, hundreds of activities." (*teacher, Cluj). The idea of a parent's school is viewed with opening of teachers, and it is necessary to correct the disagreements that arise between them and their parents: "*for this a school of parents is necessary, in Romania there is no school for parents*" (teacher, Cluj). Alternate ways of mediating communication among the actors of the Romanian educational process, especially among teachers - students - parents, are also considered: "*in the West the parent is concerned. We also have a counseling role for parents. They do not come in person, they prefer to call.*" (teacher, Dolj).

Beyond this complicated relationship between teacher-student-parents, even relationships between teachers and parents are heterogeneous. First of all, teacher relationships have been affected when teachers who chose to implement CSDs dropped out of their classes, which later on were taken over by other teachers, and so there were disagreements and competitions among teachers. Secondly, "*parents are not united. Some say that the classes are not well done; others say that children have too much to read. Last year in mathematics, some complained that they were learning too much and that there was too much homework and too many and too many, and others were saying, "Give them more!"* (teacher, Cluj).

5.1.5. *Relationship with stakeholders - How do we make the voice of the school heard?*

Involvement of stakeholders is a goal that all categories of research participants have been considering. Some schools even enjoy solid partnerships with cultural, economic, and other authorities, volunteers, non-governmental organizations, and companies that support the development of optional classes by providing alternative venues and experts invited temporarily or permanently to hold presentations and initiate pupils in subjects not previously attended by school. Stakeholder support for optional classes as well as extra-curricular opportunities that they provide are external resources that are always welcome in Romanian schools, as outlined in section 5.4.2.B of this report.

There are two categories of stakeholders, the media and non-governmental organizations that can make the voice of the Romanian school heard through information and advocacy activities, but the teacher's perception of this relationship is very heterogeneous. On the one hand, schools welcome the involvement of the non-governmental sector in the implementation of extra-curricular projects and support for elective schools, on the other hand, in promoting school interests, non-governmental organizations are not seen as a representative voice. Some teachers attribute to NGOs that, in the context of systemic and political changes, they have no consistency and continuity in addressing decision-makers and programs, and the results they are promoting are inconsistent and inadequate: „*unfortunately NGOs do not have a finality, I do not see the goal of many NGOs. I do not see the usefulness of NGOs in charge of education, what have they changed? What have they changed? And funds they had. It's the same thing for decades. (...) NGOs are the same; they can bring continuity and struggle with educational factors and influence things. In an authentic democracy it does not matter who owns the power, the fact that counts is who is the opposition. And I'm not talking about politics; I'm talking about civil society. Civil society is dead in our country. Unfortunately NGOs have no purpose. What has changed*?" (teacher, Dolj). A similar barometer follows from the application of the CSD mechanism, and the responses from the 91 educational units must be a

warning that there is too little action made by non-governmental organizations. 60% of educational establishments claim that the support received from NGOs and institutional and private partners is small and very small. 8 schools have not benefited from such collaboration, and only 13% are satisfied with supporting and collaborating with the non-governmental sector and external partners.
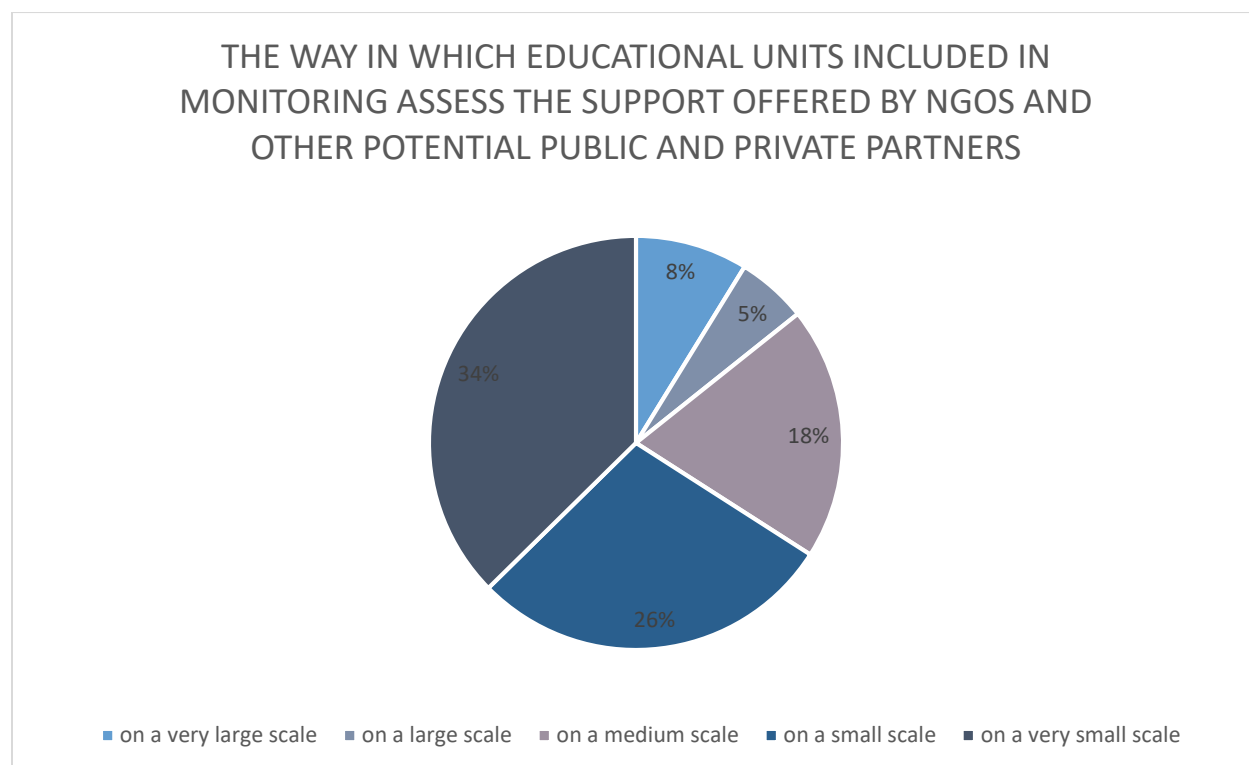

THE WAY IN WHICH EDUCATIONAL UNITS INCLUDED IN MONITORING ASSESS THE SUPPORT OFFERED BY NGOS AND OTHER POTENTIAL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS

- on a very large scale
- on a large scale
- on a medium scale
- on a small scale
- on a very small scale

Fig. 15 The way in which educational units included in monitoring assess the support offered by NGOs and other potential public and private partners

Where the non-governmental sector is involved, the successes already registered by NGOs are well received by the school, provided that advocacy efforts to introduce optional courses that meet the real needs of today's students have not taken into account the fact that there is no human resource specialized in schools to carry out many of the new optional courses, and the support they offer to the school is unfortunately limited by the lack of school resources to remunerate the involvement of external experts: "*financial education was approved three or four years ago and is the result of interventions by NGOs based on projects made over time. Let's say it's OK, it is validated by educational projects, but who does it? I think it's very important that the CSD is made by someone who has to do with the field because is useless for me, a math teacher, to go and teach body language, I should stick to mathematical languages.* "(teacher, Timis). From the perspective of teachers, non-governmental organizations benefit from the knowledge and resources to bring about a change in the Romanian educational system, but their efforts are sometimes regarded as unchained in many of the school's needs or problems: "t*o get involved, I have only seen them given speeches on television. Come to the bottom line, talk to the students and the teachers. (...) If you are an NGO, come you too. I've been teaching for 10 years in this high school and no one came. I mean, come here to see what is going on, not just on television.*" (teacher, Bucharest). Beyond the encouragement and

openness of schools to receive non-governmental organizations to help them disseminate messages in public space, NGOs are also seen as an immutable resource of innovation and improvement in school, giving the fact that investing in teacher education to adapt to new generations of children and challenges is ridiculous: "*NGOs could support us, come up with news on different themes if they can even from abroad, because there are so many, and we can all benefit from this, teachers and children.* " (teacher, Timis).

Fig.16 The availability of research institutions to enter into partnerships as a solution to increase CSD capacity

The media, on the other hand, in the perspective of teachers, only aggravates the conflicts and tensions between school, on the one hand, students and parents, on the other. Teachers accuse the negative image that the media promotes about Romanian school, but without putting the reflection and the many examples to follow: teachers 'efforts to compensate for lack of resources, pupils' performance and even educational projects run with the support of NGOs and of other institutions and companies: "*what does the media do? Why doesn't it show the good things that are done because they are the most. It should gine examples of good things, we have so many of them. This profession cannot be done by anyone. We do not work with objects, with a metal that if you misinterpreted, you melted and you reshape it. Too bad we are not appreciated, pitty, that's my pain.* " (teacher, Cluj). The consequence of such a way of reporting, teachers say, is the negative perception of school perceptions, which in the long run contributes to diminishing the confidence of students and parents in school, and makes the teaching job a less attractive one.

5.2. CSD and procedural aspects for endorsement: documents, processes, communication

5.2.1. Information, communication and support of teachers in advising and conducting optional subjects

To advise a CSD, the relationship between schools and county school inspectorates is described by teachers as performing. The Inspectorates provide information on the procedure and timing for submitting curriculum endorsement files to the school's decision: "*CSI only follows the legality of the file, not the content of the matter. CSI sends information to schools on the content of the file, the steps to be taken, the submission period, the notice period, the applicable legislation, the forms to be filled in.* " (teacher, Iasi).

There are also situations where the County School Inspectorates make recommendations for improving the documentation and retransmit the file for the school to integrate these recommendations: "*they can be rejected to be corrected. The specialist inspector is the one who reads the file and can intervene with an idea in the learning activities, in the bibliography.* " (teacher, Galati). Teachers presenting focus groups described the communication and relationship process for endorsing a CSD as being functional at school level and in collaboration with the school inspectorate: "*in connection with the opening the leadership has, it is a team that comes in support of the teaching staff, I have easily obtained the decision of the Teaching Board and the Director for the deployment of the optional course. At the inspectorate, on the day of the audience, I had a meeting scheduled and I had no difficulty. Our Territorial Officer supports us. I can say that I am a happy case."* (teacher, Bucharest)

Internally, each school develops its own model of collaboration in committees and teacher platforms so that it can exploit all the resources available for drawing up the documentation and then running the CSD: "*We have in the school a communication platform, first of all, an e-mail on which all the documentation is placed, and from there, on chairs, on commissions, within the pedagogical center are discussed the problems that arise with regard to the CSD* " (teacher, Timis). They argue that for the most part, information and support for the design of a CSD comes from the school and colleagues, each having the obligation to be informed, and then it is discussed in the specialized committees: "*Teachers have regular meetings, there are specialized circles and we are made aware. Then, secondly, is your teacher's obligation to self-inform you.*" (teacher, Dolj).

Teachers track with interest and online learning platforms and sometimes get involved in school networks that include more than one learning unit to share experience and ideas, but this practice was only mentioned in isolation during focus groups: „*We are also tracking online platforms, discussion groups, educational forums. We are informing ourselves all the time. Specifically, we keep in touch with the high schools in the country and we have exchanges of mutual experience in which we learn from others what we could do in this matter* " (teacher, Timis). Regarding the possibility of engaging in peer learning and contributing to the content of educational platforms, especially online, there is a great deal of reluctance on the part of teachers.

Many of those in focus groups have admitted that they do not want to share the materials and best practices they have developed in online learning platforms because of the plagiarism experience they have experienced in the past: „*there were proposed a bunch of materials that were lost. (...). This issue of copyright is very important because education has somehow benefited from these programs that were abused for the first time, it could not be done otherwise, they have done their work on their basis.* Then they were simply used. As it happens here, they are the authors who compose these exercises and who compose items and then they appear in some books. It is outrageous, how they can one simply be taken just like that and someone publishes them in a book afterwards. "(teacher, Timis). The same situation was also mentioned in Dolj, teachers are reluctant to access and contribute to online educational platforms for fear that the research work and the elaboration of a curriculum at the school's decision will be misused by college teachers who have made a job of publishing textbooks and school books: „*when you upload something in the online environment, anyone has access, but having anyone access to that CSD, anyone can make it theirs at anytime, which is not ok because you are the author (...) and many times, people who usually do this thing of publishing online, do not want to publish it for free, because it is a research work, a work of elaboration* "(teacher, Dolj).

5.2.2. Opinions on the documents and steps in the process of approving the curriculum at the school's decision

In general, the entire CSD approval procedure is provided by the County School Inspectorate, and at the level of the school, it is complemented by internal procedures regarding the preparation of documentation, consultation of students and parents, an internal timetable, the persons and committees involved, etc. This internal organization may, depending on the school, be mentioned in the organization and functioning regulations, in the manual of procedures or in the institutional strategy. With regard to the entire process for endorsement of a CSD, there is a general opinion shared by all teachers that schools and teachers are bound to a sophisticated work because of the abundant documentation to be prepared and the high level of bureaucracy. This is a demotivating factor for many teachers who, though having ideas for optional courses, do not want to put them into practice, because of the enormous work they have to do in drawing up the endorsement file: "*I think the bureaucratic problems are the greatest. The process until the CSD endorsement. When you have a passion and want to make a minimal difference, I do not think you can. The bureaucratic barrier brings you to the point where you do not really want to actually ... ask yourself what you can choose and prefer not to go through the endorsement process for bureaucratic reasons*". (teacher, Timis).

33 out of 91
consider the administrative requirements in the CSD approval process as a setback

36 out of 91
support the idea of reducing the process of approval for CSD

35 out of 91
support the idea that the County School Inspectorates should extend the approval notification for CSDs implemented serveral years in a row, without going again through the whole procedure

Fig. 17 The opinions of the educational units participating in the research on the endorsement process

Two of the obstacles identified by the teaching staff involved in these procedures are, on the one hand, the obligation to endorse the optional course every year, although they are teachers who have developed a curriculum that has practically entered the school's educational offer and is run in the same way each year, on the other hand, the need to give an optional list which is drawn up in accordance with the requirements

of admission to college and which, some years ago, were part of the compulsory curriculum: "I find that there is an extreme way of developing it (...) *if I consider this curriculum in line with what college students are asked to do, why do I have to go through so much*?" (teacher, Dolj).

In addition, the obligation to upload in electronic format, on the online educational resources platform, any documents regarding disciplines and school results, is seen as a duplication of work and a hindrance to the reporting process. Otherwise, an electronic system designed to centralize data and simplify the system is seen as a burden because of the cumbersome data loading: "*You must have an extremely harsh documentation* (...) *a multitude of such documents you have to draw up as well and when it was not enough, starting this year, where we had to make these documents in writing, which was simpler, now they need to be done electronically. Now they need to be loaded on that platform of open educational resources.* " (teacher, Dolj).

5.2.3. *Informing students and parents: the consultation process for identifying needs*

Formally or procedurally, information regarding optional classes is firstly done in the form of consultation and identification of students' needs. Schools enjoy the freedom in the process prior to developing the endorsement file of the curriculum at the school's decision, each school setting being able to determine how the consultation is being conducted or identifying students' needs with regard to optional subjects. These issues are usually provided by internal school documents: "*there is a procedure for designing a CSD, and it is public, there is also a person responsible for the CSD in the school*, *the curriculum committee."* (teacher, Galati) and "*it can be found in the manual of procedures, it is mentioned in the operating manual the elaboration, not only the elaboration, everything related to the strategy, of the CSD implementation at the level of the school* "(teacher, Cluj). The responsibility for preparing the files for submission to the County School Inspectorate and the monitoring of the consultation process and the need for optional analysis is usually the responsibility of a CSD methodical committee: "*there is a school committee dealing with the collection of offers and the generation of initial phases, developing questionnaires of interest for children and then processing them. I do not think they went further to their qualitative analysis because they simply limited themselves to the quantitative analysis of children's needs.*" (teacher, Cluj).

In many cases, there is neither an organized process nor a mandatory need analysis. Where undertaken, the analysis of needs in which students or parents mention what they would prefer to the next year is done through ad hoc proposals that parents can do at classroom sessions, but this does not guarantee the preparation and the development of the proposed option: "(...) *they have the possibility that in the meeting*, *besides our proposals, the parents can bring arguments if what they propose is suitable for all or not*" (teacher, Dolj). When done in an organized way, questionnaires are used to analyze needs in which students and parents are asked what optional course they would like to find in the following school year: "*we start from the identification of needs, some questionnaires apply to the parents, groups of students, the proposal is made and it's passed on for the inspectorate approval of the curriculum and the approval in the teaching and administrative councils.*" (teacher, Cluj) and "*it was more a questionnaire, there were questions like: give us 3 examples of optional course you would like to have in school? Or: what teacher would you like to have in class? Or: did the optional classes of previous years were useful or not. Things like that*" (student, Bucharest).

There are situations in which the needs analysis phase is omitted in favor of specific proposals of optional subjects, from which pupils and their parents must choose - as a rule, a predefined list drawn up by the teaching staff is provided: "(...) *at high school the studens chose the CSD they want to participate in. Brochures are made to help students and parents be informed. The main teacher presents in class proposals for CDS to be selected for classroom teaching.* " (teacher, Iaşi). In most of the schools, the responsibility for communicating optional proposals rests with the main teachers of each class: "*it depends very much on the main teacher, he is the one who communicates all things. We have an e-mail group with the main teacher through which we communicate absolutely everything, discipline, news, programs, departures, all sorts of things.* "(parent, Cluj). Depending on the organizational culture of each educational unit, the roles can be very diverse in the communication process: secretariat, school boards, school leaders, school heads, heads of departments, heads of departments, parents 'councils, parents' associations, teachers, boards of directors, pupils, parents, educational service providers, etc. - they can all be involved in the process of consulting the school curriculum.
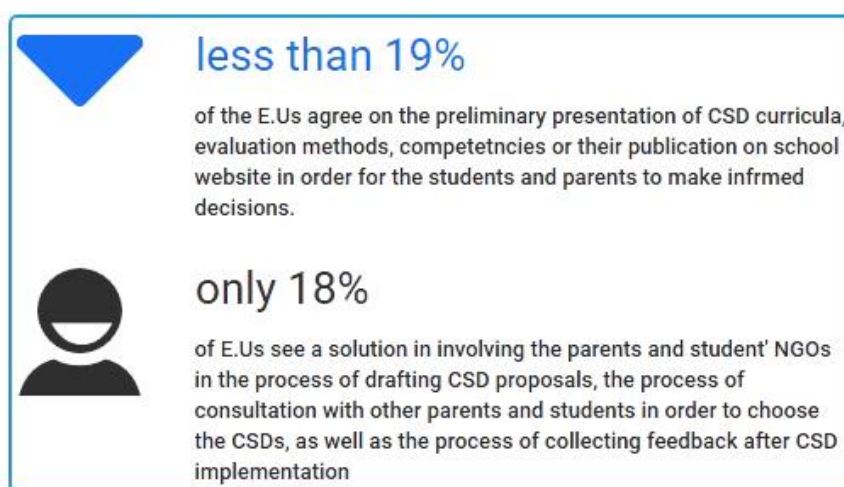

Fig. 18 The opinion of the educational units involved in the monitoring of the proposed information and transparency solutions

Most parents know nothing about the CSD and do not associate it with optional subjects. Others have heard from the main teachers, other parents, or are only informed by their children. Some of them are looking for details on the internet in order to understand the context in which this kind of program takes place in their children's schools / school, but they do not have enough explicit support for understanding the CSD mechanism as a whole (its role, explicit relationship with objectives education, etc.): "*I was in the Parents' Association at school, they did not even announce there, not even once a semester, they were telling you the facts and did not inform you*" (parent, Bucharest). They want details to make informed decisions and make an option, and therefore ask to know the curriculum before making the decision to enroll the child but also to guide the children during the CSD: "*there is no curriculum communicated to the parents as to know how to put the child on the right path* "(parent, Bucharest) and "*parents are interested in being involved in the school activities of the children and in the decision to choose which subjects to be taught.*" (teacher, Bacau).

The perception of some of the parents about their communication with the school about the CSD is that the information remains unclear, giving the impression of passing the responsibility between the school and

the school inspectorates: "*If the director is open he receives you dearly if he has to deal with formalism, it can take up to five weeks to get approval, and I do not know where to go with the paper and what the procedure is. Things stop there, and any enthusiasm from the parents will face this formalism. There are already few situations in which someone succeeds in taking things further. I think the whole system must be rethought for it to be functional.* "(parent, Bucharest) and at the inspectorate: "*you can go to the inspectorate and they will send you to school: go to the school lady, and ask ... No, they do not know to give you a clear answer.*" (parent, Bucharest)

On the other hand, the teachers present in the research activities claim to parents that "*some are completely disinterested, they do not come to these meetings, have no point of view, do not send feedback, they are not interested. Others are reluctant, why do they need ecological education, better study mathematics from another point of view and you can not penetrate with a new idea*" (teacher Timis). The same problem of availability of parents to be informed and involved is even reported by some of the parents in Timis County: "*there are parents who are part of the school committee and they know more. Unfortunately, the communication between them and the other parents seems to me quite... Sometimes the information from the meetings is not communicated* " (parent, Timiş) and" *we need more parents to be involved. There is a lot of passivity around us: <<It's good they are having the class, let it be>>. And I speak personally because I, myself, am not too involved; I think we could make an improvement here.*" (parent, Timis).

As far as students are concerned, many do not know data about the curriculum according to the school decision, about the registration deadline, and all options at school level, where there is a possibility to opt for and optional course from the other classes: „*there was an optional course for us but I found much later about the registration deadline and I felt sorry about missing it.*" (student, Bucharest). Among the students in the focus groups, some have admitted that they do not differentiate between some optional subjects and the common trunk: "*in 5th grade I had an optional class of mathematics*; (...) *I did not know it was optional. When I asked at the end of that semester about it, I found out that it was an optional course. The problem was that we did not know, we acted like normal class, we gave tests, we even gave our semestrial paper, so many of us, because it was mathematics and we were not that good, many of us had a not so good average ... and it was an optional class".* (pupil, Bucharest). This is due to the deficient nature of the information they receive. However, some of the students are not consulted at all about optional subjects in the needs analysis phase, so the CSD educational offer provided by the school is often perceived as unsatisfactory: "*no. Nobody come to ask us and I did not hear of a teacher to say "look, I'll give you a peace of paper for you to write what you want to do in an extra hou*r" (student, Cluj).

In order to choose an optional course correctly, most of the focus group students suggested that teachers teaching optional classes make short class presentations of the optional one: "*teachers could come at each optional optional class to tell us what it is and how it will be done*" (pupil, Timis), and where this is not possible, this task should be of the main teacher: "*it is good that the main teacher knows our opinions and what we would like to deepen or what we would like to change*" (student , Timiş). Indeed, even some of the teachers recognize that the way schools are communicating with students is sometimes lacking in transparency and ideally would be the involvement and participation of students in school-based decision-making: "(...) *students would very much like another type of approach. The students' council works a lot, goes, gets involved, is often misinformed, but gets involved and wants a change because they're bored. They want something new, it's natural, young people have that spirit of change, the need for affirmation, and we encourage them to do so and we have a good collaboration with the student (...)"* (teacher, Timis).

Against the backdrop of the lack of clearly defined communication procedures and communication roles in school, CSD information is often syncopated, messages remain at the level of personal perception or understanding, as filtered by schools or disseminators: "*Children go home, they say to their parents, and*

it escalates into conflict. And if in this background there is usually a bad communication with parents, the teacher [from the optional class] does not come to the meeting with the parents to explain, *then in the case he will require an optional class, from the start it will be a failure. First of all, teachers should know the issues and solve them. Otherwise things can escalate even harder, scandal in school, complaints to the Inspectorate and the Ministry.*" (teacher, Bucharest). A simple solution identified by teachers is to maximize the transparency of all CSD information - procedures, processes, offers, calendar, and so on, in an online environment that everyone can easily access: "*I would put them on the site of the unit*, if someone was not there, to be seen online, then all parents look and choose, I think it would be a possibility of promotion". (teacher, Bucharest).

5.3. Opinions and perceptions related to the process of choosing CSD in school: acquired content and skills

5.3.1. Content Identification

Identifying the most appropriate content to be studied at the CSD is a topic that does not attract the consensus of the focus group participants, not just between the categories of participants but also among the exponents of the same category. The diversity of opinions on the content of the options is evenly distributed across the regions in which the research was conducted. The main problem is reconciling the need for training for exams and deepening disciplines from the common trunk to practical training and new disciplines. There is, however, a consensus among students, parents and teachers on CSD content for terminal classes when all categories select optional ones that support further baccalaureate and national testing: "*some want more math lessons*, *others Romanian lessons because they pass the exam. If they could only do mathematics and romanian language, history and logic, it would be exceptional. They want a class which is given at the exam. An hour of meditation.*" (teacher, Dolj) and the opinion of a student:*" This year we have chosen to prepare for the assessment because we are in the 8th grade and all 20 children have chosen to prepare ourselves.*" (pupil, Bucharest)
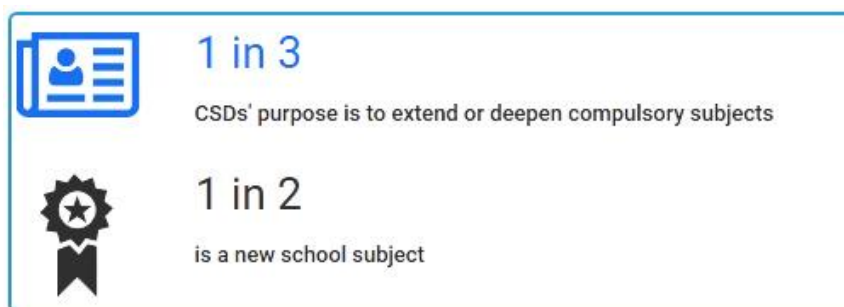

Fig. 19 The typology of the options implemented in the educational units participating in the research

Beyond the optionals that deepen the content of the examination subjects, the students' expectations on the subject are focused on the development of practical skills, so they are less concerned with the actual informational content, but more about the punctual results and the skills they learn: "*I assume that the activities these are good for exams, but some should also help us to become adults, to show us how to get by, for example, economy*". (student, Bucharest) or "*education also means practice, non-formal education (...) about life, about the world (...) It can change one of your ideas (...) I learned something that happened and I did not know. The optional class is the same as a regular class.*" (student Dolj). Parents' perspective tends to be similar: "*a lot of theory, little practice, we are not involved in matter, what can I say, or choose materials that involve practical work*" (parent, Dolj).

Another recurring observation about the content of the optional is the degree of superficiality or inadequacy of the curriculum in relation to the actual class or student needs: "*in high school I'll go to Mathematical Informatics profile and it would be nice to do actual Informatics but it's not enough what we are doing, it leaves us a lot to play on the computer and it does not teach us the things we should learn. At the end the average we have, we do not deserve.*"(Student, Cluj) and a similar situation in Bucharest: "*we have ICT optional, and I also do Informatics lessons outside the school. There is a gigantic difference between what we do there and what we do at school. There we have already learned things professionally, coding, doing things like this, and at school we learn how to write a document in Word. I do not think we need to learn this.*"(student, Bucharest). On the other hand, even some of the students admit that optional subjects are treated superficially, "*if I should talk openly, a student who would like, let's say, an optional class about development would not give a damn about it, because if you look closely, the arts and the music class are unappreciated, and we must have this aesthetically shaped side formed since we are young. Teachers, unfortunately, did not form this sense, but if we should talk about a personal development class, students unfortunately will not appreciate it.*" (student Timis). One reason is that, currently, students observed the lack of adaptability of the Romanian school to the requirements of the labor market from prospective students and employees and therefore aimed to study only subjects pragmatic or develop skills and abilities to acquire information with practical applicability and not theoretical or aesthetic.

Students would like to study legal education, financial education, first aid, sex education, journalism, theater, languages, intercultural communication, vocational guidance and personal development, learn to play musical instruments and go through arts, design, architecture, culinary art. At the same time, they opt for activities and content where they can work in a team and are stimulated by experimental learning. The teacher's vision is that sometimes the students' wishes exceed the offer that the Romanian public school has the capacity to offer and lead to unrealistic expectations regarding the optional: "*there are also children who have unrealistic expectations, want Japanese, Korean and who knows what else. It sounds very nice on paper, it's great, but it cannot be done. Here the problem is the system, let's say a whole class wanting to participate, that would mean one hour a week and we will need a Japanese teacher to come one hour a week in a class, which is very difficult to achieve. Teacher does not like to go through several schools to complete their norm. Especially if the schools are different parts of the city ... for those two hours that are very poorly paid, you cannot go.*" (teacher, Bucharest). However, there are optional classes that are already being successfully implemented in some schools: "*we can choose financial education in the 4th or 3rd grade; we had some meetings with those from the National Bank. Extraordinary! I did not know the children to have such notions or to ask so many questions, to manifest themselves. I think we have to document ourselves so that we do not disappoint them, because we have to know almost everything, or together with them."* (teacher, Dolj).

Beyond each party's expectations, students' perceptions and opinions about optional discipline often assimilate it as a compulsory subject that can be agreed precisely through the need to work extra for tests and exams, but it is not always what they would like study: "*optional class is an extra class, as we are talking about mathematics that is in the baccalaureate or biology again*" (student, Timis) or "*I have had*

optional courses all related to the school: physics, informatics, biology , chemistry, and so on. This year we were given four hours of choice: physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics and we had to choose for next year." (student, Bucharest). For students, it is important for the optional class to overcome the formalism of the school, perceived, as too cantonable in theory, and to open up horizons to the themes that are not traditionally addressed in the classroom: *"(Optional class) should be much more organized, better presented and not the same stuff we do 30 hours a week. You get bored with them at some point."* (student, Bucharest).

On the other hand, the teachers' constraints on the degree of loading of the curriculum determine the content that is proposed and studied in the optional disciplines: "*we use the CSD as a new discipline or an hour because the matter is very much, very heavy, I speak regarding my subject of teaching, where the number of hours is very small. (...) where we have only one hour a week, although the profile is Informatics, unlike mathematics where they have four hours, matter is very heavy, it is a new matter that they have not done so far in gymnasium and at one hour a week you do not have time to teach them to think* "(teacher, Dolj). Basically, depending on the subjects involved, because there are optional cross-disciplinary ones, content is reached that helps to fix the other notions acquired in the disciplines of the common trunk. Where CSD is used to teach something else, teachers tend to be more delighted with the results of their effort because of the positive feedback they receive from students: "*CSD classes have practical applicability. Students are having fun at an optional class comparing to regular classes. An alternative village history is taught in history. Students are happy to go and relax in class. The teacher is more active and relaxed. At Informatics they learn applications, they play.*"(teacher, Iasi)

5.3.2. Identifying skills

Competencies are perceived by all categories of participants as the core around which an optional must be constructed, but in theory they are the basis of all disciplines design. In December 2006, the European Parliament and the Council issued a recommendation on key competences that were pursued by future lifelong learning and training programs in European countries. In this recommendation, competencies have been defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that all individuals need for personal development and self-realization, and ensuring active citizenship, social inclusion and employment[10]. There have been defined and explained, by reference to knowledge, skills and attitudes, eight key competences: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical skills and basic skills in science and technology; digital competence; learn to learn; social and civic competences; spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship; sensitization and cultural expression. Some of these skills are of interest to Romanian school only as extra-curricular activities, such as awareness raising and cultural expression or learning how to learn[11]. Other skills are insufficiently developed on the basis of the weight of the disciplines required for these competences in the common trunk: civic education and entrepreneurial education.

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[10] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962 / EC) accessed in October 2018. URL: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32006H0962&from=EN
[11] Institute of Educational Sciences, Descriptive Key European Competences. Translation and adaptation following the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962 / EC). Accessed in October 2018.URL: http://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Competente-cheie-europene.pdf

The fundamental problem that these competences raise is that the Romanian school assures the achievement of only the first level of training in acquiring competence, namely the acquisition of knowledge, the skills and attitudes indicators being insufficiently found in the curriculum. This deficiency is felt by pupils and their parents: "*In our school there is only information, education is not done*. (...) *as a parent I would like my child to come and tell me*: "*Mom, there is an optional for education for tolerance*, *peace education, health education, knowledge and care of the environment, environmental protection*, *time spent outside, knowledge of the surroundings, the city, activities of all kinds in which the children can socialize better, know better and make a stronger bond between them >>*" (parent, Cluj). In turn, teachers admit that school programs are designed to provide predominantly information without exploring their practical utility: "*we, unfortunately, do theoretical things, but they need to solve practical problems. I remember when I was a student, I was cooking at school. And I still know how to make the cookies and cakes I've learned to do, back then. In a year I did a mechanics course, so I learned what a spark plug is, how to change it. (...) We do not teach them this. We all have to cook, conflicts everybody has - we do not teach them, we do not teach them how to have a conflict management. (...) We should teach them how to react in such a situation, but we give them information* "(teacher, Dolj).

Even in situations where parents and students do not know the general framework of key competencies, the expectations regarding the results that the CSD needs to achieve are common and highlight the practice, the applications. That is why most of the students who have been asked about the skills they want to acquire following an optional course have relied on: "(...) *a discipline in which we would know and learn to express ourselves and to overcome the affective and cognitive problems that we have. We often get nervous in front of the crowd and we do not know what to say or we are ashamed to develop our own opinion.* " (student, Timis) and the parents' opinion:"*the child to be more courageous , to be able to react, be able to treat courageously every problem. To work in a team (...), at the optional course, to work in a team, that's what I want him to learn."* (parent, Dolj) or "*developing the way of thinking, creativity, improving speech, expressing what I feel."* (parent, Timis).

In the context in which the disciplines in the common trunk together with the curriculum fail to meet the needs of the students, the expectations are oriented towards the optional disciplines. The school curriculum is an opportunity, not only because schools can come up with an educational offer to differentiate them, but rather that by optional class, school has the possibility to cover, albeit to a small extent, the vulnerabilities of the common trunk in skills development: "*CSDs are needed to develop communication and socialization skills among pupils as they increasingly choose virtual communication.*" (teacher, Bacau) or "*not on information, not on the area academic acquisitions must be developed CSD (...), we do not have the socio-emotional skills, and what can I say about the skills!"* (teacher, Cluj). Some of the participating teachers know and exploit this opportunity, and even if they do not offer new optional subjects, they deepen or go on expanding disciplines in the common trunk, but with an approach to acquiring skills and abilities: "*it is a high school preparation and we have chosen the eight key competences and for this reason we have chosen an optional class of Informatics in order to help them develop digital skills on practical skills*, *English, French, just to make sure that skills are covered.*" (teacher, Galati) and "*competencies are quite specific, measurable, they get grades for these optional classes, there is an evaluation, written or spoken assessment, projects, written results. Everything is measurable."* (teacher, Bucharest).

Teachers who reported that they are conducting CSDs as new study disciplines recognize the need to develop competences such as: "(...) *social, communication, tolerance, acceptance of diversity, promotion of democracy, respect for citizen, knowledge of rights and obligations, social responsibility, civic, ecological, sanitary. And the humanities, of knowledge.*" (teacher, Timis). They have drawn attention to the importance of education not only for acquiring skills but also for education in the spirit of socio-emotional values or abilities such as the cultivation of interpersonal relationships, the understanding of otherness, "*(...)*

tolerance with respect, the competence to listen, then to become empathetic by growing up with the others" (teacher, Cluj). The explanation is that, for now, information is more accessible to students, but values, socio-emotional skills cannot be learned from the internet.
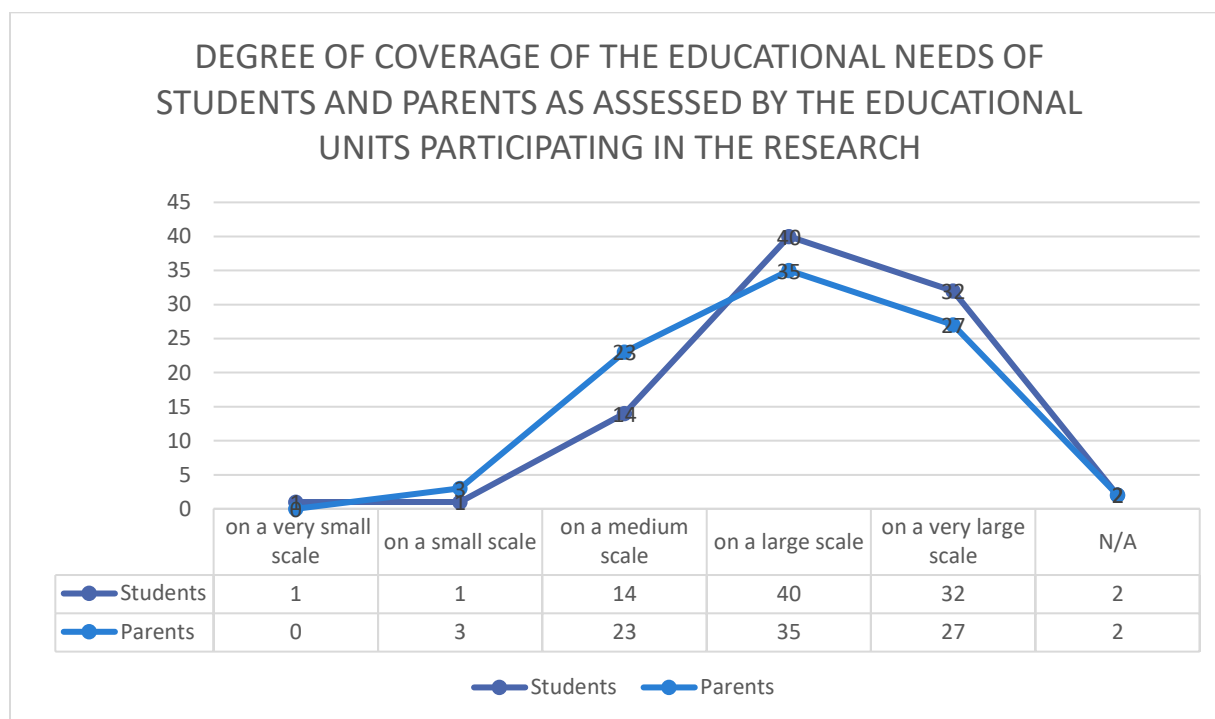

DEGREE OF COVERAGE OF THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS AND PARENTS AS ASSESSED BY THE EDUCATIONAL UNITS PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH					
	on a very small scale	on a small scale	on a medium scale	on a large scale	on a very large scale	N/A
Students	1	1	14	40	32	2
Parents	0	3	23	35	27	2

Fig. 20 Degree of coverage of the educational needs of pupils and parents as assessed by the educational units participating in the research

In 72 of the schools participating in the research it is estimated that the pupils' educational needs have been largely and very heavily covered and only 2 units consider that the educational needs have been covered only to a small and very small extent. In line with the expectations of parents, 62 schools expect a high level of satisfaction, and 3 schools believe that the pupils' educational needs are covered in small and very small extent from the perspective of parents.

5.3.3. *Choosing the optional class*

The process of choosing the optional classes is similar in the educational units from which the participants of the research activities come from. This process is organized according to the procedure and timing of submission of the files for CSD endorsement at the County School Inspectorate and follows the stage of consultation of pupils and parents. As a rule, choices of options are made in the last months of the school year, before summer holidays by handing out a list of proposals from which students, together with

parents, must choose and the latter to sign for their options. In reality, there are several challenges to this process of choice that antagonizes the three categories of actors involved in the education process.

In terms of choice, the most pressing problem identified by all three categories of participants is the limiting, sometimes false, nature of the problem. This is due to the setting of optional courses according to a set of criteria and constraints, so that consultation with students and their real proposals are replaced by a distinct educational offer during the selection process: "*it was a little disappointing that for the question of <<what would you like to have as an optional class? >> we are saying there, for example: cooking course, design course, architecture, but did not have the necessary resources in school to do them. There always went things like: science, Romanian. That's what we already do in school. I really do not think they take our options into consideration, I think the teachers or the board come up with the, and they put it out there two so we can choose from.*" (student, Bucharest).

There are several constraints that make optional classes some compulsory disciplines informally: the need to deepen disciplines for exams or disciplines in the common trunk that have a loaded schedule, cancel options from the initial list for resource reasons, drop out or transfer some teachers, the insufficient number of students enrolled to allow the optional course to take place, and even the suggestion made by the main teachers to the parents to select a specific optional course: "*we are given an optional list and we need to talk to the children where they will enroll, but it is suggested where they should enroll...*" (parent, Cluj) or "*my youngest girl, came with a sheet of paper and told me<< Madam told us for you to tick the optional for next year >>. I say: << Ok! >> << And she said to tick the Fun Mathematics course, because Reading we are not doing anyway >>. And so, I chose Fun Mathematics.*" (parent, Bucharest).

The lack of school infrastructure for rooms and the lack of teachers' availability to match the timetable so that CSD classes run concurrently is another factor limiting the educational offer and constraining the choice of choice. The fact that volunteers cannot, in most cases, be organized on small groups or with pupils from several classes of the same year of education, makes them unable to choose effectively, accepting the option of the majority:"*the majority decides. We have noticed this from other classes, and it is not necessarily a problem, but with us all CSD classes are made by the whole class and the majority decides, not like in other countries where they opt for the grammar course and they go to grammar course.*" (teacher, Dolj).

Since the curriculum is loaded, teachers fail to fully cover the compulsory curriculum, which is why CSD classes are distributed to these disciplines: "*Teachers are required to do artifices in order to comply with the law but also to do the number of hours required for pupils' education*"(teacher, Iaşi). Of course, the limited educational offer for optional classes is not only conditioned by the students' need to deepen the content of certain disciplines, but also by the teachers' willingness to propose optional new disciplines, over the disciplines that are already available to them, another constraint can be the framing and competencies of the teachers who draw up the plan and the curriculum and, at the end, run the optional: "*the optional classes are chosen according to the framing and less according to the interests of the children*" (parent, Dolj). However, the CSD's educational offer is not eminently the decision of the teachers but is the result of the consultations and the activity in the methodical commissions and has the opinion of the board of the school: "*we have optional courses but the choice does not belong to us. There are a lot of optionals that we present to parents, but the decision is at the Council, the management. In vain, I present them ten options with seven offers if the decision is on the Board of Directors*, which are saying <<we choose this one because it is necessary.>> *Parents have the impression that they are faced with the fact that we choose the optional for them, and so for them the optional becomes a chore. They feel it is an extra hour to the program they already have, not knowing that the decision is at the Board. That's why, when they get the flyer to write with which option they would agree, they write NO to all of them. And yet, the child will make an optional, mandatory.*" (teacher, Bucharest).

These premises lead to a great deal of frustration among the students: "*I do not understand how this thing goes, how it is optional if it is compulsory. How is it optional, especially if I had nothing to choose from, we only had optional class for mathematics, an extra hour of math in the school program, nothing else? How is that, if by definition, it is something that allows you to choose from something? (...) Not to be imposed!* "(student, Bucharest). It also produces many tensions between parents and teachers: "*there was an optional for which we did not sign and we found out it was made. We said NO, but still they did it."* (parent, Bucharest). Asked about the process of choosing the option, the parents participating in the research activities said: "*Although it is called optional, everyone has to do it. So no, we have not even been asked. At the meeting we are told: sign, this is the optional class*." (parent, Bucharest) or "*from my point of view, as a parent, I would like (...) not to be a mandatory optional class, but an optional one. The child should be able to choose from the optional list that the school makes available to the students*." (parent, Cluj).

However, the motivation of students to select an optional one is very diverse, starting from concrete needs, such as extra preparation for examination subjects and less interest in a particular topic, choice of the optional on friendship criteria or constraint from the parents: "*there is some rigidity as pe the optional classes in our school, in the sense that there are optional ones for which parents choose more and there is some stiffness* (parent, Timis). Students may have social constraints at the time of choosing the optional, most of whom make this choice under the pressure of the group of friends and affectionate interests towards certain disciplines: "*It is the spirit of the flock, my friend goes there, I do not want to be alone, so I'm going also. The optional must be something that you like a bit more intense than the mandatory subjects."* (student, Cluj) or "*communication exists, but there is no offer to join a group, that is, children join with other children. They also come from a certain age according to their friends: "I go to this optional because my friend also registered, and there are more children attending and they do the optional*." (parent, Cluj).

5.4. Opinions and practices related to the implementation of the curriculum

5.4.1. Organization of CSD and other logistical implications

With regard to organizing the optional, there are two issues that most of the participants in focus groups and interviews insisted on. The first of these is related to the limitation of optional choice due to poor school infrastructure and school management problems that do not allow group choices to be organized by groups: "*For the optional classes, we now receive a list of proposals, than the main teachers go with the list in classes and students choose, by number, where there are more students, that option is approved. If there is a smaller group of students, eleven or so, the optional is not approved.* " (parent, Cluj). As mentioned above, the choice of the optional is made by majority decision, and in many schools there is the rule that the optionals do not take place without a minimum number of students enrolled in a class: "*last year I experienced and worked on groups in two classes, although CSD approval is given on the class. And it was good because we fulfilled some conditions, we need at least 15 children per group, and then, two classes richer in number allowed us to do so*." (teacher, Galati). For all categories of learners, however, the variation of classes with smaller groups of pupils is ideal: "*I would clearly make groups. If one hundred children have CSD classes, seven children go to ecology ... so there is a clear CSD in school at the same time, but this is ideal, because we do not have the framing nor the space. It would be good for the students*

and everyone could choose (...) *The idea was taken from abroad, but we adapted it to our conditions.* "(teacher, Dolj) and "*when there are many of them, it's hard to work. When there are few, they can better focus on individual needs*, *for it is hard to observe in a mass of people whomever it is and how it can be helped*" (parent, Timis). Students do not have the guarantee that their choice is respected, as classmates mostly choose an optional one, and the school infrastructure does not allow, as teachers say, to divide students from one class into more optional classes: "*lately we have no space in any way. We should charge the children, three times a week they should have five hours, it is quite difficult for them to have other activities.*" (teacher, Bucharest).

The solution to this problem that the teachers themselves have implemented many times is the parallel run of the optional classes organized for each year of education so that students can choose to participate in the optional options offered to other classes: "*to be an optional at which anyone who wants to participate can participate even if they are from different classes and to be able to organize them in such a way that if one wants to go to an optional class, well he/she should go there. On the language system where they are divided in the same timeframe, one goes to English, one to French, one to German. This could be a formula, there may be an option to join the class, and you go there, the other goes to the other one.*" (teacher Timis) and "*if they are children of the same level who want to attend an optional and are from different classes*, *the schedule tends to be made so that there are two three optional classes in the same time. What I'm saying is a win because the child does not have to attend to the optional class chosen by the majority of the class.*" (teacher, Cluj). Besides, there are students who show their interest in CSD themes proposed to other classes in the same year of education but who can not choose or participate in these classes because the schedule does not allow them. Obligation to go through an optional content that is promoted as a choice is a disincentive to students, and therefore the interest in that discipline decreases, being treated superficially: "*It would be very good if we had the possibility to attend all optional classes from school, for example, and choose what we would like to do the most. Not have out optional classes imposed, so we can know what we want to do next.*" (student, Timis).

25%

of E.Us consider a problem for an efficient CSD implementation the large number of students in a class

38%

support the solution of correlating classes' syllabus in order for the CSD classes happen simultaneously and thus, students can switch from one class to another. This may lead to a real regard for student' options, not only the majority's

42%

of the E.Us have shown interest in carrying out CSD in alternative places: museums or the headquarters of institutions, NGOs and companies
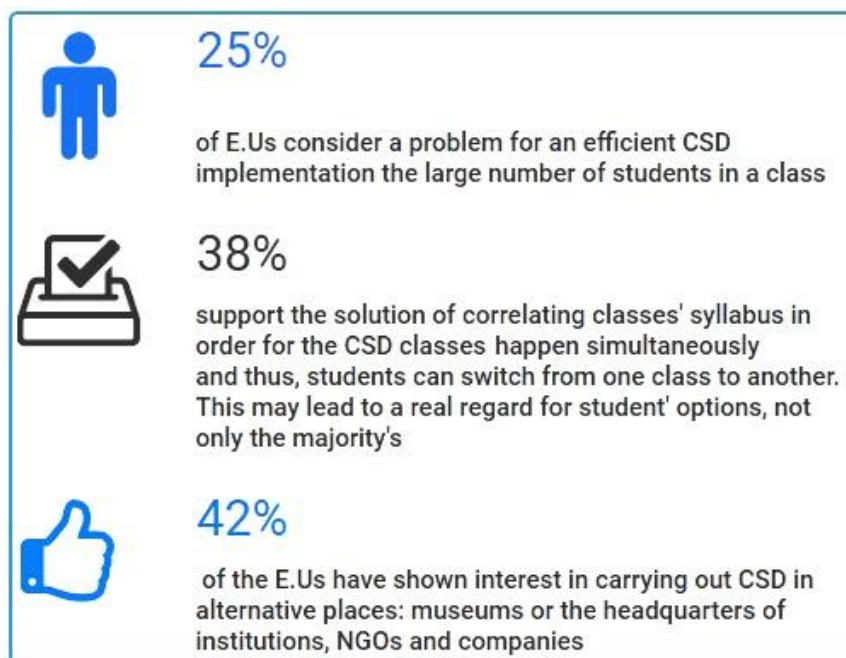
Fig. 21 The opinions expressed in the educational units participating in the research on aspects related to the organization of CSD classes

This situation is not present in all schools, but the share of those who have reported this problem in all research activities shows its generalization, especially in large schools with a higher number of teachers or those perceived as performing ones, in which is a much larger number of enrolled students and where the school's infrastructure in terms of classes and equipment cannot cope, and the timetable cannot be harmonized because of the organization of classes in several series: "*optional class cannot be done for space reasons, because for an optional in the 9th grade where you have to take from three classes of the 9th grade to make a quality optional, you need a classroom, you need a schedule arranged so that all the 9th grades are all free to be able to participate in optional classes, which is not possible in larger schools with many children, hundreds of children. There is no space, time, a teacher who has to teach, to commit to make an optional outside the matter he teaches and other things like, human resource, place, time.*" (teacher, Cluj). A similar approach, we met in Galati: "*if, in the end, an optional class takes place in the classroom and depending on the endowment of the school, the material endowment, and ultimately the human resource, in vain a parent wants an Italian teacher if we do not have this qualification.*" (teacher, Galati).

The second recurring aspect is the difficulty of organizing the optional class in alternative spaces, where students can practically observe what they are studying - a proposal that gives a lot of interest to the students: "*it is much easier to remember information if we go to museums, we are no longer at school in the desks, it would be different and maybe we would like it more*" (student, Timis). The proposal came from students and parents on the background of the need to run classes using interactive methods and experiments to exploit more the applicative dimension of the learning process, but as many teachers as may welcome this idea, most of the time, it hits the bureaucracy: "*it is good to have specialists, but it is good to go in different environments with the children, as has been said here, not to stay in the classroom, but to go to CSD-specific environments. In informatics, let's go, let's say at a company, where programming is done, of where they have jobs the children want. But many approvals are needed to get out of school.*" (teacher, Dolj). The opinion is shared by teachers in Bucharest: "*theoretically, more flexibility of the authorities, to go with the children to a job fair and make a CV there. You cannot really do this as you have to prepare all the documentation for leaving the school, with a file sent to the inspectorate, approvals from everyone, from the mother, from the father ... so you are not allowed to make a step outside the school, everything you do outside the school is considered as a procedure for camp, trip. You have to make a very big file, even for a 2 km drive, it does not matter. And this thing is very unpleasant. I think many teachers would like to do biology at the Zoo (...) or go to the Physics Experiment House and see the refraction there with mirrors and magnifying glass, etc. They remember this very differently. That's what I would do if I could: the optional classes not to be rigid anymore, go with the children if you need somewhere, use resources other than those approved by the ministry*" and the same teacher: „*many teachers would like to do this, go to a museum, do an hour there, in a more interesting place. You are simply being bothered to fill up with papers. And you have to go to the Inspectorate and get the Inspectorate approval to go to the park. It is a problem to get out, it's a too big effort to do it.*" (teacher, Bucharest).

There are also positive situations described by teachers who have managed to organize at least an optional lesson outside school, but it is not a regular activity because of the resources it involves and the responsibility that the teacher has to assume from leaving the school's perimeter. Most of these activities take place on the occasion of the "Different School Week" or are simply left out to extra-curricular activities organized by nongovernmental organizations and volunteers in schools and high schools. The compromise option is the attractive organization of the optional by inviting the specialists from different fields to present to the pupils brief presentations: "*last year, in an optional course for health education, there was a third year student of to the Faculty of Medicine and they were very much involved.*" (parent, Dolj). There are teachers who would fully reform the way the curriculum at school's decision is organized, so that it can be

modularly run: "*the organisation could be modular, for one year, but with several modules. There is a possibility to put it in modules; it is up to the tutorial teacher. To divide the subject into modules at the end of each module to make an assessment and then the final evaluation.*" (teacher, Bucharest). Other teachers would opt for an organization based on changing the school timetable and increasing the CSD's weight in the program: "*I would do one day per week in school, in which everyone would go to the CSD, eliminate the grades, and I would see the CSD as some workshops where, in the first instance, children experience this workshop, see what they like.*" (teacher, Cluj).

5.4.2. Opinions on resources and opportunities for collaboration in running a quality optional class

A. Internal resources

The problem of resources remains topical for CSD classes, the lack of classrooms and materials make the Romanian school offer too little competitive with the examples provided by other European schools. At the same time, the lack of material resources in school is always seen as a factor that lowers the motivation of both teachers and students to implement the optional classes: "*In order to have some extra optional classes, we should have some spaces, especially facilities, laboratory X, an institute because I was with my colleague in an exchange of experience, and I saw what is the meaning of optional class in another country, and clearly anyone can develop the idea of CSD and help them* " (teacher, Dolj). Without this, the choices of children, parents and teachers remain only a desideratum.
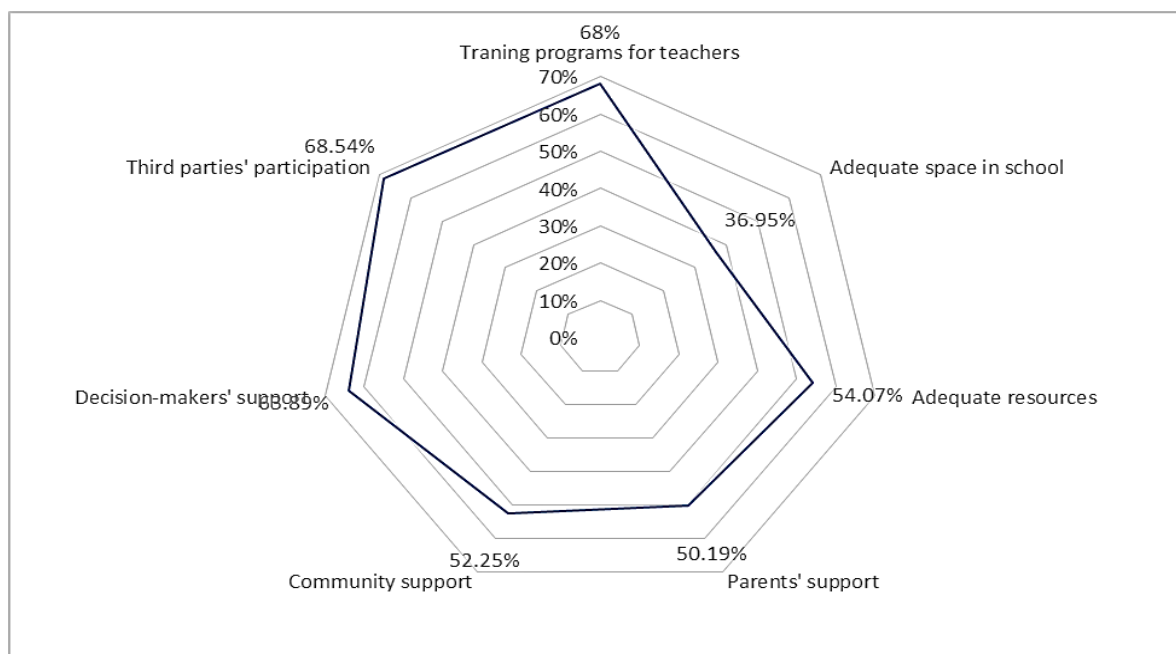

Fig. 22 The opinions expressed in the educational units participating in the research, regarding the resources they have for organizing CSD classes

- *Human resources*

Regarding the human resource, the majority of teachers with experience and seniority in their education, positively evaluate their own training: "*it is easy for us to be over 30 and years old and I think we choose our own path, but I think of those young people leaving school benches, and we are trained by some principles, which may seem are obsolete, yellowed, but I say we are very well trained*." (teacher Timis). This statement is supported by the results obtained following the application of the CSD mechanism, according to which the teachers evaluate their level of training positively. In fact, teacher training is among the first resources that 68% of the research units have mentioned as being largely satisfactory.

However, they also recognize a few vulnerabilities in the level of training, deriving from the gap between what the system, through framework plans and school curricula, calls for the real needs in the market to be implemented in the classroom, which parents and pupils insist on many times: *„We are overcome. This is the opinion of the children"* (teacher, Cluj). Hence, the human resource, although very well prepared for disciplines in the common trunk, is not always qualified to run optional classes on quality and interest topics for students, therefore support from external partnerships and external resources is needed: "*I think that if we had a partnership and we were helped, we would be much more credible at first because what we may lack is the professionalism that will lead us from the beginning to the end. In vain we are good teachers, if we are not good communicators; maybe we do not have a good expression, some good ideas."* (teacher Timis).

In addition to this, there are differences in the teaching style and the use of technology among experienced teachers, but which are not adapted to modern means and resources and young teachers who are reluctant to rely on the level of experience and the lack of method: *„we have many young teachers who invent all kind of methods. With those who are closer to retirement it's harder ... they are accustomed to what they have taught all their life, the old model, they do not know much about the technology, they do not really know how to use it, and that is, then it gets complicated."* (teacher, Bucharest). Teachers, however, argue that these problems are constantly managed by collegiate collaboration: "*the colleagues are fine, we talk about where the problem classes are, we collaborate, we are looking together on sites ... we work together and propose together*" (teacher, Bucharest).

On the other hand, remuneration remains the main reason for dissatisfaction in the decision to run optional classes. By a simple cost-benefit analysis from a teacher's perspective, the work done for the preparation of an optional referral file is disproportionately higher than their remuneration at present, all the more so since the running of a CSD is not paid extra. In this context, most of the teachers that run CSDs in school are those whose norm can not be otherwise covered, as some teachers admit, *"Let's be honest. The interest of the school units is in this area to plan the teachers' norms, with overtime, in some schools with experience in other fields too, goes a lot on, <<you do not have the full time, let's do an optional >> "* (teacher, Cluj).

- *Material resources and equipment*

"*Material provision is frustrating. This is the unpleasant aspect of the CSD.*" (teacher, Galati) - this is how most of the teachers present in focus groups and interviews briefly describe their resources for running the options. To make CSD classes as interactive and practical as pupils and parents want, material

resources, props and stationery are needed: "*I think a barrier is also the one related to material sources, because you are limited in doing those clubs that involve materials. In painting, modeling you are limited ... and as an experience too. Unfortunately, there is no support from this point of view. And you are not allowed to ask for the parents for support, and in this way, you are stuck.*" (teacher, Bucharest). In the primary cycle, especially where the children's attention is made by means of visual and props, some teachers choose to acquire the resources they need themselves: *"there are never enough material resources. You have to think about the resources you have. You cannot propose an option without thinking about how you will do it. And then, some teachers, unfortunately, choose the most used method - to acquire these resources themselves from their own money."* (teacher, Timiş). Where the requirements of students and parents are greater with regard to the implementation of a CSD, teachers can come up with creative and engaging ideas for students, but the cost of organizing such an option is supported by parents: "*funding is a problem for what we would like to do. My colleague would like to have a class about the city, how are you going to do it? With the support of the parents!"* (teacher, Cluj) and "*I had a parent who offered to help the teacher, the parent came and showed the children all kinds of things, he was working in a bank. Concretely, it was nice! It went beyond the material we had received at the time. And even now my daughter remembers him, she even tells me what she had learned then ... she was left with some money-related notions."* (parent, Bucharest).

As far as equipment and technology that are indispensable today in the learning process, both in terms of the attention and involvement that students demonstrate when used, and in terms of adapting to the requirements of a modern, European educational system, parents and teachers agree that : "*The technique is killing us* (...) *on the one hand is the technique*; *video projectors do not work, the model being ancient and old. For example, my tablet, which I bought from my money, the video projector does not recognise it because it's too old << On the outside the fence painted, inside the yard the leopard >>, on the outside beautiful, the photocopying machine is old, the video projector is old, but we want modern methods"* (teacher, Bucharest) and „*total boredom, obsolete knowledge, computers - some grunts. Especially for those children who know things about computers..."* (parent, Bucharest).

From the results of the implementation of the monitoring mechanism, the material resources and equipment, as well as the school infrastructure in terms of spaces, are considered to be largely satisfactory for the CSD, but not enough. In approximately 68% of cases, educational establishments claim that they have to a large extent material resources and equipment to run the CSD. The discrepancies between perspectives can be explained by the different levels of expectation teachers have depending on the type of CSD they implement, and other subjective factors.

63%
of the E.Us regard equipment, technologies and other materials as a solution for rising the quality of CSD

40%
of the E.Us claim that providing teachers with more educational resources in order to help them plan and draft CSD curricula would lead to its improvement
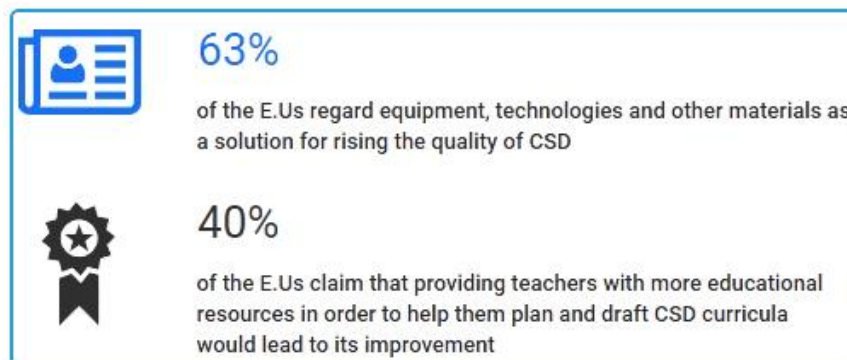
Fig. 23 Opinions expressed in the educational units participating in the research on the resources to be invested in order to increase the CSD quality

- *Information resources*

As far as information resources are concerned, teachers are willing to follow online platforms, discussion groups, educational forums, and participate in exchanges of experience to prepare for the optional classes. From this point of view, access to such resources is considered to be satisfactory, but the schedule for hours preparation, correction and committee work limits the time for documentation and the ongoing updating of knowledge to stimulate innovation and creativity in CSD, as some teachers draw attention: *„(...) I would need permanent help because we cannot just focus on this, being teachers and teaching, we also have exams. I do not think that our work in the committees is the best because it's just a piece of our whole activity and I feel that we need someone to devote more time to this. To go to classes, make presentations, ask for opinions, stay online on the platform, on Facebook, ask for opinions, give examples of good practices to see what did people line, what they saw there."* (teacher, Timis). Individual preparation for CSD classes, where they are new subjects, is, as teachers even draw attention, a problem of availability, involvement and ambition to persevere from a professional point of view: *"if we have a dedicated teacher, active, who wants development, who wants to lead the child to progress, will be an active person who will propose every year an optional class more interesting than the the one the previous year. (...) This is the case with the optional ones, if we have people who are comfortable and come just for salary and have taught their class and are gone. This type of teacher will never propose an optional class."* (teacher, Timis).

B. *Availability of external resources and co-interested third parties in running CSD classes*

The use of external resources through partnerships is described as desirable by all categories of participants in research activities, but in practice the use of external resources remains limited to the optional and much more present time in extra-curricular activities undertaken by the school or at who participates, especially for the "Week of Different School" program: "*yes, they usually come to us. I even had in school (...) volunteers and from Anti-Drug Center who came to take preventive action in high school classes. They said we could come anytime; we can always keep an optional anti-drug education. I also received from some associations some material about the education of character; they came and brought materials, textbooks: the teacher's, student's manual and again there was a proposal made. Our collaborations stop at extra-curricular projects!*" (teacher, Timis).

Asked also about their opinion on the involvement of human resources that can be attracted from the outside world to support CSD classes, parents and students are increasingly open to this option, which was initially only used in extra- curricular activities: "*It's a good thing to bring in something new! They are very accustomed to their teachers and when a new element or a new person comes, they often have more interest. Plus, they may be more documented.* "(parent, Timis), and *"students from certain faculties or even high school students came to tell us in younger classes how it is in high school or what their experience with examinations was."* (pupil, Bucharest). However, the involvement of external human resources is viewed with slight reluctance by teachers who have repeatedly stressed that the whole school body is prepared to support any option, and the call for such resources is only to bring adding value to the class approach, and not replacing the teacher. The explanation derives from several aspects such as completing the didactic norms, but also the challenges that the Romanian education system itself raises in the context of the option to run an outsourced CSD: "(...) *to the extent that financial constraints would be eliminated*

or diminished as pressure on the engagement of teachers or staff, not to say teachers, at one time may be an expert, a bank expert who at some point could come and teach children. I think things can take another turn. The school's offer as per what is of interest to children is not of interest to the system." (teacher, Timis). In addition, no matter how attractive the idea of permanent involvement of specialized staff outside educational establishments is, the lack of teaching and pedagogical training is a challenge for anyone wishing to support, along with teachers, the activities in CSD classes: „*we had an unpleasant surprise to do an activity, and that girl came totally unprepared. In that second three quarters were withdrawn. She was not a colleague, she was an external partner.* "(teacher, Bucharest). In the absence of means to monitor the way in which the CSD is being carried out and the ex-post impact assessment, the development of specialized external resource options remains limited.
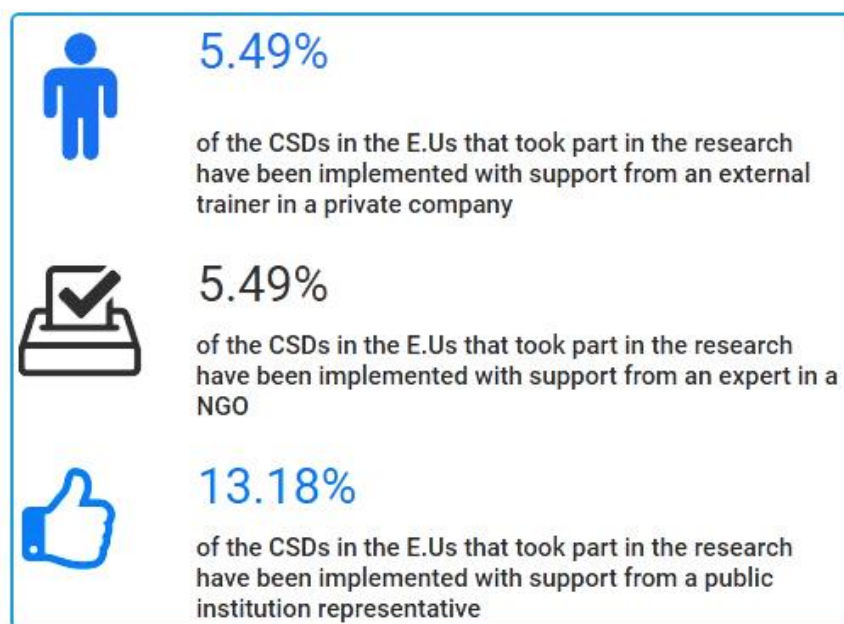

Fig. Share of CSDs conducted with third parties in education units included in the monitoring

In any case, the call for external human resources to support the CSD time cannot be sustained at the moment only by volunteering on the part of those concerned, because once again, the lack of school resources makes it impossible to reward or pay individuals and organizations that support running CSD classes in very rare cases: "(...) *they were well received, but unfortunately the one who did this cannot anymore ... It started with a theater circle and then even made an optional one at which everyone wanted to go, but it could not be done. If you turn to external resources, you have to pay them. You do not have enough extra-budgetary resources and you cannot pay them. Mr. X was doing it for no money. We live in a world where everybody asks you "what am I gaining of?"* (teacher, Dolj). Thus, the way of collaboration with the interested persons to participate in the CSD is in the form of the invited volunteers at the hour: "*in the 3rd grade, the teacher brings from time to time somebody to teach them about food, hygiene (...)*" (parent, Timis).

With regard to inter-institutional partnerships, teachers are very open to collaborating with institutions and organizations that could facilitate the CSD's hosting hours, special guests and informative materials: "*Perhaps the opening of cultural institutions, I do not know, museums, public institutions to be*

open, after all, to the banks being open to a partnership or optional proposals in which they provide an infrastructure as accessible as possible. "(teacher, Cluj), then in Dolj: "*volunteers from the National Bank, they also went to high school with many themes, but also to younger classes. The presentations videos from the National Bank were very interesting, very good and were well received."* (teacher, Dolj) and in Galati:" *we collaborate with the Children's Club, they submit offers, provide us with a person to deal with these aspects.* " (teacher, Galati). In fact, the partnership alternative is the most widely used and welcomed variation of educational units to organize a quality CSD: "*we talk about partnerships that grow nicely, develop either as a school offer to the community or of the others to school. They are nice, they reach their goals and the children have the satisfaction of being involved in something else."* (teacher, Cluj). In terms of supporting such partnerships, funding solutions have been proposed by parents and teachers: "*here are projects with funds of all nations and municipalities should play a role, because instead of funding on all the lines financing sports clubs (football), we can also fund something else. If it were table-top sport, it might be something else ...* " (parent, focus group). The call for non-reimbursable funding lines from local city budgets, as well as donations and sponsorships from teaching companies, are possibilities that can be accessed by schools with the support of governmental and non-governmental partners, as well as parents' associations. Not all educational establishments enjoy inter-institutional partnerships. Those in rural areas are not supported by NGOs, and community and decision support is perceived as limited. As a result of the quantitative analysis of the CSD mechanism data, just over one third of the educational units include partnerships and income support from the non-governmental sector in the category of resources and expertise they benefit from, and 1 in 2 educational establishments is supported by decision makers or community.

5.4.3. CSD in different education cycles

There are justified and unreasonable differences in school curricula between education cycles. Justified differences are those that derive from the framework plan, such as the number of hours and those derived from adaptation of teaching methods and a theme, to students of different age groups. However, there are also inadequate differences between the way the CSD is looked at in the different education cycles. "In the primary cycle, the optional courses are a bit more fun and the teacher chooses, depending on the pupils, the opportunity to spend more time with the pupils and to know them better, can do what pupils like and can set up an optional class" (teacher, Timis). This happens for two reasons. On the one hand, CSD at primary school is easier to organize, there is no competition between teacher offers and no content constraints. As a rule, it is the teacher who agrees with the parents regarding the optional class: "*I think that for the primary education is easier to choose from that list. You can consult with pupils because it depends only on the teacher and pupils*" (teacher, Bucharest). On the other hand, optional at primary school is used as a fun, game-based learning to help transition pupils from pre-school to school.

However, in the 5th grade, then in the 9th grade, there is a rupture in the way of approaching the option that both pupils and parents and teachers feel: "*up to the fourth grade they attend the optional class with pleasure, but something in the 5th grade is happening. Indeed, the children grow up also (...), but something happens in the 5th grade. Either the children are not sufficiently capacitated or the classes are not attractive enough*" (parent, Cluj). One problem with the organization of CSDs in the different education cycles is the gradual decrease of the quality of the optional, from primary to high school: "*the optional classes in the general school were much more interactive, we could discuss between us to do projects, we learned to communicate."* (student, Timis). In the opinion of teachers and parents, the differences arise for

several reasons. First, from the 5th grade to the end of the school, the curriculum becomes very busy in the disciplines of the common trunk, which can lead to two situations. The CSD is used, as we drew the previous attention, to expand or deepen the compulsory subject: "*I believe that parents, when children reach the 8th grade, want to do more math, more Romanian classes, knowing that an exam is coming. They are aware of this and I think that's what most parents want. All of these beautiful optional classe, like architectural are made in small classes, because after ...*" (parent, Timis). The CSD has no place in the school program because, especially in high school, there are many intensive and bilingual specializations covering the total number of hours a student can spend at school: "*there are fewer in the 9th grade and most are in the 11th and 12th grades. There are classes that, according to my knowledge, have no optional courses, because they are intensive classes of mathematics, informatics, they have a lot of classes, and if they were to add them optional ones, they would load their schedule very much. Legislation limits your number of hours.*" (teacher, Dolj).

Secondly, some of the parents believe that starting with the 5th grade, the CSD is no longer intended to meet the needs of the pupils, but rather the needs of the teaching staff, such as completing the didactic norm or approaching easy but similar themes with those from compulsory disciplines: "*I appreciated the fact that the teacher in primary school was focusing on optional classes that were never found in the other classes, it was something new, and in the 5th grade, it was made simply according to the needs of the professors, of the departments.*" (parent, Bucharest). Thirdly, starting with gymnasium, the possibility that each student's options are respected is limited by how consultation and resources are conducted, so the CSD is not chosen through parental consensus, as in primary classes, but by majority decision or, in unfortunate cases, with an optional imposed at the level of school management and methodical commissions: "*at gymnasium, the children are faced with the accomplished fact, in the options thay will have we do not want it, no, no, no. They want other subjects and we end up with mathematics, according to the possibilities.*" (teacher, Bucharest).

5.4.4. *Teaching and learning methods used in the course of optional subjects*

The teaching-learning methods used in optional subjects are one of the most disputed subjects during focus groups and, in most cases, go beyond any discussion about the optional course, extending to a debate on the teaching methods used for the compulsory disciplines also. As far as the school curriculum is concerned, the fact that there is no consensus on the expectations of the parties derives from the experience and the way everyone designs the "Optional course". Thus, for some of the parties, the optional takes the form of a deeper understanding of the subject matter and thus becomes confused with the disciplines of the common trunk, both as a method and in terms of content. For other parties, the optional class should extend pupils' knowledge to disciplines in the common trunk and is used as training for the Olympics and contests and therefore involves another form of interaction between teacher and student. Optional class as a new discipline is the most advantageous situation to experience in class with various teaching methods, the probability of teaching the class in the form of non-formal activities, being the highest one possible.

Some of the teachers, however, try to adapt and combine teaching methods to master students and overcome the rigidity with which they are accustomed at school, but the possibilities are limited: "*the ideal should be the optional class not to be overlapped but complementary, to stimulate interdisciplinary, not to*

take you only to a certain area. The teacher should make connections; teach them to work in a team. You can not let them work in a team during class because they have to work individually. You can also develop skills to help them solve their problems. For example, I use brainstorming at the CSD, and I can not afford to do it at school, I have to go straight to what I have in the classroom. And these can go to CSD. Otherwise you struggle with matter! Here your can make your own schedule. You can personalize for each class and when you customize the needs of that class, you can do this. "(teacher, Dolj).

Teaching and learning methods are typically designed according to the purpose, content of the subject, so there is a smaller possibility to use active-participatory methods and non-formal learning techniques in the optional class of deepening the disciplines in the common trunk and in the training for national exams because the idea that << *you do not have to like what is mandatory* >> is rooted. Thus, in many cases, the CSD class does not run differently from the usual classes in the common trunk: "*we reproduce knowledge already processed by the teacher given directly to us. We never build anything; give them some landmarks in order for them to draw some conclusions. (...) we must prepare some subjects, which we will do theoretically, from which the students should store some cognitive knowledge, the optional ones should be practical, skillful, practical skills training, skills they need very much.*" (teacher, Cluj)

There are other constraints in gymnasium and lyceum education cycles, and these methods are less likely to be used than in the primary cycle, where there is a greater understanding of adapting pupils to the climate of school. In addition, teachers present in research activities have drawn attention to the fact that they also feel vulnerable to the challenges that the information society poses. Every day, students are harder to get involved in school activities, in favor of social networks and different websites and games, especially since, in the context of an outdated, conservative educational system with unadapted teachers without sufficient resources in school to keep pace with technological upgrading and the problems faced by society, students tend to lose their full interest in school: *"We always have the same question <<Madam, what are all the things we learn at school usefull for, what do we need so much information for?>>, and then we find a way of applying what is taught in more disciplines. (At Financial Education) all are role plays, they are accountants, they make decisions, they build their income and expenditure budget, and then they find it useful for life, it is very attractive and they are very interested in this financial education hour."* (teacher, Dolj).

Interactive methods become a solution for the student to be engaged; the teacher increasingly calls upon the technology available to draw students' attention in the classroom: "*this technological generation, if they could have the least effort and the greatest benefit, it would be perfect for them. If you can only use movies, phone applications, games, it would be perfect: unfortunately not only that, you have to combine it ... all the applications: YouTube, I'm trying to do so!"* (teacher, Bucharest) and in Timis County : "*for little children, games, computer-aided games, those national softwares that actually transmit and create some skills that are very valuable and playable. (...) They are closer to them, they are more easily perceived when assisted by computer and software indispensable in a technological era, maybe even the electronic portfolio, although in our schools, I do not think there is the possibility of working exclusively electronically because even our school documents are not all electronic at national level (...). Rather than having reports of this type that are not usefull anyway* "(teacher, Timis).

That is why the teachers who are oriented towards pupils' learning and development needs adapt their teaching act, not only to the CSD, but also to the disciplines in the common trunk, so as to attract students - by use of technology, non-formal methods so that, over time, active-participatory methods gain more ground in preferences. At the same time, most people admit that the use of these methods is limited, leaving aside the rigidity of the system, even the stiffness of the teachers - an aspect that needs to be improved or reformed: "*children like to do such activities. Rigidity seems to be more relevant to the teachers' system. I think there is the need to make a change*." (teacher, Cluj). Where the active participation

of students is being invoked, techniques and methods taken from non-formal education to support CSD classes aim at increasing interaction and socialization: "*students are encouraged to socialize, argue, and support their views. (...) CSDs are needed to develop communication and social skills among students as they increasingly choose virtual communication* "(teacher, Bacau). At the same time, it involves analytical and argumentation techniques that develop critical thinking and teamwork: "*clearly, we are talking about portfolios, brainstorming. Modern methods (...) they choose according to which personal conception they think is correct or wrong, but the condition is to argue ones choice*"(teacher, Timis) and "t*here are no written works, more portfolios, projects, practical works, with different grade, with a separate heading in the classbook* "(teacher, Galati). Some teachers call for playful methods to involve primary school pupils and they are well received: "*In the 2nd grade, we had an optional class called (optional name) and there we learned how to play for example Go, an ancient Chinese game. And there I learned to play chess, some games complicated with pebbles. We've learnt their logic. I do not know what I was taught, but it was ok.* "(pupil, Bucharest), but even the oldest ones would enjoy if in some disciplines the learning would be done through adapted games: *"if they could only change the style and not teach us for almost an hour and would use something different in the form of a game or more interaction ... "* (student, Timis).

Fig. 25 The opinion expressed in the schools participating in the research on the use of non-formal education methods at CSD

Students' opinion is that CSD should be taught using non-formal education techniques and increased interaction, stimulating interpersonal and emotional intelligence. Beyond the CSD, students generally prefer the interactive methods they are involved in teaching learning, to the detriment of lecture: "*Any teacher can teach you a lesson, but not to read it as a poem and explain it to you, he can interact with you, ask you, give you some examples, make a game with you that you understand it much easier. Because involuntarily your attention will disappear and you will not be curious anymore and the time will pass and you will not be left with anything. If there is anything that interests you, you want to answer*." (student, Timis). Some of the high school students' observations on classical teaching methods show a lot of realism and maturity in approaching and even understanding and resignation regarding the deficiencies of the education system and the limitations of teachers, but understand the importance of using classical methods in some disciplines and the difficulty of transitioning to modern methods for older teachers: "*it is sad that we are bound to learn, we can even say to learn by hard, if it were to rely much more on the experiment and the things we discover, maybe we would figure out what we would like to do in the future.*"(student, Timis). Students also draw attention to the fact that some of their colleagues, while enjoying modern teaching methods, will not recognize the teacher's much greater effort to orchestrate interactive learning and may refer to superficiality, minimizing the implication: "*Everything depends, in fact, on the teacher's abilities to do the class as we want, but also on the possibilities, not just on our requirements. Sometimes we are selfish and we say that we want it to be like that, like the other, as we want, but we never think of the work the teacher does, and especially, at our desire for involvement which, unfortunately, is very low* ". (student, Timis).

As far as parents are concerned, the perspective on interactive methods is heterogeneous or nuanced. As a rule, they want that the students to be involved in the classroom and the activities to be interactive: "*a non-formal or alternative education would be great. Children like it, but only if they did something. The children would go with pleasure.* " (parent, Cluj). On the other hand, they are worried about how interactive activities are not used properly and disguise the lack of teachers' involvement in organising the optional course: "*do a project about ... and everyone searches on Google and does the project, no! Not like this! Let there be something for which they need to work and think for a bit, because we all know to look for something on the internet. Doing something practical, making them learn I do not know what. Make something different, something else than in the classroom* " (parent, Cluj) and " *if during the class before there are looking for the topic that everyone gets informed about and we're coming and gathering them together to work together, so that they cooperate, they could learn something. We give them a cardboard, we give them markers, (...) so that they do things together. They do not go home to X, eat pizza together, and copy the project from Google.* " (parent, Cluj). Apart from this, the CSD is seen as an opportunity to involve students in practical activities that are well received by parents: "*the optional courses to be practical, why is it, but why is it so? Debate, brainstorming. There are so many phenomena and questions around us that you can do a case study about. We can use these methods that they like and do not do the traditional teaching (...). It would change some things.*" (parent, Cluj).

5.4.5. *Grading and class evaluation*

Grading and evaluating students at optional subjects is a topic that is inevitably correlated with the question of motivation. In several focus groups, the idea to remove CSD grades and replace them with other evaluation methods based on ratings, prizes and points that were not counted at the annual average was initiated. This proposal came equally from some teachers: "*I believe that even in the area of evaluation there is a lot of pressure on the CSD. I think if there were no grades, things would be much more ... I'm saying now after reflecting on this. If the goal of the optional course is to feel comfortable with it, you do it for pleasure, and the child feels this thing. If you manage to motivate him in this way by showing enthusiasm in front of the children, they are delighted.*" (teacher, Cluj), but also from the students: "*in my opinion, if the subjects are optional, there should be no grades. Because you're stressing the child. He will not enjoy it because of this.*" (student, Bucharest). Therefore, an argument put forward by these parties in order to eliminate the grading is the decline in motivation for learning, to the advantage of the motivation to "hunt big grades": "*now the grades are no longer so motivating for students because some of them care about the grades on others are not interested at all, especially since they may know you are studying this subject for a year, two, three, and then you do not need it anymore. It is more complicated, depending on the student, if he wants to have good grades or not.*" (student, Timis). While for some students, the grades for the optional courses may not influence the level of effort at school, others associate grades with extra stress, which diminishes their interest in the matter: "*if we need to receive a grade, it is stressful, you do not read for pleasure anymore, you know, you do it to get grades. We get grades as per a regular class..."* (student, Bucharest). Another argument is that where there is a real possibility to opt for the optional courses from other classes and the students from the same education cycle would mix, the optional types and their degree of difficulty automatically lead to lower grades at some optional courses that others, and thus distorting the process of choosing according to preferences and not by the ones that provide great grades, so as not to have their annual average ruined: "*when children are scattered at various optional course, I would abolish the grade and I would only write optional in the classbook. No name and no grade. The child would decide: I want Romanian course, dance, geography, religion, and the teacher who worked on that module or in the*

chosen direction writes the child's grade and in the register it will be placed in the optional heading."(teacher, Bucharest)
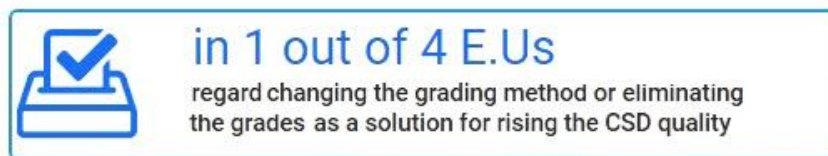

Fig. 26 The opinions of the educational units participating in the research on the students' grades at the CSD

The idea, however, provokes a lot of debate, as the counter-arguments are based on the fact that students are now hardly able to become involved in school, the fear of small grades being the only element underlying motivation, as some students admit: "*at school you are motivated by grades*, *but unfortunately we see testing and evaluation sometimes as something bad because it does not show your knowledge. Evaluation should be done, but it is the role of the teacher to see how it has developed according to the student's current knowledge. (...) Unfortunately, you have to use grades and absences, and especially if it's a subject matter in a curriculum, it's normal to give grades."*(student, Timis). The vision is shared by most of the teachers: "*you need to have feedback, a measurement of what the optional class is. If you take out the grades, it will happen as it was the case for the baccalaureate, at English skills.* Before, when the tests were written and the grade from the *baccalaureate in English was important, the children were more diligent. Now they come to pass the skills test, totally not prepared. This will also happen for the optional class if the grade is removed and it does not matter anymore. They are now striving, because some of them want scholarships, and are motivated by the fact they will receive some money. The town hall got involved and the children are motivated, striving to receive that amount of 850 lei. And then any average counts. If you eliminate the grade, the effect will be disastrous. Not being evaluated and graded they will not bother anymore and then, somehow, this works against the optional course. So no, I do not agree with the fact that the grade should be eliminated.*" (teacher, Bucharest)

In fact, evaluating and noting students at the optional courses gives rise to various dissatisfactions from all parties and for other reasons. One constraint is that there is a lot of emphasis on scoring, on the number of grades and less on the real assessment of the skills that pupils learn, not only in optional disciplines, but also in those in the common trunk: "*as a teacher who has 7 hours on an object, the rule is 2 + 1, I have two hours, I have to give at least 4 grades, I have 3 hours, I have to give at least minimum 6 grades, etc. It is very hard to evaluate them, very hard. You give them written tests, and they may not have prepared for that day, that's the grade. I do not know what to do with so many grades, they have 5 grades, 7 grades, what's the difference?* (teacher, Dolj). Moreover, the conditions that accompany the mandatory minimum number of grades are seen as a barrier to ensuring a quality assessment process: "*Why are the grades so low at optional courses when they should have a different character? The grades should be in a certain form, the themes to be creative, to stimulate children.*"(parent, Bucharest). The obligation to constantly record a large number of students becomes a challenge to the evaluation process that does not focus on monitoring the extent to which students learn skills but on theoretical evaluation, exclusively through tests and classroom listenings, not through projects, compositions, competitions and other interactive methods that require a greater amount of time from the teacher: „*we were evaluated at this optional courses with the eternal technique of reproducing what we have been told.*" (student, Dolj)

Grading is always a reason for misunderstanding and conflict between teachers, on the one hand, students and parents, on the other: *"(...) the worst issue is related to scoring. Either the evaluation is not made correctly, either the teacher does not have a scale, or favors and disfavors others. Usually, the conflict starts at this point.* "(teacher, Bucharest). For the optional course, this happens not only because of the valuation methods, but also because of the differences in expectations in terms of grades. For teachers, the effort to create a CSD and to prepare the file for endorsement makes them treat optional courses as a compulsory discipline which is totally disagreeable with the students' expectations: "*the claim that everyone should have a 10. If you are thinking about it, the option course is the most difficult to teach and evaluate, and their attitude is that I have to have 10 at the CSD and treat it a bit more superficially, which is not the case*." (teacher Dolj). This discrepancy derives precisely from the pressure of the grades and the need to have the highest annual average to contribute to admission to a leading high school or even admission to many faculties whose procedure is based on the preparation of an admission file and not on the exam: „*in general, the optional course is seen as an average of 10 that must be 10. The optional course can not have an average of 8, 9, 7 because it will not increase the final average. We choose, therefore, optional courses to make our life easier. "*(teacher, Cluj).

Enrollment in optional classes as a method for increasing the annual average is also recognized by students, and those who do not carry out such optionals feel discriminated: "*optional courses give you an extra point at the annual average. (...) It does not seem right to me because sometimes I get one extra point and you work more than others, but at some subjects I do not find it normal to get one extra point if you were not present (.. .) It's not right.* "(student, Cluj). Parents also, know the practice: *"the optional course is done or not. Many children follow it for the grade because they raise their average. The more optional courses you have in the classroom, and in our case they had three optional classes (...) and they managed to raise their average very much."* (parent, Cluj), some of whom suggested that the grades and the school results should not be published: "*maybe their grades and their results should not be publicly displayed"* (parent, Timis). Grading also involves a transactional dimension that creates unrealistic expectations: "*when you give them grades, they are disappointed: it's not enough that I chose the class, now you give me a bad grade*!" (teacher, Bucharest) and the failure of teachers to respond to these expectations is considered condescendent not only by students but also by some parents: "*<< it's not enough that I chose the class, you give me less than 10». Students have the impression that if they have taken an optional course, you must receive a 10. I have heard that dissatisfaction. The parent is generally dissatisfied because the child gets 10 at religion class and a 9 at the optional one."* (teacher, Bucharest)

5.5. CSD reporting process. Monitoring and Evaluation of CSD Efficiency

The evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of an optional one is usually done at the level of the teachers' school and the methodological committees, but there is no procedure or requirement at the central level or from the county school inspectorates to formalize or make the process compulsory. Therefore, it is up to the school if it wishes to implement an internal measure to assess the satisfaction of students or parents about CSD or other study discipline. In educational establishments where such internal evaluation takes place, the process may be compulsory and organized at the level of the whole school or, in most cases; it is the choice of the teacher if he / she wishes to know the students' opinion about the subject. In many of the cases presented during focus groups, CSD evaluation is done through the distribution of satisfaction assessment questionnaires: "*we select five forms per class and see what they think. With simple questions.*

Did you enjoy it? What did you improve? What did you learn? What are three things you've learned? Do you still want to study it next year? Would you like to keep the optional course next year also? Was it boring?" (teacher, Timis). Other times, the CSD satisfaction assessment is done through spontaneous feedback requested at parent meetings: *"simply spontaneously, at parent meetings or personal meetings with parents. There are assessments or opinions, and everything can be improved. The desire is to do this for the sake of the child. It is not made according to a specific date nor only on the basis of grades and notes.* " (teacher, Cluj).

In other educational units, CSD effectiveness indicators are the degree of promotion, the results of school competitions, and even the degree of engagement rather than the level of satisfaction. *"the evaluation is done through student participation in competitions and consultation of economic agents to which students engage."* (teacher, Iasi). Most of the times, the school's evaluation of the performance of a CSD remains the students' school situation at the end of the year. In terms of monitoring the optional course during the year, this is done in theory by following the teacher's framework if the learning objectives have been achieved and if the students have achieved the desirable skills: "*the teacher should make a portfolio where he can pursue the level of achievement of the proposed objectives.*" (teacher, Iasi) and "*from the inspectorate we have only a form for each optional course in which we mention whether or not the skills are achieved*". (teacher, Galati).

Regarding the efforts of the county school inspectorates to monitor and evaluate the quality and efficiency of the options, the way of organization and operation is very similar in approach but different in the volume of requested information. The responses from the twenty-one county school inspectorates to requests for public information highlight a similar procedure for monitoring the implementation of options through general and specialist / thematic inspections. In addition, with few exceptions, county school inspectorates collect data about electives through online databases: "*for the RAQAPE it is something else, and that is a kind of information we offer in which school is seen as a whole but also in a punctual way*, for optional courses we receive requests from the inspectorate to load them on Google forms"* (teacher, Timis). The information collected about the CSD differs from one school inspectorate to another and is about: the school residence environment, the school cycle and the class for which a CSD is proposed, the name of the school curriculum responsible for the unit, the CSD type, the name, the type of the curriculum, number of hours in a week, number of students enrolled, etc.

After the endorsement of the optional, continuous monitoring takes place throughout the school year, and the data collected electronically and as a result of specialized inspections are used to draw up reports at the level of the inspectorate at the end of the school year. Teachers presenting research activities have generally been pleased with the relationship that the school has with the county school inspectorates, but most of them recognize that the level of transparency with regard to data collected from schools is minimal, and the information is confirmed as a result of the low response rate and the format of responses to public information requests: "*the specialist inspector keeps track of the optional courses in a school without the optionals being known by others. Inspectors were changing from year to year (...). There was no one specialized in keeping this record, because there was a single inspector with these responsibilities. And he has enough to do, and is not able to keep the database with the optional courses for that year.* " (teacher, Bucharest)
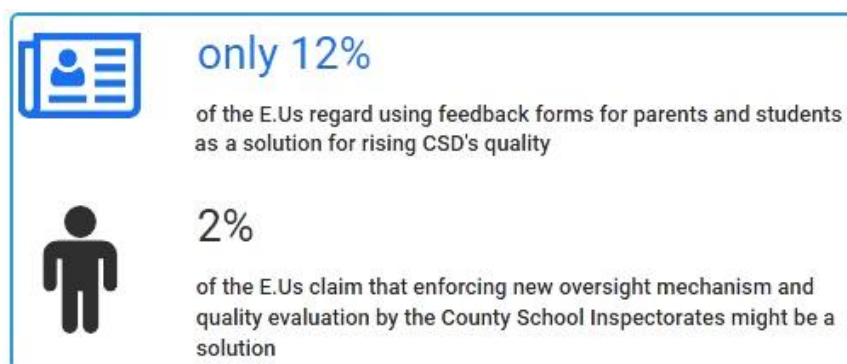
Fig. 27 The opinions of the educational units participating in the research on the application of the students' satisfaction assessment tools after passing a CSD

Regarding the hypothesis of more in-depth monitoring of the optional courses made by the county school inspectorates, the teachers were against this: "*we have feedback from children and parents and do not feel the need for official feedback from the inspectorate.*" (teacher, Cluj). Even more, the perception in school is that, at present, the education system is so centralized and that the reporting obligations to the central and county institutions are overwhelming in general. These reports must be completed at the end of the school year, and time and resources are not enough, forcing teachers to sacrifice hours in the last weeks of school to have time to close all reports: "*decentralization of education does not exist in Romania. It's super-centralization. Because each school has to introduce the results of each child from the preparatory class, from the evaluation in second, fourth, sixth grades, with the item solved or unsolved. Practically, for each child, you fill out the entire evaluation sheet. This is a big absurdity. There is no feedback (...). We work really hard, we go out of classes, we look for substitutes because we are in the committee, the children are taken out of classes because they have the evaluation. We need to verify papers a few days in a row, day and night in order to be on time and surrender the results. Finally, the results are introduced on this platform, for which we do not see the purpose. There are some national interests with these platforms and programs.*" (teacher, Timis).

5.6. Perceptions and opinions about CSD perceived in relation to public, private schools and alternative systems regarding content and themes

If for students and parents there is the option to have at least one optional course organised according to European models that perform educational performance, teachers are very different from international models and alternative systems. Firstly, there is a category of teachers who recognize the defects of the Romanian educational system, but in the long run, they consider it better than other systems: "*they are much more stressed, but our children, when they go to other parts, are better than those from England, from Germany in all fields and languages, mathematics, since we were talking about high school, at Physics, Biology. It is true that perhaps they are much more stressed than the other children (...). That's because we want a lot for our kids. We want them to have good results everywhere. It is not possible, but*

we want for them very much" (teacher, Timis). Secondly, there is a category of teachers with moderate attitude who declare themselves partly satisfied with the performance of the Romanian education system, but they are also open to lending educational models from other countries only to reform where improvement is needed: "*I think the Finns have time and financial resources to do this, anyway we tend to get there. Finns have extraordinarily good results because they are very free and open to everything new and teachers are different. (...) And Romanian education has many good things which we must not give up just for the sake of being the same as elsewhere. So, we have to keep what is good for us and adapt eventually what can be adapted* ". (teacher, Dolj).

Another category of teachers showed more openness to the fundamental reformation of the Romanian educational system, proposing the transplantation of a whole model, not just the way in which CSD takes place in other educational systems, criticizing the initiatives to "patch" and to give birth to an eclectic system: "*you can not take by change what the French do in mathematics, English at their language, Americans at practice. If you find a system that works very well, borrow it fully. You do not start taking a bit, a little bit and making an eclectic system that does not work well, it does not work at all. And to say that <<I have revolutionized it>>, because every system that comes says it has revolutionized. It's like having a bag and you patch it. We have to find a system that is working; we do not need to invent the wheel. Some models must be found. It has to be changed from the ground. There are countries that have invested heavily in research.*" (teacher, Dolj). The eclecticism of the educational system is also condemned in terms of its effects on students: "*we do PISA tests, but we do not teach interdisciplinary, what are we talking about? Everything is messed up. We want PISA tests, we also want European models, we do not know which models, but we still keep going, and all this stuff is poured into the head of children who do not know. The problem is to take a system from start to finish, that is, not a bit from here, a bit there and we have something. No, we need a totally assumed and implemented system from head-tail. I mean, we do not take a bit out of here, a little bit of there and we're doing something to make Romania look good.*" (teacher, Cluj).

Last but not least, a category of teachers present at focus groups has adopted pessimistic or nuanced attitudes about the possibility that international models once taken up should be appropriately assimilated to local conditions so that they become performing: "*the Finnish model was harmful from my point of view. He let the child do what he wants at any time, but our society is not a Finnish society. In relation to society it is not the same thing. Unfortunately, this is the way we were accustomed, we cannot work horizontally, we're working vertically. And if anyone tries to convince us it will be different, we will continue to fail. And we need psychologists, sociologists to establish us to an existential, psychological, affective profile that works and on its basis to make programs for the development of society, not on the basis of new foreign realities. From this point of view (...) all the alternative forms did not succeed in our country: Step by Step, Montesorri. It does not work on us.*" (teacher Timis). Among the teachers' constraints on lending educational models based on a completely different relationship between educational actors like the Finnish one, they mentioned, first of all, their disagreement: "This would involve teachers who would be left without because it would fall for a very long number of hours and would require a reform that no one really wants. "(teacher, Cluj). The second constraint is that of parents and society, which are not currently prepared for such a change: *"to make a reform like the Finnish or a Japanese one where the child is cleaning his desk, what are we talking about here? Here, if you put the kid to clean his desk, he tells you that you put him to work and that his dignity is dropping because you put him to sweep the floors."* (teacher, Cluj).

In relation to Romanian private schools, teachers who have gone through the teaching experience in those classes find major differences in the CSD*: "I worked in the private sector, where the optionals classes are commun and they have a positive impact on the development of the children. I have recently arrived in the public system where somehow optionals courses are banned and only those needed to complete the norm of teachers already in school are kept, and I do not know how beneficial it is for the*

child and how it helps to develop future generations." (teacher, Bucharest). However, in relation to the standards of assessment and the expectations for the pupils at the Romanian exams, the pupils trained in private schools and those with an alternative learning profile are perceived as unadapted and unprepared.

6. Analysis of European and international best practice models

In the analysis of models and good international practice, we start from the premise that there are no perfect educational systems, but only perfectible. We started in our documentation of the analysis of one of the finest education systems in the world (Finnish) and continued with the analysis of CSDs in Estonia and Poland, former communist states, whose historical path more similar to that of Romania, can justify a potential comparison. At European Union level, sustained progress has been made in effectively delivering a European education area in the light of the demands of a knowledge-based society. Thus, the current European context provides a series of reference documents, with an important role in rethinking, reorganizing and harmonizing education systems, from the point of view of ensuring the quality of education and professional and study mobility. The Finnish education system has been named one of the best in the world in 2016, following a ranking by the World Economic Forum. According to those who reformed the Finnish educational system, the school must be able to anticipate changes in society; it must be able to change, precisely to meet the concrete needs of the ever-changing world.

Remarkable is Poland's rise in recent years, which has succeeded in achieving a reform of post-communist programs and succeeded it almost 25 years after leaving the communist bloc, developing a high-performance education system (according to PISA tests) . Last but not least, on the same indicator, Estonian pupil results are among the best in the world after they developed a school system based on equity and inclusion.

6.1. Finland[12]

After about 50 years of reforms in the education system, with investments to the extent of the proposed objectives, Finland occupies an honorable place in international rankings with the most trained students and outstanding achievements. Education in Finland has had the highest qualitative leap since the 1970s. Thus, the number of teacher training courses has increased, and the best-trained ones come to teach, having the freedom to approach the curriculum and being encouraged to identify new teaching methods.

One of the basic principles of Finnish education is that all people must have equal access to high quality education and training. The same educational opportunities should be accessible to all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic origin, age, wealth or the environment in which they live. Education is free at all levels from pre-school to higher education. The degree of decentralization of the education system is maximal, with local authorities determining how much autonomy is allowed for schools. Educational institutions have the right to provide educational services based on their own administrative arrangements and visions, as long as the basic functions established by law are respected. Teachers have pedagogical autonomy, they can decide on the teaching methods as well as the manuals and materials necessary for the educational act.

Early education supports child development and learning, and pre-school education is mandatory for children, starting at the age of six. Preschool education is provided both in kindergartens and schools. In pre-school education, children adopt basic skills, knowledge and skills in different learning areas, depending on their age and abilities, so learning by play is essential. Basic education is provided in a single structure starting from 7 years and lasting 9 years. Basic education is provided in a single structure, with no division in primary and lower secondary education. The core national curriculum leaves room for local educational choices. The basic national curriculum for basic education is managed by the Finnish National

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[12] Ministry of Education and Culture and Finish National Agency for Education, *Finish Education in a Nutshell*, ,2017

Agency for Education. It contains the objectives and the essential content of the different disciplines, as well as the principles of student assessment, special needs education, student welfare and educational orientation. The principles of a good learning environment, work approaches, and the concept of learning are also addressed in the core curriculum. The core national curriculum is renewed around ten years. Educational providers prepare their own curricula within the core national curriculum, leaving room for local or regional specificities. However, all local curricula have to define the values, the fundamental principles, as well as the general education and teaching objectives.

In Finland, the main type of student assessment is continuous assessment during the studies and then the final assessment. Continuous assessment is offered to guide and help students in the learning process. Each student receives a report, at least once per school year, and there are no national tests for students in Finnish basic education. Consequently, the core national curriculum contains assessment guidelines for all common topics. A task of basic education is to develop students' self-evaluation skills. The purpose of this system is to support the growth of self-knowledge and learning abilities and to help students learn to learn the progress and learning process.

General secondary education is organized flexibly. The general upper secondary curriculum is designed to last three years, but students can complete it in 2 to 4 years. The educational act is organized modularly, not on classes / years of cycles and students can decide on the individual study programs freely. Each course is evaluated at completion and when a student has completed the required number of courses, including compulsory and optional studies, he / she receives a general upper secondary education certificate. The National Finnish Education Agency decides on the objectives and learning outcomes of the various disciplines and study modules for general upper secondary education. Based on the national curriculum, each education provider then prepares the local curriculum. Due to the modular structure of upper secondary education, students can combine studies in general and higher education with education and training with science.

The core curriculum in Finland is the framework document for the educational act taking place in schools and represents the national position on the basic requirements for schooling all children. It is the duty of the municipality and other education providers to ensure that each of their schools develops a curriculum that is consistent with this content. This process itself may look different depending on the area where the educational institution is located. In some areas, the municipality creates its own curriculum, based on the core curriculum, adding elements appropriate to their goals. In other areas, each school develops its own curriculum based directly on the core curriculum. Starting with 2014, Finland has proposed that the core curriculum be a commitment that will lead to a future-oriented vision of education.

The curriculum thus appears to be an interactive and strategically important process. Basic curriculum, municipal curriculum, school curriculum and education plan are created in an open, extended and interactive process - the curriculum being more a process than a product.

6.2. Estonia

The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy, 2020, sees learning as a lifestyle. And this begins with general education, which is why in Estonia there is a common system applied to general education. This means that a common curriculum is taught at all levels of education, regardless of the study language. The length of the study period consists of at least 175 teaching days, approximately 35 weeks and four holiday intervals. Parents can influence school development through the school council. The national curriculum for the pre-school, basic and upper secondary education curriculum establishes national standards for general education.

The national curriculum consists of a general part and annexes. The annexes are grouped according to the programs related to each field and according to the cross-curricular / inter-curricular analytical programs. General education is divided into pre-primary education, basic education and upper secondary education. Preschool education is delivered to children aged between 18 months and seven years in specific educational institutions. Pre-school education facilities are provided by local authorities at the request of parents. Basic education is established as the compulsory minimum of the general educational requirement and can be partially acquired in primary schools (grades 1st to 6th), in elementary schools (grades 1st to 11th) or in upper secondary education. Basic school is divided into three stages: Stage I, grades 1st-3rd, stage II, grades 4th-6th, stage III, grades 7th-9th. Basic education is regulated through two national programs; national curriculum for basic education and simplified curriculum for basic school[13].

In order to graduate from the basic school, it is necessary for the pupil to assimilate elements of the national curriculum at least satisfactorily, and then, after graduating, be able to opt for the continuation of the educational path. Secondary education is based on basic education and is divided into general secondary education provided by upper secondary schools and vocational secondary education provided by vocational education institutions. General secondary education consists of a set of knowledge, skills and competences established in the national curriculum for higher secondary education, and their acquisition by pupils is necessary to continue the educational path in universities and vocational education institutions. General secondary education is meant to help students become active, creative, socially mature citizens, giving them the chance to discover their purpose, according to individual interests and capacities to help them in the educational path. The study program at this level is comprised of compulsory courses and optional / voluntary courses. For high school graduation, the student must complete a curriculum of at least 96 individual courses, at a satisfactory level, at least, graduate from the mother tongue exams and at least carry out a research project or a practical work throughout study periods[14].

The national curriculum sets out the following disciplines and curricula: language and literature, mathematics, natural sciences, social studies, artistic disciplines, religious studies. All these are compulsory disciplines that are part of the national curriculum. For each of these courses, students can also choose optional lessons, depending on personal and local interests such as *"Oratory and Debate", "Myth and Literature", "Literature and Society", "Drama and Theater", "Literature and "Film", "Biology Applied", "Principles of Chemical Processes", "Chemistry of Elements", "Chemistry of Life", "Physics and Engineering", "3D Modeling", "Technical Drawing", „General History-History of the World: Europe","Psychology", "Introduction to Philosophy", "Philosophy Today".* The Estonian educational system also provides pupils the possibility to also choose cross-curricular / inter-curricular courses / themes.

Cross-curricular themes are a mean of integrating both general and practical skills, and are taken into account in the development of the school environment. Cross-curricular topics encompass many disciplines and are a priority for society, and allow the creation of an idea for the development of society as a whole, supporting the student's ability to apply his knowledge in different situations. The organization of these types of courses can be done in cooperation with the school or other competent institutions, regional institutions, enterprises, civic associations or cultural associations, giving students the chance to participate in county, national and international projects. Schools respect a national curriculum which has as a priority language, mathematics and science, but also takes into account other aspects of development[15].

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[13]National curriculum for upper secondary schools, accessed in December 2010, URL, https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/524092014009/consolide.
[14]National curriculum for basic schools, accessed in December 2010, URL https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/524092014014/consolide
[15] Secondary education, accessed in November 2018, URL, https://www.hm.ee/en/activities/pre-school-basic-and-secondary-education/secondary-education

6.3.   Poland[16]

Poland has rethought the education system through a series of reforms aimed at lowering the dropout rate and increasing the level of education. Starting in 2017, a new school curriculum is being implemented in Poland, according to which full-time compulsory education lasts for 9 years (the last year of preschool education and 8 years of primary education).

The Polish education system is divided into full-time compulsory education and part-time compulsory education. Compulsory full-time education applies to pupils aged between 7 and 15, while compulsory part-time education refers to pupils aged 15-18 and can either be in educational institutions (a student may attend upper secondary school) or outside the school environment (for example, a student follows a vocational training institution provided by employers).

In Poland, the core curriculum for preschool education and general education in certain types of schools forms the basic document that obligatorily describes at a certain stage of education the set of educational objectives and the taught content that must be incorporated into the curriculum implemented. Educational objectives (general requirements) and teaching content (specific requirements), as described in the core curriculum, should allow the setting of internal school assessment criteria and fulfill the role of examination standards in the examination system. The core curriculum refers to pre-primary education (3-5 years), early years of education (ages 6-8), primary school (ages 9-11), lower secondary education (ages 12-15 years) and upper secondary education (depending on the type of school, aged 16-19). In Poland, compulsory education refers to children from the age of 6 until the completion of the lower secondary school, not later than the age of 18 years. Obligation to study refers to those pupils who have completed lower secondary school but less than 18 years of age. They continue their studies in upper secondary schools of different types or in other educational institutions[17].

The purpose of primary education is determined by three elements: basic curriculum, hourly schedule and educational standards. The main curriculum must be respected by each school.

At primary school level, there are at least 18 compulsory lessons per week (grades I to III) and 24 in upper classes (IV-VI). In addition to these lessons, 2 hours of religion or ethics (which are not compulsory) are added to all levels and 3 to 4 hours left to the school principal.

In addition to these mandatory hours, the following cross-curricular topics have been introduced: health education, ecological education, philosophical education, reading and the media, education for society, education for family life, cultural heritage of the region, patriotic education and civic. The management of the educational institution is responsible for including cross-curricular themes in the curriculum. The teacher chooses a school curriculum and a manual (manuals are selected from the list approved by the Ministry of National Education.) Each curriculum is approved by the head of the institution.

The Parents' Council is the one establishing its own activity regulations and may cooperate on mutually agreed procedures. It may issue opinions on the timetable and calendar for improving the efficiency in teaching or attending school opinions on the financial plan proposed by the school principal.

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[16] Based on The Polish Education System in Brief 2017/18, Further information may be found on the websites: Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Central Statistical Office (statistical data).
[17]Polish Eurydice Unit in consultation with the experts from the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and Refernet. (Co - operation Fund Foundation), *The sistem of Education in Poland*, Warsaw 2010,

7. Conclusions

The Curriculum according to the the school's decision is an instrument by which the educational institutions have the freedom to introduce a new subject, besides those provided in the common trunk, to a certain profile and specialization. Changes initially made to the curriculum in Romanian education indicate that awareness of the need to promote a new logic of the didactic act that transforms "teacher-centered school" into "student-centered school" has been realized. Of all the changes brought by the curricular reform, the CSD is the segment with the highest innovation potential. However, the importance of CSD has been minimized from decision-makers and contained in many schools that have understood and used it in a way similar to compulsory subjects and for exams.

Students' expectations for optional subjects are ambivalent. On the one hand, the CSD is seen as an opportunity to compensate where disciplines in the common trunk still face problems by overcoming the level of training based only on theoretical knowledge and the acquisition of skills involving practical skills. On the other hand, even for students, the CSD is a pragmatic way by which they can compensate for the preparation of some compulsory subjects and exams on which the Romanian education system seems to be centered. The relationship between school, students and parents regarding optional classes seems to be deficient, generated by the different expectations of each category of actors involved. The effective implementation of the CSD is also affected by the lack of school infrastructure and school overcrowding, which makes it difficult to harmonize school timetables and the possibility for students to choose the optional course of another class.

As far as the relationship between teachers and parents is concerned with CSD, they are tinted, teachers who want to propose new subjects to the CSD feel constrained by pragmatic choices of parents in this field. A first category of parents tends to opt for CSD for deepening or expanding, in order to replace home training hours and prepare students for the exams. The second category, in the antithesis, calls for optional disciplines as applied and more cantonable in the themes of interest in society. Teachers' perception is that parents take into account what they consider to be the needs of children and less of their preferences, which is true for parents involved in school education. The teachers' observation is that most of the parents do not get involved, do not give feedback and are reluctant to alternative disciplines, considering them to be useless.

The insufficient number of continuous training programs for teachers in order to be able to develop more creative and more focused options on the issues with which the society currently faces or other topics of interest is even overcome by the lack of investment in all aspects of the profession the teacher. Thus, after graduation, those students who accept the chair make it more compromise as an alternative to other jobs for which they did not initially qualify, and many find it difficult to succed to the tenure examination. At the same time, the experienced teachers remain in the chair also after the retirement age because of the human resource shortage, and those who have vocation and respect for this profession face the shortcomings in the Romanian school. The lack of material and informational resources creates barriers to CSD and is complemented by the lack of partnerships between schools and local stakeholders. The use of external resources in the educational act, through the conclusion of partnerships (with NGOs, organizations, associations, which could facilitate the development of the CSD) is desirable by all interested categories, but can only be supported by voluntary activities, schools not being able to remunerate them .

In addition, in the context of overloading school curriculum and increasing the time students spend at school, we also found a decrease in the interest in using CSD, from primary and secondary schools and especially to high school, with a break in the way to approach these hours. Qualitative research and the data collected from the participating educational units have shown us that the CSD is often designed according

to the compulsory disciplines, the norm of the teaching staff and the need to prepare for the exams. Since schools are not required to implement the curriculum at the school's decision and the lack of funds for these hours eliminates the motivation of many teachers to run hours in addition to the common trunk unless the optional course is used to complete the norm. In high schools with technological profile, CSD is made on high school specialties. In vocational schools, CSD is replaced by a CD (Differential Curriculum) that includes specialist subjects, so that optional classes come in addition to specialist classes.

On the other hand, the research has brought to light an optimistic perspective on the opportunities offered by the option such as: the possibility of initiating in areas and themes that can meet the training needs and the requirements on the labor market and facilitate the learning of social and emotional abilities. Teachers consider it necessary to develop skills and educate students in the spirit of social and emotional values or abilities, such as the cultivation of interpersonal relationship skills, the understanding of otherness, etc. Students are open to being involved in school-based decisions that affect them. The choice of CSD classes is made by majority decision, from the offer presented by teachers, in theory, according to the needs expressed by students at a previous consultation stage.

A correct CSD analysis can not be completed without taking into account European and international best practices. Equally innovative and attractive, the three educational systems mentioned above (Finnish, Polish and Estonian) are considered as some of the most effective in the world without trying to make a ranking of them. The educational policies of these states, of which two former communist states, are the result of open dialogue and long-term collaboration between decision-makers and all stakeholders in the field of education. Participation, involvement and decentralization are the words that best characterize these educational systems. Schools follow the guidelines of the national curriculum, but authorities and schools are the ones who develop their own curriculum.

It goes without saying that the interest of the students should prevail in the educational act. The principle from which CSD classes should be chosen is that the interests and aims of the pupils determine the educational program. The choice of CSD should be based on knowing the needs and interests of students and accurately diagnosing their needs and interests. The main purpose of the educational act is to prepare young people for social roles. This is done only through exposure to countless experiences which society has systematised and delivered through the curriculum.

8. Recommendations

8.1. For teachers and schools

✓ Allocating classrooms and unconventional spaces within the school to run the CSD, harmonizing the timetable so that the optional time is scheduled at the same time in all classes of the same school year to allow students to take part in optional courses offered to other classes.
✓ Conclusion of partnerships with institutions, non-governmental organizations, authorities, companies, etc. for the provision of space for CSD hours, as well as for specialists who can be invited to such classes.
✓ Running fundraising campaigns from private sources through corporate CSR programs, and tightened money to be used for endowing CSD classes so that it can support the practical development of students.
✓ Publication of the CSD's educational offer on the school's website each year so that students and parents can make informed decisions about this issue.
✓ More extensive use of new technologies in CSD teaching (video, educational platforms, online courses, electronic and audio books, etc.).
✓ Use of satisfaction assessment forms for pupils and parents at the end of CSD.
✓ Calling on institutional and non-governmental support to support the implementation of European exchange programs and projects for lifelong learning and lifelong learning for teachers.

8.2. For students and parents

✓ Creating parents' initiative groups to facilitate contact with institutions, non-governmental organizations, authorities, companies to support the transformation of optional classes by providing space for CSD hours, as well as specialists who can be invited to such hours .
✓ Involvement of the Parents 'and Student Councils' Committee in proposing the ideas and themes of the new optional in the process of communication and consultation with the rest of the pupils and parents for choosing the CSD and assessing the satisfaction of the students after the CSD.

8.3. For the County School Inspectorates and the Ministry of National Education

✓ Simplifying the CSD endorsement procedure so as to stimulate school autonomy in the curriculum proposal and introduce means of continuous monitoring and ex-post evaluation of the effectiveness of the optional course.
✓ Simplifying procedures for organizing the optional course in cultural and educational spaces outside the school.
✓ Extending the notice for a repeat CSD without resuming the entire procedure.
✓ Ensuring the transparency of data collected at CSI and MNE regarding CSD and their presentation in an open format.

✓ Organizing regular public debates on the CSD to ensure that all stakeholders are expected to meet the expectations of the issue.
✓ Ensuring that intellectual property rights are respected for teachers who provide their colleagues in other educational establishments with materials developed to advise a CSD via online platforms.
✓ Redesigning the curriculum and reducing the load for the disciplines in the common trunk and exams to make room for a wider range of themes for optional subjects.
✓ Extending the CSD offer made available by the Ministry of National Education for each educational cycle so as to include themes tailored to the global context and challenges, but also to the real needs of pupils learning to prepare them for the future.
✓ Providing teachers with bibliographic resources and educational resources to support the curriculum and planning of new CSDs.
✓ Facilitating the access of schools and teachers from disadvantaged and rural areas to European projects and programs, in order to stimulate lifelong learning and intensify partnerships with non-governmental organizations to support this process.

8.4. For non-governmental organizations in the field of education and research institutes in education

✓ Running information campaigns to empower students and parents to get involved in school decisions and to actively participate in improving CSD classes.
✓ Facilitate the relationship of the school with funding bodies and private donors to attract non-reimbursable funds and CSR funding that can be used for school infrastructure and for logistics improvement of CSD hours.
✓ Running campaigns for informing and promoting optional ideas and teachers' ability to implement them through informative materials, trainings and work-shops.
✓ Periodic statistical and qualitative analysis of CSDs from the point of view of educational efficiency and stakeholder satisfaction.
✓ Facilitate and mediate the exchange of best practices between schools, schools and institutions in the field of education (CSI, MNE) and between schools and stakeholders (other institutions, private organizations) to bring the Romanian school closer to the needs of the market.
✓ Promote good practice models in schools to replicate them.
✓ Support schools, students and teachers to access European programs for lifelong learning and lifelong learning and partnering projects with European funding that could open up CSD horizons.

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