School and Family Cooperation: Strengthening Parents' Knowledge of Greek

Eleni Karantzola and Ioannis Galantomos

Abstract The positive impact of parent's involvement in their children's schooling is widely accepted. This chapter aims at presenting the rationale, the structure and the specific features of the Greek language classes organized during 2012 and 2013 and directed to migrant parents of school age students, in the framework of a national scale project. The main idea lying behind these classes was to enhance migrant parents' knowledge of Greek as a second language so as to better communicate with school and participate more actively in their children's schooling. For this reason, the focus of teaching has been the familiarization of the participating parents with everyday school domains, such as school governance, curricula and the language textbooks. Results and implications of the intervention are discussed.

Keywords Parental involvement · Immigrant parents · Greek as a second language · Language material · Language textbooks · School and family cooperation

1 Introduction

During the last three decades there is a growing consensus among researchers and educators that both the quality and degree of relations between schools and family and parental involvement have a positive impact on children's academic achievement (e.g. Barnard 2004; Jeyenes 2003; Karantzola 2003; Pomerantz et al. 2005). Furthermore, this relationship has been proven to be beneficial for all involved.

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Parents can gain a better understanding of the school's curriculum and engage in various activities (e.g. Swap 1993), students can develop high motivation towards school (e.g. Berger 2000), and teachers benefit from parental participation in school activities by sharing their aspirations and expectations (Henderson 1987).

Parental involvement can be defined as the parents' or caregivers' active engagement in the education of their children at home or at school. This engagement can take the following forms: volunteering at school, helping children with their homework, participating in school activities, visiting the child's classroom, sharing knowledge or experience with the class through guest speaking and participating in school decision-making processes (LaRocque et al. 2011).

At this point it is essential to make a distinction between the terms "parental engagement" and "parental participation". Parental engagement refers to procedures which allow parents to have a predetermined role in what is happening in the school. In most cases, parents are spectators of school events or activities (Davies and Johnson 1996). On the other hand, parental participation presupposes procedures that allow parents to take an active part in school governance and decision-making at all educational levels (Soliman 1995).

McNeal (2001) claims that the positive impact of parental involvement on children' socialization and academic success can be attributed to theories of social and cultural capital. Social capital is mainly manifested through two processes, firstly, parents' participation in the governance of their child's school, in that they are expected to engage actively with the organizational and social aspects of school life and secondly parents' engagement in monitoring of their children's school attainment (Berthelsen and Walker 2008). Cultural capital refers to the amount of parental involvement in the educational process. Parents with increased cultural capital as a result of better education are more likely to engage more actively in their children's schooling (Lareau 1987).

2 Immigrant Parents' School Engagement

Researchers have documented that parents of immigrant origin face complex issues of adaptation which involve both their home culture and the culture of the new country (e.g. Berry 1997). In other words, these parents face the demanding task of structuring new lives for themselves and the members of their families in a community and a culture in general, unknown to them (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). This task is demanding by nature because immigrant parents hold values, beliefs and educational expectations which may be different from those advocated in school (Ogbu and Mature-Bianchi 1986). Therefore, immigrant parents in order to be successful in their roles as parents, must develop new ways of world understanding, establish new social networks, new forms of cultural capital (e.g. learning the language of the host country) and learn new ways to function (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001).

It is widely accepted that immigrant parents put an emphasis on their children's education (e.g. Trueba 1999). Nevertheless, in their effort to improve the schooling of their children's, these parents often realize that the space for involvement is not equitable. They find that their beliefs and actions are positioned lower than those of other school actors (Olmedo 2003). The obstacles that put them in the lower places of the school hierarchy are language, cultural capital and social networks (Trueba 2004). Similarly, Tinkler (2002) argues that the barriers most often confronted by parents of immigrant background with regard to their participation in their children's schooling are school-based barriers, lack of English language proficiency, parental educational level, discontinuities between school and home culture and finally, logistical issues (i.e. immigrant parents often have labor-intensive work schedules with limited flexibility which affect their ability to attend teacher-parents meetings and communicate with other parents and school actors (e.g. Scribner et al. 1999).

On the other hand, migrant parents often express their anxiety regarding issues, such as their children's language maintenance and shift and their children' literacy in the minority language (Gaintartzi and Tsokalidou 2012). Research data suggest that when migrant children enter the official educational system of the hosting country they tend to alter their language repertoire by using more and more the dominant language (Fillmore 1991; Lambert 1974).

3 Research on Parental Engagement in Greece

In Greece, parental engagement is mentioned in the Laws 1566/1985 and 2621/1998 (Government Gazette 167A, article 53 and Government Gazette 136A, article 2 respectively) where the emphasis is mainly put on the elections held by the parents so as to participate in the school governance. Nevertheless, research data investigating parental engagement and especially migrant parental engagement are little and focus mainly on primary education (Antonopoulou et al. 2011). Even fewer are the surveys which investigate teachers' beliefs about the necessity and the nature of this involvement (Koutrouba et al. 2009).

To name a few, Chatzidaki (2007) investigated migrant parental involvement and teachers' beliefs regarding this involvement. She found that migrant parents hold positive attitudes towards their engagement in their children's education. On the other hand, teachers claimed that migrant parents do not participate in their children's education for various reasons. Chatzidaki (op.cit.) concludes that teachers should become more sensitive to parents' needs and expectations and adopt more democratic and empowering forms of collaboration. Poulou and Matsagouras (2007) found that there is a clear-cut differentiation between educators and parents' roles, with the teachers being responsible only for the academic aspects of their students' school attainment and the parents being responsible for their children's emotional and social growth. Pnevmatikos et al. (2008) concluded that Greek parents relate their children's performance with their active involvement in the school activities and with their collaboration with the teachers. However, they (i.e. the

parents) evaluate their engagement in their children's homework less effective compared to the children's overall academic achievements. Bonia et al. (2008) showed that Greek primary education teachers consider factors, such as lack of time for communication, diverse parents' language and cultural background and parents in insufficiency to help effectively their children with their homework can stand as barriers to teacher-parent communication and collaboration. Antonopoulou et al. (2011) showed that home-school collaboration is poor although the parents themselves believe that this kind of collaboration is beneficial for students' academic and emotional development, teachers are deemed to be friendly and caring and the Greek secondary school offers some instances of constructive parental engagement. The researchers attribute these three paradoxes to the structure, the way of functioning and the engraved beliefs that run the Greek educational system. Finally, Charavitzidis (2013) presents the results of a study which showed that the interaction between school and family through migrant parents' active participation in decision-making procedures and school governance was beneficial for the members of a school community in Athens, Greece.

4 The Study

4.1 Background

For a long period of time, Greece has been a traditional labor-exporting country. However, political, economic and social developments, such as the collapse of communism and the border opening in Eastern Europe have transformed Greece into a major migrant receiver. According to Eurostat,[1] in Greece, in January 2014, there were 836.900 (7,7% of the total population) foreigners. 188.300 (1,7%) come from EU countries and 648.600 (5,9%) are non-EU citizens. The vast majority of the migrants comes from the neighboring Balkan countries (Cavounidis 2004; Rovolis and Tragaki 2006). In particular, according to the 2011 Population Census,[2] migrants from Albania number 480.851, from Bulgaria 75.917 and from Romania (46.524). Other major migrant communities in Greece are those from Egypt (10.455), Ukraine (17.008), Georgia (27.407), Afghanistan (6.911) and Pakistan (34.178).

This influx of migrants at the beginnings of the 1990s has brought many changes to the social structure, economy and education of Greece. In fact, the Greek people had to face a totally unfamiliar situation, since this migrant influx unsettled the national balance. Similarly, this influx disorganized the Greek educational system, in the sense that the Greek schools were totally unprepared to cope with students of migrant background (Tsokalidou 2008).

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/1/14/Non-national_population_by_group_of_citizenship%2C_1_January_2014_%28%C2%B9%29_YB15.png

[2] Data extracted from Table 04 (www.statistics.gr/demographic-data).

4.2 The Project "Education for Foreign and Repatriated Students"

In light of the above, the Greek state in collaboration with the European Union authorities designed and implemented in 2010 the national scale project "Education for Foreign and Repatriated Students", under the auspices of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The project consisted of nine (9) actions[3] and stopped functioning in 2013 (although some dissemination activities took place in 2014).

More specifically, the action 7 *"Connecting School and Community"* evolved around two sub actions, namely, sub action 7.1. *"Strengthening Family"* and sub action 7.2. *"Developing cooperation among School, Migrant Communities, NGO and Social Workers"*. Given the importance of parental participation and the linguistic and cultural diversity of migrant parents, short-term language classes were organized, and specific language material was designed aiming at parents whose children were attending various levels of the Greek educational system (with an emphasis on primary and secondary education).

For the implementation of the language classes a call of interest was launched looking for more or less experienced language instructors in teaching Greek as a foreign/second language. The aim of the call was to form a registry of instructors and from this registry to use them on demand. Before the start of the classes, the selected language instructors went through a 2-day training seminar on various issues.

More specifically, this training seminar was organized around general (related to foreign/second language teaching theory and practice) and more focused topics. For instance, the general topics included the presentation of the foreign/second language teaching methods, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe) and the world's major language families with a special emphasis on migrants' most used languages in Greece. The suggested teaching methodology was the Communicative Approach which is nowadays the most widely used teaching method (Bella 2007). This particular instructional methodology was selected because it addresses all four language skills (i.e. reading, speaking, writing and listening), it presupposes learners' active role, teacher acts as an advisor and facilitator and puts an emphasis on the production of linguistically and culturally appropriate language so as certain functions to be carried out (Mackey 2006). On the other hand, the more focused topics in the training seminar covered the goals and expected outcomes of the language classes at both individual and societal level, the detailed presentation of the language material content (see below) and finally the duties of the language instructors.

The total number of language instructors was 187 (61 trained and 126 non-trained). The vast majority of them was part of Attica region registry (72, 21 trained

[3] For a detailed presentation of the actions of the project, visit http://www.diapolis.auth.gr. Unfortunately, schools which took part in one of the actions were not able to participate in another action, so there was no school which took advantage of the whole design and the interaction of the activities.

Table 1 Data about the Greek language classes in 2012 and 2013

No	Region	School units		Parents *(approx.)*		Language strand	
		2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013
1	Central Macedonia	2	6	7	85	20	20
2	Thessaly	1		4		40	
3	Epirus & Ionian islands	3		19		20	
4	Western Greece	2		39		40	
5	Eastern Macedonia & Thrace	3		26		20	
6	Peloponnese	2		15		40 & 20	
7	Attica	20	8	192	153	20 & 40	20
8	North Aegean islands		4		44		20
9	South Aegean Islands		5		49		20

and 51 non-trained), whereas the regions with the less instructors were the South Aegean Islands (9), Continental Greece (5) and the Ionian Islands (1).

The language classes run from 2012 to 2013 and were implemented in two strands, namely 20-hour Greek classes and 40-hour Greek classes. The difference between the two strands was that in the 40-hour one, the explicit teaching of the Greek alphabetical writing system was introduced.

In 2012 these language classes were offered in seven (7) (of the 13) Greek regions, namely, Central Macedonia, Thessaly, Epirus & Ionian Islands, Western Greece, Eastern Macedonia & Thrace, Peloponnese and Attica. On the other hand, in 2013, the language classes took place in four (4) Greek regions, namely, Central Macedonia, North Aegean Islands, South Aegean Islands and Attica (cf. Table 1).

The language material came from two sources. Firstly, it was based on existing material used in language classes run by the Institute of Continuing Adult Education (Gr. *IDEKE*) within the framework of the project *ODYSSEAS*. At this point it should be mentioned that the authors were members of the expert group who wrote in 2011 the ODYSSEAS students' book and teachers' guidelines for levels A1 and A2 (see Agathos et al. 2011).

More specifically, this material covers levels A1 (125 h) and A2 (150 h +25 h of history classes)[4] (according to CEFR) and relies on various genres and texts. Each language level consists of eight units. These units reflect the tenets of Literacy and Multiliteracies and evolve around three sections, namely "to engage" (Gr. *Εμπλέκομαι*) (i.e. exploitation of previous experience and knowledge), "to elaborate and analyze" (Gr. *Επεξεργάζομαι και αναλύω*) (i.e. full teaching of the new topic) and "to extend" (Gr. *Επεκτείνω*) (i.e. learners apply new knowledge to a typical communicative instance (Agathos et al. 2011) (sample material is available upon request).

[4] Recently, two more language levels were added, namely B1 (185 h) and B1 (195 h) with an emphasis on oral speech production and comprehension (cf. *http://www.inedivim.gr/προγράμματα/odysseas*).

The alphabet section was also taken from ODYSSEAS language material; its originality lies in the fact that it is based on letter grouping according to similarities/differences of the Greek letters compared to the ones of the Latin alphabet, which is more or less familiar to the immigrants. Therefore, teaching is there organized around four groups. The first group consists of letters that present the greater proximity with those of Latin alphabet, in their capital form[5]: <A, α>, <E, ε>, <I, ι>, <O, ο>, <Z, ζ>, <K, κ>, <M, μ>, <N, ν>, <T, τ>. The second group includes the letters <Λ, λ>, <Π, π>, <P, ρ>, <Σ, σ/ς > and < Φ, φ>, that represent in a different way the sounds [l, p, r, s, f], as well as different graphemes for the sound [i] and [o] (<H, η>, <Οι, οι>, <ΕΙ, ει> / <Ω, ω>. The third group consists of letter combination for sounds as [b] (Gr. <ΜΠ, μπ>), [g] (Gr. <ΓΚ, γκ>, <ΓΓ, γγ>), [d] (Gr. <NT, ντ>); moreover, this group includes <Υ, υ > (= [i]) and the combination <Ου, ου > (= [u]). Lastly, the fourth group consists of the sounds [θ], [χ] "ξ" [ks] and "ψ" [ps]; in addition, it includes the combinations <ΕΥ, ευ>, <ΑΥ, αυ > that correspond to the sounds [ef / ev and af / av] (Agathos et al. 2011).

Secondly, and for the new material was designed. In particular, a Glossary of the most common school terms (Gr. *Γλωσσάρι Σχολικής Ζωής*) was developed in order to familiarize parents with the administration terms and procedures of the Greek educational system. This Glossary covered all types of schools, from kindergarten (Gr. *Νηπιαγωγείο*) to senior high school (Gr. *Λύκειο*) at two language levels, that is, beginners (Level A) and intermediate (Level B) (cf. Appendices 1, 2). Added to this, a corpus of the most common authentic administration documents (cf. Appendix 3) and a description of the Greek educational system in the form of FAQ were designed (cf. Appendix 4).

4.3 Method

The aim of our analysis was twofold. Firstly, to evaluate the short-term effectiveness of theses fast track Greek language classes and the impact they had on the quality of migrant parental participation in their children's schooling and secondly, to evaluate the mid−/long-term effectiveness of these classes (i.e. 2 years after the end of the Action 7). Although a questionnaire aiming at parents' views was designed, it was not feasible to process it due to certain limitations, namely parent's unwillingness to fill it. Thus, we examined the short evaluation reports written by the language instructors at the end of the Greek language classes, which reflect indirectly migrant parents' positions. On the other hand, we conducted a focus group discussion with educators who had participated in the intervention in April 2015.

[5] According to the usual notational conventions, [] represents sounds, a narrow phonetic transcription, while < > encloses graphemes.

4.4 Results

In the indicative extracts to follow, the views of language instructors are documented regarding the overall effectiveness of the Greek classes and the degree of satisfaction of migrant parents:

Extract 1[6]
The atmosphere between me (i.e. the language instructor) and the parents was very warm and friendly. During the course of the classes, a climate of trust was developed, and the parents were able to express their questions and clarifications. According to their statements, they were satisfied, they were assisted (i.e. in improving their fluency in Greek), covered gaps and were disappointed with the completion of the classes *(Evaluation report from a school in Attica-2012).*

Extract 2
Evaluating generally the project, I would say that it was successful, while no complaints or problems came up. The trainees showed great interest and learned useful stuff not only for themselves, but also for their children's school life. For example, the Greek educational system was unfamiliar to them and they didn't know basic aspects of it. Also, they learned to fill in forms, which until then was an obstacle to them. They expressed their satisfaction with the stuff they learned and with their overall experience form the project *(Evaluation report from a school in Epirus-2012).*

Extract 3
They showed special interest by making constantly questions, correlations with what is in force in their countries. Also, they showed interest in the Greek grammar and syntax so as to help, as they were saying, their children. Based on words from the Glossary (i.e. *Γλωσσάρι Σχολικής Ζωής*) a long discussion was in progress regarding their children's school success-failure and mainly their difficulties in their integration into school *(Evaluation report from a school in Central Macedonia-2013).*

Extract 4
The language classes to parents of diverse language background were completed successfully. The everyday vocabulary of those who participated was enriched so as to help more their children in their preparation for school *(Evaluation report from a school in the South Aegean region-2013).*

At a second level, in April 2015 we organized a focus group discussion with six (6) participants who took part in sub action 7.1. These were four (4) primary school teachers and two (2) external collaborators (one (1) adult educator and one (1) sociologist). This semi-structured interview lasted 1,3 h and took place in Athens under the coordination of one of the two authors.

Two major tendencies/patterns were identified. The first one regards schools that integrated the language classes of the sub action 7.1. into the regular school function

[6]The extracts in English were translated by the authors. The translation is the closest one to the original Greek text.

alongside with other activities, such as migrants' native languages teaching. The second one regards school units that implemented the language classes without any connection with the school function and sometimes the location of these classes was far away from the school itself.

4.5 Discussion

The extracts taken from the evaluation reports document the positive attitudes of both language instructors and (indirectly) the migrant parents towards the language classes that aimed at the enhancement of migrant parents' Greek fluency. This satisfaction is shown in migrant parents' willingness to participate in similar forthcoming activities. Additionally, the primary goal of these language classes was achieved, since migrant parents were familiarized with aspects of the Greek educational system, they learned how to fill in applications and improved their level in the Greek language so as to better communicate with the school and even assist their children in their homework with more confidence.

On the other hand, a closer look at the semi structured interview manifested two totally different approaches towards immigration, parental participation and migrant children' schooling.

In particular, there are some Greek schools[7] that started early on organizing language classes and took advantage of national and E.U. funded research projects, such as "Olympic Education" (Gr. *Ολυμπιακή Παιδεία*) so as to promote parental participation in their children' schooling and assist migrants at maintaining their native languages through language classes in various L1 s (e.g. Albanian, Russian). These schools enhanced school-family collaboration ("parents are interested in the closer relationships with the teachers, the contact", "those parents who participated actively in schools' actions were benefited from these", "these classes were the key to unlock school function") and it has been shown that they motivated neighboring schools to take part in similar actions ("due to the project, neighboring schools took part"). Furthermore, these schools did not stop such activities when the public funding reached an end; in fact, they continued on a volunteer basis ("when the action ended, volunteerism was activated, and the action's material was used in this context").

On the other hand, there were schools that implemented the language classes and when the funding stopped, these classes ended too. These schools never actively integrated the language classes into their function; in fact, there were cases where the classes did not take place in the school but outside the school building ("in …

[7] A school which actively promotes school-family collaboration is 132nd Athens Elementary School. In this school 85% of the total student population comes from 12 different nationalities. Since 1999 various activities and language classes aiming at migrant parents took place in order to enhance collaboration among students, parents and teachers (Protonotarios and Charavitzidis 2012).

name of the school… the classes took place in another place outside of the school"). In these schools, parents participated, but the lack of cooperation between the school and the family had either a negative or an indifferent impact on the overall outcome of these classes and the general expectations held by both parents and the sub action governance.

Other major findings which can be drawn from this focus group discussion are the following ones.

Firstly, participating migrant parents did not constitute a homogenous group. As school factors stated on the one hand there were the migrants from the Balkans and on the other hand migrant parents from Afghanistan, Syria and other countries from the same region. Parents from the Balkans due to their longer stay in Greece had already gained a good command of Greek and they desired to get familiarized with the more academic aspects of the language in order to certify their qualifications ("they are interested in enhancing their knowledge of Greek"). Migrants from Middle East and Asia had totally different characteristics due to their different background and expectations. They had little understanding of the value of education and they wanted to leave Greece and move to the more developed countries of the Western Europe ("they are difficult because they want to leave", "they have other qualities compared to the Balkans. Balkans are aware of the value of education").

Secondly, all participants stated that these language classes had an expiration date ("the action had an expiration date"), the total duration was limited ("the duration of the classes was little") and no provision was made for the next day ("it should be taken into consideration the management of the end of these classes"). In fact, the language classes generated expectations on the side of the migrant parents and when they ended it was difficult to explain them the reasons for it ("the project generated expectations and upon its end caused problems", "why-questions arose", "migrants do not consider as an adequate answer the lack of funding").

Lastly, the need for specialized language material and different teaching approaches came up. For instance, the transition from kindergarten to primary school and to the secondary education calls for differentiated material because the relationship between the school and the family and the language needs alter and vary ("as the school level progress, what is called school-family cooperation lays "somewhere else"). At this point it is useful to mention that the participants expressed their positive views towards the teaching of the Greek alphabet based on the similarities/differences between the Greek and the Latin alphabet ("Now I know how to read/pronounce the letters correctly"). In addition, new topics arise, such as the management of teenage worries and expectations ("if the school wanted to keep in touch with the parents, it should deal with the major topic of students in their teens", "students in their teens trouble classroom, frustrate parents"). Furthermore, there is a need to adapt language teaching and material to migrants' everyday language practice and topics that are meaningful to them. It was stressed by all participants that parents should actively engage in language class design, so as these classes to meet their expectations and take into consideration any cultural, language and religious issues.

4.6 Limitations

A number of limitations of the present study are noteworthy. Firstly, the fact that we did not investigate directly the views of migrant parents prevented us from reaching safer conclusions and secondly, the small sample of the school actors who participated in the focus group discussion did not enable us to gain more insights regarding the role and beliefs of educators.

5 Conclusions

To sum up, our analysis aimed at demonstrating the beneficial role of migrant parental involvement in their children academic performance. Toward this goal, we analysed the evaluation reports that indirectly manifested parents' views and carried out a focus group discussion with educators who have worked with migrant parents. Our results indicate the positive beliefs hold by migrant parents and the positive effect of Greek language classes on migrant parents' ability to familiarize themselves with the Greek school function. Nevertheless, certain limitations apply, mainly the indirect way to document migrant parents' positioning with regard to their participation in their children's schooling.

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Appendicies

Appendix 1: Glossary for the Kindergarten (Sample)

B		
Entry	level	explanations
Medical booklet	A	The medical booklet is an official small-sized book which is given to the doctor in order to document any illness and to prescribe any drugs taken
	B	The medical booklet is the official small-sized book which is given to the doctor in order to document the illness a patient is suffering from and to prescribe the medical treatment which should be followed

Appendix 2: Glossary for the Senior High School (Sample)

E		
Entry	Level	Explanations
Specialty of the vocational senior high school	A	In the vocational senior high schools, students choose a specialty they are fond of. In other words, they choose if they will become electricians, plumbers or if they will follow any other occupation
	B	In the vocational senior high schools, students are obliged to choose the specialty they wish to follow. In other words, students express their interest in a specific occupation

Appendix 3: Corpus of Administrative Documents (Sample)

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS
NORTH AEGEAN REGIONAL DIRECTORATE OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
CHIOS DIRECTORATE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

_____ /Seats PRIMARY SCHOOL
Postal Address : _____

Information: _____
Telephone : _____

_____
200__
Registry No: _____

To the Principal of the ……./Seats Primary School

_____
___
Street_____No_____
Postal Box _____ Town/City

Service Note

I hereby request the registration in your School of the student……. attending the …….. grade of our School. Via inter service route we will forward the Transfer Document, his/her Grades Document and his/her Individual Medical Report.

The Principal

Appendix 4: FAQ Regarding the Greek Educational System (Sample)

- Is education in Greece compulsory?

It is essential to know that education in Greece is divided into compulsory (from Kindergarten to Junior High School) and non-compulsory one (all forms of education from Junior High School onwards). This practically means that all children between 5 and 15 years old attend school.

- Is there an education alternative for children below the age of 5 years old?

There are education alternatives for the pre-school age. Nursery schools can register children from the age of 2,5 years old. These schools can be private (where parents pay the tuition fees), public (run by the State) and municipal (run by the City Authorities).

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