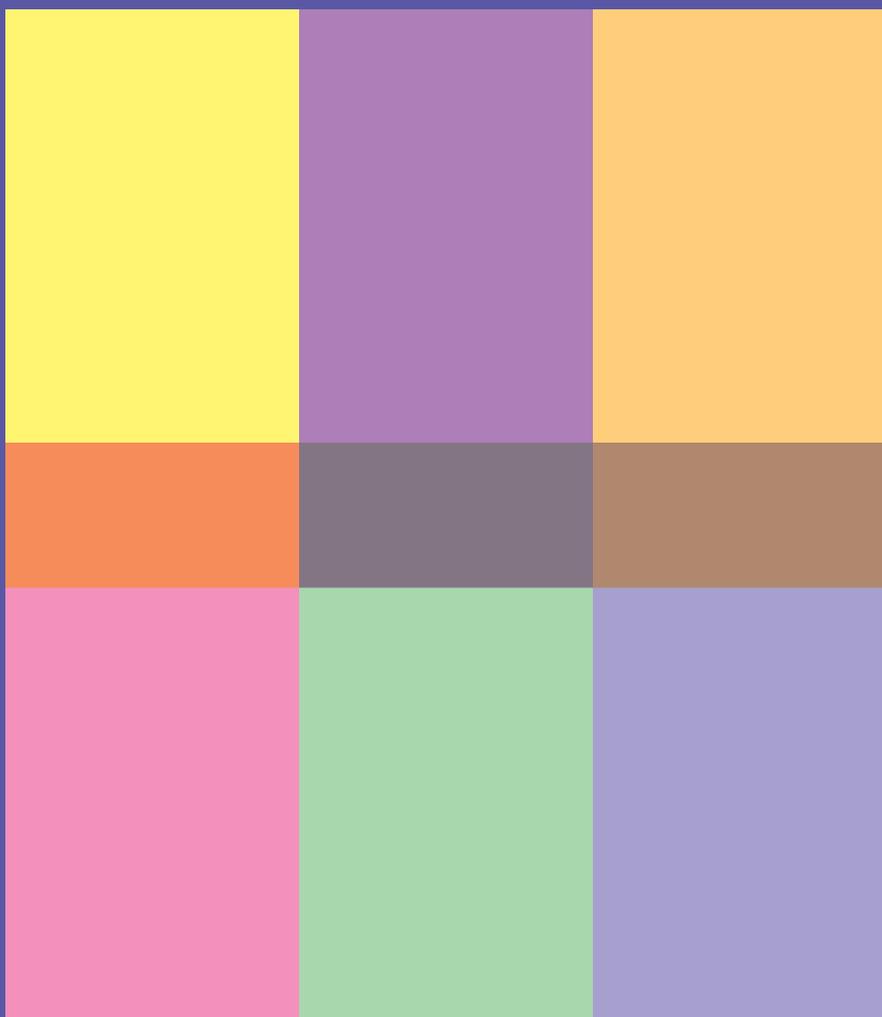


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C · E · P · S *Journal*

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The CEPS Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal devoted to publishing research papers in different fields of education, including scientific.

Aims & Scope

The CEPS Journal is an international peer-reviewed journal with an international board. It publishes original empirical and theoretical studies from a wide variety of academic disciplines related to the field of Teacher Education and Educational Sciences; in particular, it will support comparative studies in the field. Regional context is stressed but the journal remains open to researchers and contributors across all European countries and worldwide. There are four issues per year. Issues are focused on specific areas but there is also space for non-focused articles and book reviews.

About the Publisher

The University of Ljubljana is one of the largest universities in the region (see www.uni-lj.si) and its Faculty of Education (see www.pef.uni-lj.si), established in 1947, has the leading role in teacher education and education sciences in Slovenia. It is well positioned in regional and European cooperation programmes in teaching and research. A publishing unit oversees the dissemination of research results and informs the interested public about new trends in the broad area of teacher education and education sciences; to date, numerous monographs and publications have been published, not just in Slovenian but also in English.

In 2001, the Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS; see <http://ceps.pef.uni-lj.si>) was established within the Faculty of Education to build upon experience acquired in the broad reform of the

national educational system during the period of social transition in the 1990s, to upgrade expertise and to strengthen international cooperation. CEPS has established a number of fruitful contacts, both in the region – particularly with similar institutions in the countries of the Western Balkans – and with interested partners in EU member states and worldwide.



Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij je mednarodno recenzirana revija z mednarodnim uredniškim odborom in s prostim dostopom. Namenjena je objavljanju člankov s področja izobraževanja učiteljev in edukacijskih ved.

Cilji in namen

Revija je namenjena obravnavanju naslednjih področij: poučevanje, učenje, vzgoja in izobraževanje, socialna pedagogika, specialna in rehabilitacijska pedagogika, predšolska pedagogika, edukacijske politike, supervizija, poučevanje slovenskega jezika in književnosti, poučevanje matematike, računalništva, naravoslovja in tehnike, poučevanje družboslovja in humanistike, poučevanje na področju umetnosti, visokošolsko izobraževanje in izobraževanje odraslih. Poseben poudarek bo namenjen izobraževanju učiteljev in spodbujanju njihovega profesionalnega razvoja.

V reviji so objavljeni znanstveni prispevki, in sicer teoretični prispevki in prispevki, v katerih so predstavljeni rezultati kvantitativnih in kvalitativnih empiričnih raziskav. Še posebej poudarjen je pomen komparativnih raziskav.

Revija izide štirikrat letno. Številke so tematsko opredeljene, v njih pa je prostor tudi za netematske prispevke in predstavitev ter recenzije novih publikacij.

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Editorial

Education Reforms and Social Change

As a topic in the sociology of education, educational change has been high on the agenda of scholars, practitioners and policy-makers alike. In fact, over the previous several decades, both social and political changes, as well as technological innovation, have been a catalyst for changes in education. Yet, educational change is not only a reflection of larger social and political transformations as well as initiatives aimed at reshaping educational practice but an amalgam of factors (both internal and external) that have an impact on schooling as well as on education in general.

Interestingly, scholarship on educational change has been galvanised not only by these transformations but also by an increasing significance of education for both individual and social well-being. This period coincided with some of the major shifts of emphasis in education policy-making on a global level and scholarly endeavour that had a transformative influence on theorising in social sciences and the humanities. In particular, the centrality of education in post-1989 social and political changes has contributed considerably to several system-based reforms throughout Europe. One of the paths undertaken has been that of Slovenia. After a decade of conceptual discussions and a panoply of 'scaling up' projects and other initiatives, a comprehensive educational reform was undertaken in 1996.

This focus issue of the CEPS journal (entitled *Education Reforms and Social Change*) aims to bring together a set of contributions discussing the impact and the legacy of the introduction of nine-year comprehensive education alongside changes at the legislative, organisational, and curriculum levels from pre-primary to vocational and general upper-secondary education, including higher education, of a newly established independent state. Twenty-five years later, this educational reform continues to stimulate discussions about public as well as private education (both in Slovenia and in other countries in the region). This focus issue, therefore, includes articles that discuss a particular aspect of this reform as well as papers that reflect the broader social and political circumstances that have influenced change in education and continue to do so. While focusing on Slovenia, it simultaneously includes reflections on the educational reforms and other initiatives in the selected European countries both from the south and the north.

The article authored by Hannele Niemi, entitled *Education Reforms for Equity and Quality: An Analysis from an Educational Ecosystem Perspective with*

Reference to Finnish Educational Transformations, starts with the question of why educational reforms do not lead to better learning. Although access to education has increased remarkably, the quality can be very low. The reality is that by 2030 800 million educated young people will not have basic skills in reading and math. The author seeks answers to the question of why it is so with the concept of the educational ecosystem, asking how different subsystems, such as curriculum system, evaluation systems, teacher education policy, and labour market, should be interconnected, and systemic changes supported by all these subsystems. The basic conditions are that different actors and stakeholders work in collaboration. There are active interactions within and between different subsystems for supporting both equity and quality in education. Educational reforms are complex processes and need diverse partners and governance among whom trust is required. The article also provides a brief case description in Finnish contexts of how educational reforms have been implemented in the frame of the ecosystem concept. In the end, the article summarises how educational ecosystems could help to overcome the global learning crises.

Georgeta Ion, Cecilia Inés Suárez, and Anna Diaz Vicario, in their article *Evidence-Informed Educational Practice in Catalan Education: From Public Agenda to Teachers' Practice*, reflect on Catalonia's long tradition of school innovation movements, which have increased in recent years as public administration and private entities initiated substantial school reforms oriented toward the use of evidence in teaching practice. As the Catalan educational system is highly autonomous, not all schools embraced the evidence-informed practise (EIP) movement; this has created differences between schools that choose to implement a change or an innovation based on scientifically demonstrated evidence and those that do not. That is why our authors attempt to understand the current state of the inclusion of the EIP in Catalonia and the teachers' perceptions regarding its adoption as part of their daily practice. To address the abovementioned, they have started exploring the legal and structural framework grounding the implementation of EIP in the Catalan system and, through interviews conducted with a sample of primary school leaders and teachers, they have approached the organisational and individual levels to explore the opportunities to implement an authentic EIP approach in the Catalan educational system.

In the next article, *The Impact of Specific Social Factors on Changes in Education in Serbia*, Ana Pešikan and Ivan Ivić examine political and economic changes that followed the adoption of the *Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia (2012)*, which largely left aside the basic ideas and intentions of the strategy, creating the systematic threat to education and its role in the

development of Serbia. In the opinion of the authors, this made an almost experimental situation for analysing the impact of political and social factors on changes in education. In the sphere of politics, new trends have emerged (centralisation of power; marginalisation of democratic institutions; encouraging foreign investment in companies with a low technological level, etc.) that all strongly influenced the changes ('reforms') in education (great centralisation in education, strong influence of politics on education, imposing of some lower-level forms of education, reducing professional autonomy, etc.). The basic mechanism of transferring general policy to education is changing the role of the most important national institutions in defining and implementing education policy. The adoption of new education laws (2017) radically changed their status and competencies, resulting in a reduction of their independence and professionalism and a strengthening of the role of the Ministry, through which the influence of the ruling politic is transferred. Also, the role of the Chamber of Commerce in education has been strengthened. Such changes, according to the authors, have endangered the autonomy of educational institutions and teachers, as well as the quality of education. Consequently, these changes have a clear impact on the country's development and its international position in the field of education.

Slavko Gaber and Veronika Tašner, in their paper *Structural Over-Determination of Education Reforms and Agency*, conceptualise the relationship between the individual and the structural in a time of relatively radical changes in society. The dialectics of such relationships are analysed through a combination of auto-ethnographic reflections and archival documents showing the changes in the functioning of a council of experts in a country that experienced and managed three fundamentally peaceful transitions: the transition from a self-governing socialist economy to a market economy, from a one-party socialist system to a representative liberal democracy, and from a republic that was part of a federal state to an independent state. The contextualised account and assessment of the shifts that together helped produce the independent state and its formation of the educational system outline the complexity and importance of reflexive governance during times of transition, which in itself foregrounds a number of relevant issues and invites and supports change in the educational system.

The article by Mitja Sardoč, entitled *Citizenship, Social Change, and Education*, discusses some of the neglected aspects associated with the justification of citizenship education in public schools. The central purpose is to explain the two main impulses associated with the civic aims of public schools and their interrelationship with social changes. The main part contrasts these

two opposing motivational impulses associated with the reasons for citizenship education. Each of the two impulses is presented and then clarified with an example to shed light on the basic justificatory procedure associated with it. The concluding part of this paper outlines the most distinctive challenges: the alternative conception of justifying citizenship education and its interplay with social change.

The article *Consequentialist Reasons for Some Education Reforms* by Zdenko Kodelja identifies two contrasting reasons for educational reforms: consequentialist and non-consequentialist. In particular, it examines proposed education reforms in some of the EU countries whose strategic aims have been equated with creativity and innovation and whose main form of justification has been a consequentialist one. As the author emphasises, it seems that the introduction of such education reforms can be understood not as a decision founded on causal explanation but rather on the basis of a special type of teleological explanation, which has the logical form of 'practical syllogism'.

Marjan Šimenc's contribution, entitled *Education Reform and the Normalisation of Private Education in Slovenia*, to this focus number of the CEPS Journal examines 'the long-term effects of the regulation of private education adopted in the education reform in 1996 and the sustainability of the guiding principles that served as the starting point for this regulation'. In particular, it reviews both the main goals of the education reform as explicated in the 1995 White Paper, the guiding principles of the introduction of private education in Slovenia, as well as the regulations introduced based on these tenets. It also takes a closer look at the establishment of private education in Slovenia based on the adopted regulation and its relationship with public education. As the author accentuates, '[t]he thesis proposed by the article is that it is the normalisation of private education in Slovenia that should be considered the main achievement of the education reform'.

Živa Kos's contribution, entitled *Shifting Regulative Ideas of Education Policy and Practice: The Case of Quality Assurance in Education in Slovenia*, attempts to show how societies and schools have for some time functioned through the regulation of three dispositives: the legal, the disciplinary, and the security dispositives. While the crises of the 1970s shifted the combination of dispositives in education in the West towards security ones, this shift in the rationality of educational policy and practice in Slovenia did not take place until the 1990s, after the broader political transition to democracy and a market economy. The paper aims to illustrate these shifts through the structuring of quality assurance mechanisms in education in Slovenia over the last two decades.

Ljubica Marjanovič Umek in her paper *A New Image of Preschool Institutions in Slovenia: Conceptual, Systemic and Curricular Backgrounds* presents an analysis of preschool education in Slovenia. Her analysis is based on theoretical starting points, international comparative analysis of quality indicators of preschool education and curriculum documents, and the results of Slovenian and foreign empirical research on children's early development and learning. The analysis was conducted from the point of view of conceptual, systemic, and curricular solutions. The author particularly emphasises the need to update the preschool curriculum and professional dilemmas related to the efficiency and fairness of preschool. In conclusion, the author highlights selected opportunities for improvement in Slovenian preschool education.

The article by Mojca Kovač Šebart, Damjan Štefanc, and Tadej Vidmar *Compulsory Education Reform between the Profession and Policy in the Light of Justice and Equal Opportunities* provides a detailed and critical insight into selected elements of the reform of primary education in independent Slovenia. The reform of primary education in Slovenia was based on the 1995 concept White Paper, which formed the basis for the adoption of the relevant legislation. Since there were more solutions than could be problematised in one paper, the authors focus only on a few selected solutions. They have been usefully divided into three groups: System, Programme, and Process groups. The text also points out that more attention should be paid to reducing inequalities related to social and cultural realities and different regions in Slovenia. For the programme level, the authors point out the need to reach a consensus on what quality general education means. For the process level, they note that there is not enough professional support or systematic evaluation studies. The authors believe that the quality of schools cannot be measured solely on the basis of the results of international research.

We round up this focus number with Pavel Zgaga's article, *From a National University to a National Higher Education System*. In line with the idea of 'focus', the author addressed the conceptualisations and gradual transformation of higher education from the 1980s to the early 1990s in Slovenia. His reflection is thus dedicated to the period of profound social and political changes leading to the proclamation of the independent Republic of Slovenia (1991). The broad public debate on the future of education was an important part of the awakening of civil society in the 1980s in general. In the specific field of higher education, intensive discussions led to the demand for a new and comprehensive development strategy. Given the profound transformation of higher education during this period, this subject has been unjustifiably poorly researched. The presented article, therefore, attempts to contribute to partially filling the gap and at the

same time to stimulate further research of the topic. The present analysis, based on the study of archive material, concludes that the most important innovation of this period can be defined as a gradual conceptual and then normative shift from a national university to a national higher education system.

The paper by Hajnalka Fényes included in the *Varia* section of the 2nd issue of the 2021 volume of the CEPS Journal, entitled *Paid Work Alongside Higher Education Studies as an Investment in Human Capital*, examines the contribution of working (while studying) to individuals' human capital. In particular, the author examines whether Bourdieuan capital conversion is characteristic of students. The results of the survey that was carried out in the Central European region point toward a mutual advantage understanding of higher education students' paid work (while studying) for all the actors involved.

The book review included in this focus number of the CEPS Journal takes a closer look at the volume *Performative Approaches to Education Reforms* edited by Dorthe Staunæs, Katja Brøgger and John Benedicto Krejsler (Routledge, 2019).

The overall aim of this focus issue of the CEPS Journal has been to discuss the various issues that any education reform brings along. Alongside vertical and thematically oriented criteria, a particular focus has been made on the issues addressed by the authors of these contributions that reflect the broader social and political circumstances that impact educational change. Given the tumultuous changes brought by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as a panoply of issues as diverse as populism, fake news, hate speech, the shrinking civic space, and similar, there are many topics to be explored further, not only in how education can respond to them but also how education shapes the future of our societies.

MITJA SARDOČ, VERONIKA TAŠNER AND SLAVKO GABER

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Education Reforms for Equity and Quality: An Analysis from an Educational Ecosystem Perspective with Reference to Finnish Educational Transformations

HANNELE NIEMI¹

☞ The article starts with the serious question of why educational reforms do not lead to better learning. Although access to education has increased remarkably, the quality of education can be very low. The reality is that by 2030 there will be 800 million young people who do not have basic skills in reading and math. The answers will be sought from the concept of the educational ecosystem and how different subsystems, such as curriculum system, evaluation systems, teacher education policy, and the labour market, should be interconnected, and the systemic changes supported by all these subsystems. The basic conditions are that different actors and stakeholders work in collaboration, there are active interactions within and between different subsystems for supporting both equity and quality in education. Educational reforms are complex processes and need diverse partners and governance in which trust is present. The article also provides a brief case description in Finnish contexts of how educational reforms have been implemented in the frame of the ecosystem concept. In the end, the article summarises how educational ecosystems could help in overcoming global learning crises.

Keywords: education ecosystem, education reforms, interconnectedness, communication, diversity

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Šolske reforme za pravičnost in kakovost: analiza z gledišča izobraževalnega ekosistema s sklicevanjem na finske izobraževalne preobrazbe

HANNELE NIEMI

☞ Članek se začne z resnim vprašanjem, zakaj šolske reforme ne vodijo k boljšemu znanju. Čeprav se je dostop do izobrazbe znatno povečal, je kakovost izobraževanja ponekod zelo nizka. Resničnost je takšna, da bo do leta 2030 800 milijonov mladih, ki ne bodo opremljeni s temeljnimi veščinami branja in matematike. Odgovore smo iskali v zasnovi izobraževalnega ekosistema in tem, kako naj bi bili različni podsistemi (kot so na primer: kurikularni sistem, evalvacijski sistemi, politika izobraževanja učiteljev in trg dela) medsebojno povezani, sistematične spremembe pa podprte s pomočjo vseh teh podsistemov. Osnovni pogoji uspešnega delovanja so sodelovanje različnih udeležencev in interesentov, da se znotraj podsistemov in med podsistemi izoblikuje aktivno vzajemno delovanje, ki bi podprlo pravičnost in kakovost v izobraževanju. Šolske reforme so zapleteni procesi, ki zahtevajo raznolikost partnerjev in upravljanje, pri čemer je prisotno zaupanje. Članek prav tako ponudi bežen opis primera, kako so bile izvedene šolske reforme skladno s konceptom ekosistema v finskih kontekstih. Na koncu članek povzema ideje o tem, kako bi izobraževalni ekosistemi lahko pomagali pri premagovanju svetovnih učnih kriz.

Ključne besede: izobraževalni ekosistem, šolske reforme, medsebojna povezanost, komunikacija, raznolikost

Introduction – Why do educational reforms fail?

Education is a term, even a slogan, that encompasses almost all issues when societal reforms are envisioned. In many political documents and international recommendations, education is seen as a primary solution to many challenges.

The European Commission (2017, p. 1) noted:

Good education underpins inclusive and resilient societies. It is the starting point for a successful professional career and the best protection against unemployment and poverty. It fosters personal development and lays the basis for active citizenship. Good education fuels R&D, innovation, and competitiveness. However, for societies to reap these benefits, high-quality education needs to be a reality for all.

The World Bank (2018, p. 38) described education this way:

Education is a basic human right, and it is central to unlocking human capabilities. It also has tremendous instrumental value. Education raises human capital, productivity, incomes, employability, and economic growth. But its benefits go far beyond these monetary gains: education also makes people healthier and gives them more control over their lives [...] generates trust, boosts social capital, and creates institutions that promote inclusion and shared prosperity.

High-quality education is seen as a powerful tool and grounds for the success and well-being of individuals and society as a whole. The same message comes from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2012, 2018). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have emphasised that high-quality education is a human right (UNICEF, 2014, 2020; UNESCO, 2018).

Examining the global situation more closely uncovers many contradictions. Traditional factors, such as race, ethnicity, gender, geographical residence, language and minority status, can be tied to school failure and lack of access to education. Although access has increased remarkably in the last 20 years, over 250 million children still do not attend school if secondary school-age children are counted in the statistics (UNESCO, 2018; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2019; World Bank, 2018). Presently, access to primary level education has increased globally to more than 90%, but schooling in the early years does not

guarantee the achievement of secondary level outcomes. The most alarming fact is that in several low-income and even mid- and high-income countries, many students do not achieve the lowest basic skills in math and reading, despite having attended school for several years. UNESCO forecasted that by 2030, more than 800 million children will lack these skills (UNESCO, 2018; UIS, 2019; World Bank, 2018). Therefore, an urgent challenge is addressing low-quality education. Many researchers are concerned about inequalities and the ability of schools to provide high-quality learning opportunities to different learners, also those who have learning difficulties (e.g., Ainscow, 2016; Garira, 2020; Gorard & Smith, 2007; Kyriakides et al., 2020; Lee & Manzon, 2014; Trifonas, 2003). The European Commission (2017, p. 1) recognised that ‘the quality of education is decisive for young peoples’ prospects and life chances... Education also plays a critical role in the European Pillar of Social Rights’. Most countries have initiated reforms that will provide wider access to education, but the problem of low quality still exists. UNICEF (2020) has announced the following:

Quality education, which is essential to real learning and human development, is influenced by factors both inside and outside the classroom, from the availability of proper supplies to the nature of a child’s home environment. Improvements in the quality of teaching can reduce drop-out rates and ensure better retention and transitions from early childhood learning into primary and secondary education.

While in many countries, educational reforms have started to raise the quality of education, it is surprising that the goals of reforms are often not reached. The book *Teaching the World’s Teachers* (Lefty & Fraser, 2020) describes teacher education (TE) reforms in 11 countries and their connections to those countries’ educational systems over the last two to three decades. The authors explain that political decisions have not been implemented, aims have not been accepted or have not been fully understood by practitioners and local authorities, parents or other stakeholders have not been included in reform processes. Multiple and varied reasons explain the failure of these reforms across different countries, while the fault is often also attributed to resource allocation and corruption. However, the serious consequence of this situation has been that equity and quality have not been connected. Indeed, equal opportunities are not sufficient if learning support systems and educational quality are lacking.

In this article, the major question investigated is why educational reforms do not lead to better learning. This issue is analysed in the educational ecosystem context. First, this concept is introduced; thereafter, it is used to understand general reform challenges globally. Finally, the concept is applied to a

case analysis to describe educational reforms in the Finnish educational system. The research questions are as follows:

1. What is an educational ecosystem, and how can the concept help to understand educational reforms?
2. From the perspective of the educational ecosystem, what determines whether educational reforms achieve their goals?
3. How can the education ecosystem concept explain successes and challenges in previous Finnish educational reforms?

The study is a literature-based analysis and review. It is mainly based on policy level reports and reviews from international organisations, such as the OECD, World Bank, UNESCO and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the official source of internationally comparable data on education, science, culture, and communication. Another data source is research investigating themes related to educational reforms, particularly from equity and quality viewpoints. The data on the Finnish case descriptions are obtained from national policy sources and research published in international books and articles in which the authors analysed features of the Finnish educational system for international readers. For the theoretical analysis of systems and their reforms, concepts from the ecosystem paradigm that view educational systems as changing and living wholeness and beings more than separate parts are utilised. A critical theory and Habermas's (1987) ideas of processed segmentations in societies and communicative action are used for deepening the understanding of what occurs within human systems.

What is an educational ecosystem, and how does it relate to reforms?

The ecosystem concept has emerged in many disciplines, such as medicine and healthcare (Kahn et al., 2012; Walpole et al., 2016) and the social sciences (Oksanen & Hautamäki, 2015; Schwind et al., 2016), as well as in educational discussions (Niemi, 2016, 2021a, b; Niemi et al., 2014). Ecosystems have also been used in technological contexts to describe the importance of different partners working together (Moore, 2006). Mars et al. (2012) analysed the value of this concept, noting that the metaphor for the biological ecosystem provides a fresh lens through which to view an inherently interconnected world.

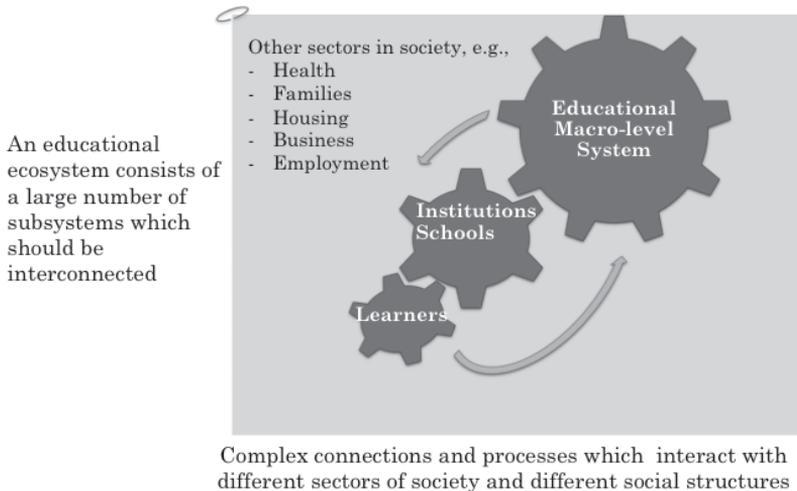
Indeed, the concept of ecosystems is rooted in biology (e.g., Dowd, 2019; Mars et al., 2012). We have learned from ecological studies that systems function well when their various parts work together and much biological

information flows among their constituents. Biological ecosystems are characterised by three essential features: 1) *interconnectedness* of constituents, 2) *information flow* throughout the system, and 3) *diversity* that ensures the health and growth of the system (Niemi, 2016; 2021a, 2021b). The ecosystem idea provides lenses and concepts that can be applied when analysing how educational reforms achieve their aims. We have two concepts in an educational discourse: educational system and educational ecosystem. In principle, they have the same structures and elements, but the educational ecosystem emphasises the interconnectedness of different parts and actors, their diversity and how they work together and share information as essential resources. In both concepts, macro-, mid-, and micro-levels exist. Figure 1 describes the levels and interconnectedness of the educational ecosystem.

Figure 1

The educational ecosystem

Note. Adapted from Niemi, 2021b, p. 6.



The macro-level consists of different structures in education, such as early education, pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education. It also involves comprehensive national or state-level strategies or processes, such as national/state curriculum and evaluation systems, TE, and training and life-long learning strategies. Education also encompasses mid-level organisations and institutions, such as schools and universities, with their own structures, cultures, and forms of leadership. Micro-level systems in education comprise

individuals, such as students and teachers, who have individual histories, life experiences, and genetic and neurological features.

When reflecting on educational reforms and how well they have achieved their aims, the ecosystem can be used as a conceptual tool for analysis. Niemi (2016, 2021a, 2021b) noted that an educational ecosystem is a complex living system and that it provides lenses through which connections and processes that interact within and between educational levels and actors can be examined. The diversity of reform partners plays an important role both within the educational ecosystem and with other systems. Connections with other ecosystems, such as healthcare, housing, social affairs, and employment, are crucial because it is through these that people are more empowered to access education and use their learning opportunities.

Interconnectedness in reforms

In educational system reforms, partners and actors must be connected and committed to common goals. This is a classic concept in the literature on how to lead educational change. However, this is not the reality of the situation. Sociologists, notably Habermas (1987), have described how systems in modern society can become separated and colonised through hierarchies and lack of communication. In education, subsystems can divide into segmented territories with their own aims, social practices, and power structures; eventually, collaboration among the parts vanishes. Systemic changes require that reforms also involve changes in other parts of the ecosystem. Broad national reforms can focus on a certain level, such as early education or adult education. Although the reform focuses only on one level, consequences are much wider, so changes are also needed at other levels. Transitions from basic education to secondary or from secondary to higher education can be difficult, even impossible, or cause students to drop out at the subsequent level (UNESCO, 2018). Therefore, students, teachers and parents must be prepared for changes to occur across the wider system.

Habermas (1987) also underscored the importance of interconnectedness. This message is also supported in recent leadership and management studies that emphasise commitment to joint aims for realising change. Researchers of systemic change have also presented the position, including Hargreaves et al. (2009), and since then, by many others (e.g., Garira, 2020; Pischetola & de Miranda, 2020). Unfortunately, segmentation still exists in many sectors of education. For example, TE can be separated and segmented from the broader educational community, and in higher education, large gaps or tensions can exist between multiple academic and educational faculties that do not cooperate

(e.g., Hudson, 2017). Thus, a lack of interconnectedness is often the reality at institutional levels in schools and universities that can develop territories among different disciplines that compete for time and resources.

Connections between school curricula, teachers' roles, and TE are essential. If interconnectedness between these components is loose or cooperation is strained, implementing changes can be challenging (e.g., LeTender, 2018; Wubbels & van Tartwijk, 2018). Evidence from Singapore and Finland has verified how a strong connection between national curriculum systems and TE can lead to high learning performances, although these two systems differ in their educational governance (Low, 2018; Niemi et al., 2018). While differences, such as centralised versus decentralised systems, exist, the common essential factor is that multiple parts of the system and their actors cooperate to achieve common goals.

Field et al. (2007) and the OECD (2012) observed that curricula systems host many connections to the whole educational system and lifelong learning. UNESCO (2020) reported that irrelevant curricula are one key reason why student learning outcomes are low. Curricula that are not relevant to students create difficulties for teachers and learners in local level implementations. Stabback (2016, p. 4) investigated what adds quality to a curriculum: 'Curriculum... provides the bridge between education and development – and it is the competencies associated with lifelong learning and aligned with development needs, in the broadest, holistic sense of the term, that span that bridge'. The curriculum and its connections with evaluation systems are also crucial. In some countries, especially the United States, evaluation systems are based on standardised testing, competitiveness, and rankings (LeTender, 2018), limiting what is taught in schools. Reforms can fail, even if the national curriculum is revised when evaluations are grounded on measuring narrow outcomes and different concepts of knowledge.

When analysing how equity and quality are connected in different educational systems, Field et al. (2006, p. 6) proposed that OECD policy recommendations aim at tighter links between actors regarding several issues. First, *early prevention* of dropout is the best cure. Basic schooling should support and engage those who struggle at school as well as those who excel. Second, those at risk should be *monitored* using the information on attendance, performance, and involvement in school activities and linked to interventions to improve outcomes and prevent dropout. Third, *upper secondary education* needs to be attractive to more than just the academically inclined elite; good quality pathways without dead ends and useful links to the world of work should be offered. Fourth, *smooth transitions* prevent school failure and dropping out. Additional

learning support at the end of secondary school may encourage students to stay in school. Finally, *good quality vocational tracks* are essential to removing academic hurdles from the entrance to general upper secondary education and enabling access to tertiary education from vocational programmes.

All these recommendations relate to connections between different levels and emphasise multiple forms of support needed to create routes to learning for all. Interconnectedness requires active mutual interactions and understanding of what happens throughout the system, including outside its domain. One tool for better interconnectedness is information sharing, discussed next.

Information flow – knowledge and evidence in educational ecosystems

At present, information sharing is technically easier than ever before. However, in educational systems, many problems related to having, sharing, and using knowledge exist. Biological ecosystems function well if the information is delivered and shared among constituents. In the context of human behaviour, what must be considered is not only whether the information is flowing but also what kind of information or knowledge is shared, how it is communicated and to whom. Information flows in biological ecosystems are not one-directional; the links that form human cooperation should not be either, as such communication requires mutual activities and dialogue.

In educational reforms, information and knowledge sharing is needed vertically through different levels of the system but also horizontally across partners. For example, changes in school curricula must be shared with university TE programmes, at school levels with parents and other stakeholders and also with other systems in society, particularly with workforce representatives. From the ecosystem viewpoint, these obstacles cause serious dysfunctions if information is not crossing borders and remains in segmented systems. If macro-level units and structures are working separately or are not connected with mid-level units like schools or TE institutions, achieving the aims of reform may be difficult.

UNESCO (2020) discussed the urgent fact that real knowledge for educational development and improvements is lacking. The *Global Education Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2020) claims that almost half of low- and middle-income countries do not collect enough educational data about children with disabilities. One effort to address that is the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE), which brings together data from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), national household surveys and learning achievement surveys from over 160 countries (UNESCO, 2020). The tool enables users to compare educational outcomes between

countries, and between groups within countries, according to factors associated with inequality, including wealth, gender, ethnicity and location. The same lack of knowledge has been observed by the World Bank (2018), which has noted that many countries do not have trustworthy and comprehensive data about student learning.

Evidence-based policy has been an important discourse topic over the previous two decades in educational governance, raising the importance of the knowledge needed for policy-level decisions. This discussion involves many critical voices that provide input on what works and what does not (Biesta, 2006; Matsushita, 2017; Pawson, 2006). The main criticism has been that the data have been collected from a narrow perspective or do not reflect the true essence of education, ignoring important stakeholders like teachers. PISA measurements and other international performance measure results have been criticised for not giving sufficient consideration to local circumstances (Zhao, 2020). This raises the question of how we can trust the knowledge we have and what kind of knowledge is used in reform decisions. Reforms require high-quality data from multiple perspectives. In the context of information sharing, problems in evidence-based knowledge can be classified into various categories: lack of knowledge, false or unreliable knowledge, misuse of knowledge and no use of knowledge.

Information sharing creates openness. However, the question of legitimacy is also an essential issue in educational reforms and their objectives. Legitimacy concerns are raised based on who is included and excluded from the flow of information. Wheeler-Bell (2017) analysed curriculum reforms considering critical theory and different interpretations of difficulties. He emphasised that viewing curricula decisions as bureaucratic and technocratic solutions is not sufficient. Partners must have a feeling that their voice is heard within decision making (2017, p. 562):

Democratic legitimacy depends upon the people interpreting educational decisions as justified: legitimacy depends upon individuals collectively feeling that their voice—or at least someone representing their voice—was presented within the decision-making process, and the process for making decisions was fair and generally reasonable.

When individuals feel they are not properly represented, policies begin to lose legitimacy. Wheeler-Bell (2017) also referred to Habermas's (1975) communicative action and asserts that a legitimisation crisis in curricula reforms means that individuals collectively do not feel that curricula are morally binding; as a result, there is a moral disconnection between the educational policies enacted and the people's acceptance of said policies.

Wheeler-Bell (2017, p. 569) proposed that ‘a critical theory of the curriculum could explain why curriculum decisions are unjustifiable and fail to meet the standard of generality’. He referred to Habermas and the elements of communicative action as follows:

[They are] oriented towards mutual understanding in which speakers engage in the intersubjective process of giving and taking reasons to each other with the intent of collectively coordinating social action. Communicative action has three functions—reaching understanding, coordinating action and the socialization of individuals—all of which contribute to the reproduction of the life world and a democratic society.

Diversity as a reform resource

In biological ecosystems, diversity in the form of different types of constituents is needed for the system to function well. In educational reforms, a variety of actors involved in different phases of the reforms are needed. The discussions on ‘interconnectedness’ and ‘information sharing’ presented previously indicate that partnerships are complicated in education. Who is considered a partner depends on structures, governance, participants’ involvement, and the sense of legitimacy. In the business sector, innovations develop when a wide range of partners and capacities are involved (e.g., Moore, 2006). Moreover, the idea of learning communities is based on the assumption that teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders work together (Antinluoma et al., 2018; Stassen, 2003). Smith (2016) analysed TE’s role in society and in educational systems and claimed that partnerships must extend beyond rhetoric and be based on long-term commitments and genuine aspirations to cooperate to improve education at all levels.

Diversity means that different kinds of actors contribute to the system. Harford and O’Doherty (2016) provided examples in the Irish context to explain the importance of inviting teachers to participate as partners in planning reforms rather than viewing them only as objects of reform. As the legitimacy crisis discussion revealed, including or excluding partners can have remarkable consequences on commitment levels. We often describe educational governance as centralised or decentralised. Burns et al. (2016, p. 16) explained that many countries have decentralised control of their educational systems, giving local school authorities greater autonomy to respond more directly to citizens’ needs. The report also noted that ‘stakeholders (such as teachers, parents, students and labour unions) have become more involved in decision-making about education policy; relationships among stakeholders and decision-makers have become increasingly dynamic and negotiable and diversity within school

communities has increased'. It also seems that the border between the centralised and decentralised systems is not as strict as once assumed. Balancing national, regional, and local interests can be difficult, and finding consensus is not easy. Mason (2016) asserted that diversity and diverse partnerships require new approaches and analysis to determine how they should connect and balance responsiveness to local diversity with the ability to ensure national objectives.

Mason described today's educational systems as increasingly complex due to multiple layers of governance and a greater number of stakeholders involved than ever before. He stated that complex systems pose several challenges, as individual systems can no longer be examined in isolation. He also claimed that the study of complex systems requires examining how the various interconnections can form a coherent whole. How to connect national and local interests requires much discussion, negotiation, compromise and dialogue. Mason (2016, p. 254) stated: '[This means] the system displays properties that are beyond those possible to anticipate based on the system's constituent elements alone. The governance of such a system is thus no longer possible with traditional linear models of planning and steering'.

Diversity in ecosystems demands new administrative cultures that shift from focusing on control to focusing on collaboration and trust between actors to combine ambitious aims of equity and quality. Cerna (2014, p. 36) states:

In education systems, trust is a key component that helps coping with complexity. It facilitates cooperation between stakeholders and reduces information and power asymmetries. Trust is central to smart accountability systems and a high level of professionalism. As with all complex systems, one element cannot be changed without others to follow. Feedback loops can then create vicious or virtuous cycles. Elements such as cooperation, smart accountability, professionalism and trust can positively reinforce each other,

The educational ecosystem and previous Finnish educational transformations

The Finnish educational system has become well-known since 2000 due to its high performances in the international PISA assessments (Väljjarvi & Sulkunen, 2016). Although Finland has experienced some declines in their results, still many countries have been interested to learn key features about the Finnish system because it differs from many other systems. In this section, the analysis of Finnish educational reforms from previous decades is investigated through the educational ecosystem lens. This section aims to analyse how

interconnectedness, information sharing and diversity have been implemented in the Finnish educational reforms.

Equal opportunities in education were not an ideal nor a reality in 1950s Finnish society. Major differences existed among the population in the context of education, despite the common obligation for all to attend elementary school enacted in 1921. Differences were significant between urban and rural areas as well as between the northern and southern regions. In the 1950s, of Finnish citizens over age 20, 29% had no education; in rural areas, it was 35%. Geographical differences were considerable: in the southern part of Finland, only 14% of adults over age 20 were uneducated, but in northern rural areas of Finland, almost 48% fell into this category (Niemi & Lavonen, 2020). Finnish researchers (e.g., Sahlberg, 2007, 2011, 2012; Simola, 2005) described that in those days, Finland had a parallel system in education in which ten-year-old children had to decide on their future prospects and careers. The educational system put individuals into one of two categories at this very early stage of their lives, thus creating a divided nation. Students had to seek entrance and pass examinations to enter academically oriented schools or take a route that led to vocational fields. If they selected the vocational route, they could not seek entrance to higher education. The academic schools very often charged tuition, which further strengthened the divide.

Planning for a new school model began, and between 1965-1971, several committees were established, much explorative work and joint planning was initiated, and many pilot studies were launched in various parts of the country. The new school law was eventually stipulated, and in 1968 the comprehensive school model was put into action. Without the cooperation of educational leaders, teachers, principals, political parties, workforce and economy representatives and the labour market and increasing demands for lifelong learning (Faure, 1972), the major reform probably would not have been possible. The implementation required extensive communication, joint activities, decisions and other actions, including the following (Laukkanen, 2006; Niemi & Lavonen, 2020; Sahlberg, 2007, 2011): 1) new TE requirements raising primary school TE to the master's level; 2) the strong allocation of educational resources to lower secondary education at the beginning of the transformation and then increasingly for weak students and inclusion policy; 3) the discontinuation of streaming and ensuring lifelong learning; 4) new evaluation systems and commitment to enhancement-led principles in evaluations; 5) inviting partners to reforms, moving towards decentralisation in decision-making and asking varied stakeholders for input; and 6) establishing platforms for continuous collaboration and dialogue.

The new school needed new kinds of teachers. Teaching in the school for the whole age cohorts was different than in parallel, differentiated schools. New TE programmes in universities were based on new concepts of teaching and learning, and teachers were expected to promote all learners' growth, have the most current research-based knowledge in pedagogy and in their disciplines, learn critical thinking and reflection for the profession and also become familiar with how knowledge is created through their own experiences with scientific work on their bachelor's and master's theses and other research studies as part of TE (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006; Sahlberg, 2011). These changes required much cooperation within and between universities but also cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Culture and universities and their TE departments.

The revisions made TE one of the most popular academic programmes in universities, attracting highly talented and motivated students, and that many positive outcomes were identified, such as teachers' high professional competence, commitment to the profession and their contributions to local-level curriculum designers and school developers (Sahlberg, 2012). However, schools continuously face new challenges, and TE must address them. In the Finnish system, the collective platforms that provide informal benchmarking and borders played an important role. In TE, these have included regular deans' meetings, research conferences, joint research projects with scientific and popular publications and cooperative development projects for teachers' competence building. Two examples of these wider collective processes will illuminate this practice. When Finland joined the Bologna process and reformed all university degrees, national processes were launched in 2001–2004 in all disciplines, including educational sciences and TE (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006). This provided a coordinated platform, financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture but led by academics, to discuss and jointly design new bachelor's and master's degrees. In the educational sciences, different partners (representatives of teacher educators, teacher and student unions, the labour market and local educational authorities) collaborated in discussions and steering groups. Based on this comprehensive cooperation, new decrees were enacted, starting in 2005. The official regulations, like the decrees, provide only frames; universities are autonomous in detailed implementations. The joint discussions and recommendations provided useful grounds for local actions and internal quality assurance.

The most recent example of comprehensive cooperation is the Teacher Education Forum (Niemi & Lavonen, 2020), established by the Ministry of Education and Culture in February 2016 but entirely led by TE representatives and stakeholders. It aims to foster the renewal of TE to meet the newest challenges

and to prepare a development programme for teachers' pre- and in-service education covering lifelong professional development. The core of the forum consists of almost 100 teacher educators, teachers, and other stakeholders, including experts from municipalities and teacher and student unions. The hundreds of Finnish municipalities are partners in the Teacher Education Forum's projects.

Initially, the comprehensive school maintained a tracking system, in which students were streamed into low, intermediate, and high achiever groups in math, the mother tongue, and foreign languages. This was a concession to the secondary school teachers and business representatives who were concerned that Finland would lose gifted children when they learned in the same schools in heterogeneous, mixed-ability groups (Niemi & Lavonen, 2020). However, this tracking prevented lower-level groups from advancing because intermediate courses had to be completed. Thus, lifelong paths were cut short by the tracking system. The new school was created to ensure equity in education, so in the 1980s, tracking stopped, and instead of segregation, the schools provided extra teaching hours and special needs support for weak learners. The decision required much cooperation between different stakeholders. The trend towards inclusiveness, special needs education with support systems, and students' holistic well-being has continued and, in fact, has become more important but also more demanding because of the broad heterogeneity of students. Välijärvi and Sulkunen (2016) have summarised that since the first PISA measurements (2000), differences have grown between students from different socioeconomic statuses, with some still falling below the average of PISA countries. Differences in outcomes between genders have also increased, prompting much discussion on the kinds of support needed (Välijärvi & Sulkunen, 2016).

Evaluation systems impact the whole educational system at all levels. The Finnish system includes certain features rarely found in other countries. The Finnish National Agency of Education (FNAE, previously the Finnish National Board of Education) determined already in the 1990s that Finland's education system did not employ standardised school achievement testing, that inspectorates, schools and teachers are not ranked, and that student evaluations must be encouraging (FNAE, 2018). The Finnish solution has been an enhancement-led evaluation system. As such, information and data are needed to inform future improvements but not for rankings and competition (Kumpulainen & Lankinen, 2016). The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) carries out evaluations from early childhood education to higher education, organising field-specific evaluations, thematic evaluations and learning outcome evaluations. FINEEC (2020) indicates on its website that 'it is based on trust,

openness, interactions and enhancement-led evaluation. External education evaluation aims to support the education system in achieving its objectives. Evaluating the prerequisites for educational equality and inclusion is one of the key areas of FINEEC's evaluation operations. Enhancement-led evaluation is also the main principle in student assessments. Schools and teachers are free to use the methods that best support student learning (Kumpulainen & Lankinen, 2916).

All Finnish public sector governance, including governance of the educational system, began moving towards a more decentralised model in the mid-1980s to transition from a control focus towards more information-led steering. The most important aim was to make educational services as functional as possible at the local level. Curriculum development processes are also manifestations of decentralisation. Every tenth year, the national core curriculum for basic education is revised and updated (Vitikka et al., 2016). Because of decentralisation, only core curricula are designed at the national level, which provides frames for local schools' own curricula. Education providers at local levels, in practice cities, may determine implementations in cooperation with teachers, parents, and other interest groups. To ensure pupil welfare, the curriculum must be drafted in collaboration with authorities who are partners in local level implementations, particularly social and health services (Finnish National Board of Education, 2015). The process has become increasingly more participatory. Vahtivuori et al. (2014) explained that the last revisions began in 2012 as a preparatory phase that involved hundreds of expert hearings. Many working groups with teachers, teacher educators, and societal stakeholders, including teacher unions and labour market representatives, were established. After the wide interactive processes also incorporating Internet-based platforms, the core curriculum was accepted in 2014. Local authorities and school principals, teachers, students and parents had two years to design the local school-based curricula; full implementation commenced in 2016 in schools.

Typical in the Finnish educational system has been an effort to create interconnectedness. A strong commitment to equal opportunities in education from the 1970s has established a value basis that set common aims for equity, emphasising supporting different learners and a link to equity and quality throughout the system. Different educational levels and partners have attempted to connect to changes as early as possible. Systemic changes have frequently required new resource allocations and special support for inclusion and for those with learning difficulties. In international reviews, trust has been cited as a specific feature in the Finnish system (OECD, 2016). Sahlberg (2007, p. 147) described 'how steady improvement in student learning has been

attained through Finnish education policies based on equity, flexibility, creativity, teacher professionalism and trust'. Enhancement-led evaluations and a participatory, decentralised curriculum system have facilitated different partners to work together. Although Finland has many good experiences with interconnectedness, open information and knowledge sharing among different partners in transformations, supporting the educational ecosystem is a never-ending process. Changes in society and work lives, economic situations, migration and the ageing population continuously present new demands (Niemi et al., 2016). Finland has many challenges to be solved: increasing gaps between learners from different socioeconomic statuses and gender differences in learning outcomes (Väljjarvi-Sulkunen, 2016); indeed, still there is much work to be done, despite Finland's position as one of the top-performing educational countries in the world.

Conclusion

This study aimed to find out why educational reforms fail or be successful. The concept of the educational ecosystem was used as lenses in the analysis. The first and second research questions asked how the concept of the ecosystem can help understand educational reform and determine whether educational reforms achieve their goals. We could find much evidence for failures: if different parts of the educational systems do not work in close cooperation, share information, and invite partners who work at different levels or sectors of the system, there will be many risks that reforms do not achieve their aims. The ecosystem is based on three key premises; interconnectedness, information flow, and diversity; these are also the key determinants to successful educational reforms. The legitimacy of reforms can be only achieved if actors, such as policymakers, teachers, students, and parents, are invited to be partners from the preparing phase of the reform, and they are heard in different phases, and they are aware of the goals of the reforms.

The ecosystem lenses were also used in the analysis of the third research question, which asked how the ecosystem concept can explain successes and challenges in the previous Finnish educational reforms. We determined that the major national structural reform towards more equal education in the late 1960s required interconnectedness throughout the system. New concepts of pedagogy and revisions in teacher education were needed to produce real changes in classrooms. We also can see that if the aim is to connect equity and quality in education, the inner barriers must be abolished and in attempts to find ways to support different learners to maximise their learning. The structural barriers,

as such early tracking, prevented Finnish students from fully entering life-long learning paths. The educational structure was changed to be more flexible to different learners, even for those who fail at certain phases in learning. Aiming at equity requires much information sharing between different levels of the educational system for finding relevant and efficient support systems. The educational ecosystem also aids in understanding the role of evaluation. The interconnectedness and information flow are essential if evaluations should serve more improvements than control.

The most important condition for real cooperation and information sharing is that the different partners and stakeholders can trust each other. In Finland, the system is decentralised, and many responsibilities have been given to local schools and teachers. However, this is only possible if teacher education is also involved in reforms and ensures that teachers can work with the freedom that decentralisation will bring.

Many common issues were identified through the ecosystem lenses. How to lead changes in educational ecosystems is a process that needs more research. How to find legitimacy and mutual understanding are major questions that come from critical theory but nowadays also from totally different paradigms or domains. The OECD has also raised the discussion of trust and support in education. The recent global challenges in education require that educational systems and reforms are regarded as complex ecosystems. The ecosystem cannot be based on top-down power structures without real dialogue about developing interconnections, knowledge sharing and diversity (Burns et al., 2016; Cerna, 2014).

If educational systems want to provide high quality learning opportunities to all learners, the lenses of the educational ecosystem provide a frame to analyse transformation processes. While the ecosystem metaphor is useful for understanding and predicting the conditions that shape and influence systems, it is important to understand the differences between biological and human behaviour. Biological systems do not consciously plan for the future to be effective or influential or effect change. In natural environments, many processes occur based on the system's balance or imbalance. Human organisations and systems, however, are based on conscious human actions, strategic aims and commitments. This also concerns educational reforms and set high demands for interconnectedness, information sharing and diversity of actors.

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Evidence-Informed Educational Practice in Catalan Education: From Public Agenda to Teachers' Practice

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∞ Catalonia has a long tradition of school innovation movements. These have increased in recent years as public administration and private entities have initiated substantial school reforms oriented toward the use of evidence in teaching practice. As the Catalan education system is highly autonomous, not all schools have embraced the evidence-informed practice (EIP) movement, and this has created differences between schools that choose to implement a change or innovation based on scientifically demonstrated evidence and those that do not. In the present paper, we will attempt to understand the current state of the inclusion of evidence-informed practice in Catalonia and to assess teachers' perceptions of its adoption as part of their daily practice. In order to address these issues, we start by exploring the legal and structural framework grounding the implementation of evidence-informed practice in the Catalan system, and through interviews conducted in a sample of primary school leaders and teachers, we approach the organisational and individual level to explore the opportunities to implement an authentic evidence-informed practice approach in the Catalan education system.

Keywords: educational research, evidence-informed practice, research use, teachers use of evidence

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Na dokazih utemeljena izobraževalna dejavnost znotraj katalonskega izobraževanja: od javne razprave do prakse učiteljev

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☞ Katalonija ima dolgo tradicijo inovativnih šolskih gibanj. Te so se v zadnjih letih pomnožile, saj so javna uprava in zasebni subjekti začeli znatne šolske reforme, usmerjene v uporabo dokazov pri poučevanju. Upoštevajoč visoko raven avtonomnosti katalonskega vzgojno-izobraževalnega sistema, niso vse šole sprejele na dokazih utemeljenega izobraževalnega gibanja (EIP), kar je ustvarilo razlike med šolami, ki so se odločile, da izvedejo spremembo oz. vpeljejo novost, osnovano na znanstveno utemeljenih dokazih, in tistimi, ki se za to niso odločile. V tem prispevku bomo poskušali predstaviti trenutno stanje vključenosti tega pristopa v Kataloniji in oceniti zaznave učiteljev glede sprejetja pristopa v njihovo vsakodnevno prakso. Da bomo lahko naslovili ta vprašanja, bomo začeli z raziskovanjem pravnega in strukturnega ogrodja, ki umešča izvajanje na dokazih utemeljene dejavnosti v katalonski sistem, nato pa bomo prek intervjujev, opravljenih na vzorcu osnovnošolskih voditeljev in učiteljev, obravnavali organizacijsko in individualno raven, in to za to, da raziščemo priložnosti uresničenja avtentičnega pristopa EIP v katalonski izobraževalni sistem.

Ključne besede: izobraževalne raziskave, na dokazih utemeljena dejavnost, uporaba raziskav, raba dokazov pri učiteljih

Introduction

Evidence-informed education policy and practice is not a new approach in the international landscape. However, in recent years it has gained more visibility in Catalan educational public discourse and practice. The trend is perfectly understandable since most decision-making is increasingly global in its nature and emerges as a complex edifice of global and local rhetoric, actors, forms and strategies (Verger, 2014). The issues of education policy are no longer isolated, but cross borders and nations, actions and understandings.

In the present paper, we explore the adoption of evidence-informed practice (EIP) as an initiative encouraged recently in the Catalan educational landscape by both educational administration and private educational bodies. We first analyse different models of the adoption of evidence-informed practices in education systems in an attempt to determine differences in the Catalan models of EIP promotion. We then explore the extent to which teachers resonate with public discourse on EIP and examine their perceptions of the EIP approach regarding its adoption as part of their current teaching practice. Teachers' views will shed light on the viability of implementing education reform and how they see their role in this process.

The EIP approach is in line with educational initiatives aimed at improving education practices, either in the classroom or through more general institutional transformations. In most cases, the proposals aim to stimulate education innovation based on experience and reflection in order to address specific student needs or student-based educational challenges (Chapman & Ainscow, 2019). EIP refers to the use of academic research corroborated with experiential knowledge by educators in order to improve aspects of their teaching, decision-making, leadership or ongoing professional learning (Brown, 2020). There are strong reasons to consider EIP as a desirable approach in schools. For instance, there is a growing evidence base indicating that if teachers engage with evidence to make or change decisions, embark on innovations and experimentations, or develop new practices, this can have a positive impact on teaching and learning (e.g., Cain, 2015; Ion et al., 2020; Perines, 2018) as well as pupils' outcomes (Armstrong et al., 2020). Engaging with evidence places teachers in a process of self-reflecting inquiry to improve the rationality and justice of their own practice as well as the understanding of their actions in class (Saquipi & Vogrinc, 2020).

Nonetheless, despite this growing body of evidence and these extant imperatives, including enthusiastic efforts made by public administrations, educational institutions, universities and schools to foster EIP, it is yet to take hold in the vast majority of schools, including Catalan schools.

In order to understand the roots of these hesitations, we start our analysis by examining different EIP implementation models in an attempt to see which ones the Catalan education system has adopted (if any). We continue by giving voice to the central actors involved in EIP adoption: teachers.

Exploring models of EIP in the Catalan school system

As we have seen, there is a wide consensus on the benefits of education policy and practice informed by research. Moreover, there are a wide variety of models to implement EIP in both, involving various strategies of integration, actors and contexts. Explanatory models of research utilisation cover a wide range of scenarios, but authors discuss four major alternatives: *the science push model*, *the demand-pull model*, *the dissemination model*, and *the interaction model*. Each of these models serves to understand the factors contributing to research use (Landry et al., 2001).

The science push model emphasises the role of researchers in evidence utilisation. It focuses on aspects such as the quality and type of research and proposes a linear model of the evidence-utilisation process that follows a simple path from the dissemination of research findings to utilisation by policy-makers and practitioners (Best & Holmes, 2010). Stressing the role of research producers in this process and limiting the role of final users, the model has been criticised mainly due to two aspects: the transfer of knowledge is not automatic, and raw research information is not easily applicable in teaching practice or decision making (Landry et al., 2001).

Traditionally, the educational-research model of Catalonia has been linear, as “researchers produce new knowledge, which gets disseminated to end-users, and (in the best-case scenario) then incorporated into policy and practice” (Best & Holmes, 2010, p. 146). Some attempts have been made to increase interactions between users of research knowledge and to adopt evidence-informed policies and practices, but most of them are very recent. At the systemic level, the Catalan Department of Education, in December 2018, approved Decree 274/2018, which implies a major commitment to educational research through the creation of the Educational Research Service. Along with other goals, the purpose is “to drive educational research by establishing policies of process and impact assessment to obtain scalable and transferable models to different educational realities” (Decree Article, p. 118). The first initiative undertaken under this new regulation was the launch of the strategy “*Schools of Evidence*”, which was a collaboration between two institutions: the Catalan Institute of Public Policy Evaluation (Ivàlua) and the Jaume Bofill Foundation.

As a public policy, the strategy for promoting the use of evidence and educational research was presented in November 2019, with the ultimate purpose of improving education and reducing educational inequalities. The general objectives of the programme are: a) to collect, disseminate and generate solid evidence on education policies and practices, regarding their effectiveness and efficiency; b) to create opportunities to share and transfer knowledge about what works to improve education; c) to devise pilot initiatives based on evidence; and d) to promote an assessment culture and the practice of controlled and rigorous experimentation within the administration and the educational community, connecting decision-making processes with international evidence-based/informed trends. Although the initiative is currently stalled and there is no information available about when it will be resumed, it nonetheless represents the first public attempt to bring different educational stakeholders to the same table to discuss EIP and to plan actions to move it forward.

Another way to promote evidence use in practice is the *demand-pull model*, which focuses on the initiative of final users (in this case, teachers) in research utilisation, as they appear to be the major source of ideas (Rich, 1991; Weiss, 1979; among others). However, this model fails to take into account organisational aspects and users' interests. These limitations led to adding new variables to the model, such as organisational structures, rules and norms, as essential determinants of knowledge utilisation (Oh & Rich, 1996). In addition, the critical factor causing the under-utilisation of research findings is linked to the political interests of users, which may be in conflict with research data (Landry et al., 2001 in Iftimescu et al., 2020).

Criticised for its excessive instrumental use of research and for the omission of the role of the interaction between users and knowledge producers, the previous model led to the emergence of the *dissemination model*, which focuses on the role of the transfer process as both formal and non-formal. The dissemination model promotes the need to develop dissemination mechanisms in order to identify useful knowledge and mobilise it to final users. The model stresses the importance of two determinants: the type of research results and the dissemination effort (Landry et al., 2001). The dissemination model is the most common in the Catalan landscape at this moment and is followed by private entities as well as universities and research centres. "*What Works in Education: Evidence for Educational Improvement*"³ is one of the first initiatives promoted by a private body that focuses on offering scientific evidence based on systematic reviews and programme evaluations to the educational community. Ivàlua and the Jaume Bofill Foundation are the institutions responsible for

3 For more see <https://ivalua.cat/ca/projecte-tematic/educacio/que-funciona-en-educacio>.

this initiative, which began in 2015. Their objective is to collect, summarise and share international evidence about effective educational practices, including recommendations for their implementation in the Catalan education system. They produce a biannual publication with two systematic reviews about a specific topic and organise open-close seminars related to one of the themes published. In addition, they organise an annual international meeting with experts related to one of the themes explored in the systematic revisions.

The initiative “*What Works in Education*” offers “research distillations” (Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2003, p. 4), which can support the improvement of the research-practice nexus (Martínez-Celorio, 2019). It is considered an example of “Summary Guides” models, similar to another initiative conducted by the “laCaixa” Foundation, a private bank foundation. The EduCaixa Programme⁴ consolidated an evidence-informed programme in 2018, promoting an educational assessment culture through the awareness, generation and transferability of educational evidence. In collaboration with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Institute for Effective Education (IEE), both from the United Kingdom, EduCaixa offers resources from *The Teaching and Learning Toolkit* and *The Best Evidence in Brief*, translated into Spanish and Catalan. Despite the benefits that this implies for Spanish and Catalan teachers, as it enables them to access international evidence, we note that the summaries are barely tailored to the Catalan context adaptation and guidelines for local application.

The dissemination model lacks consideration of the process of dialogue between researchers and teachers, and the gap between the contexts of research production and research use prompted the appearance of the *interaction model* (Huberman & Thurler, 1991; Oh, 1997; among others). The variables considered in this model are related to informal personal contacts, participation in committees, and transmission of reports to non-academic organisations (Huberman & Thurler, 1991 in Iftimescu et al., 2020).

An example of this model in the Catalan system is promoted by EduCaixa, which, in 2018, launched the initiative “*Your Ideas Transform*”, aimed at promoting rigorous impact evaluation and scaling up education programmes implemented in schools. The programme matched schools and research groups for collaboration. Research groups were commissioned to assess the impact of innovative practices promoted by schools, and to support knowledge transfer or scaling up the experience to other schools. The focus of this initiative was to identify education programmes that could be transferred to other educational contexts. Only one call has been opened and completed since the initiative started, and we do not have evidence of the impact of this initiative, as the

4 For more see <https://educaixa.org/es/landing-evidencias>.

research reports are not made public. It was an example of the model “Design Experiments” defined by Burkhardt and Schoenfeld (2003), and it is a significant attempt to conduct quasi-experimental research in practice.

All of the above models have been criticised in recent years due to new advances in the field of knowledge utilisation. For instance, Estabrooks et al. (2006) argue that the variables proposed in the models are not enough to explain the complexity and variety of the real situations, scenarios and agents involved in the research utilisation process. In order to overcome the limitations of the previous models, Brown (2012) added variables derived from the *Social Activity Model*. From his perspective, knowledge adoption appears as “most likely to occur when both researchers and policymakers are actively seeking to engage with one other, employing corresponding strategies to enable this process” (Brown, 2012, p. 460). Integrating the virtues of previous models, the Social Activity Model adds factors linked to the determinants that encourage evidence to be adopted and ensure efficient strategies to communicate this evidence, as well as factors that impact how findings are likely to be received by the public and users. In addition to these considerations, several other factors that shape the nature of the relationship between researchers and policymakers can be named, such as political, legislative, economic and cultural factors, although the intention is not to focus on the latter aspects (Ion & Lopez, in press). Among all these initiatives, we cannot overlook attempts made by researchers and research groups to spread the results of their research and increase the inclusion of and collaboration with teachers. Although these efforts are clear, there still continues to be a gap between researchers and practitioners.

Taking into account the current initiatives, various research-practice models coexist in the Catalan education system today. We note that the majority of initiatives to increase the use of evidence to inform educational practices come from private stakeholders, and only a few are promoted by the public administration. Irrespective of the promoter of the EIP initiatives, it is clear that Catalan schools are “assaulted” by a variety of proposals from both public and private entities, which reflects the increasing interest in linking research and practice accompanying the wave of innovation that the Catalan education system has started. As final recipients – both providing data to researchers and as end users – school teachers are exposed to all of these initiatives requesting them to adopt EIP in their school/classes.

In this context, the present paper explores how teachers perceive the EIP approach. Specifically, the aim is to examine teachers’ perceptions of the adoption of the EIP approach, and to identify opportunities that could promote the diffusion of this approach to support innovation processes in the school and

on the systemic level. The research questions that guided our qualitative study were: *What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of authentic EIP in the Catalan education system? What opportunities are there to implement the EIP approach in Catalan schools?*

Method

Since our aim was to conduct an in-depth examination of beliefs, perceptions and conceptions about a particular topic expressed by a group of informants, we developed an explanatory study (Stake, 1995). This approach is suitable for gaining an understanding of meanings that shape people's views and experiences about the topic under examination.

Specifically, we employed a qualitative research method (Miles et al., 2020) to explore teachers' perceptions of the EIP approach. We were particularly interested in knowing how they conceive of the approach, how they apply it, and what their views are on the researcher's role in relation to the school.

Materials

In order to approach teachers' voices, we developed semi-structured interviews (Valles, 2009), as this allowed us to ask about general topics as well as specific aspects of the phenomenon under study. Drawing from our literature review, we developed the interview protocol according to the following areas of interest:

1. Perceptions of the EIP approach. We sought the informant's personal perception of the evidence, research and approach of EIP.
2. Type and utilisation of research evidence. We were interested in knowing what kind of sources of information teachers rely on to prepare their lessons, and more specifically, whether they consult findings from educational research.
3. The researcher's role and their relationship with the school. In this topic, we explored informants' opinions on what role researchers have when it comes to school life, if any. We also asked them what role scholars should play in strengthening the connections between academia and schools.

The information gathered in the semi-structured interviews enabled a more in-depth examination of the meanings expressed by the informants. During the interview sessions, we sought not only data, information and descriptions, but also experiences, examples and perceptions that facilitate

understanding of the object of study. In so doing, we were supported by the specific questions incorporated into each of the three general topics. For example, when we asked the participants for the “type and utilisation of research evidence”, we also included questions related to the functionality of research, the role of evidence in the innovation process, the transference of evidence to their practice, the integration of previous experience with scientific knowledge, and the motivation to adopt evidence.

Participants

Ten informants were selected following non-probabilistic convenience sampling (Patton, 2002), establishing four selection criteria: teachers from primary school level with more than ten years of teaching experience who are developing a leading role at their institutions and were engaged in the innovation process in their schools or classrooms.

The final sample was comprised of three principals, three heads of studies, one secretary, and three teachers who were coordinating innovation processes in their schools. All of the informants were females aged between 34 and 59 years (see Table 1).

Table 1

Informants' sociodemographic information

Informant coding	Age	School position (at the time of the study)	Years of experience (as a teacher)
T1	34	Principal	16
T2	59	Teacher	13
T3	58	Teacher	21
T4	52	Head of studies	24
T5	32	Teacher	12
T6	50	Head of studies	29
T7	57	Principal	36
T8	42	Head of studies	18
T9	42	Secretary	12
T10	35	Principal	14

Prior to the interview session, we asked our informants for their consent to participate in the interviews and to record the sessions.

Data analysis

We followed the recommendations of Huberman and Miles (2000) and Miles et al. (2020) on the method of the coding process. We started with a deductive book of codes derived from our literature review, but also allowed categories to emerge from the data in an inductive manner. The final code book comprised 3 topics and 15 codes (see Table 2).

Table 2

Topics under analysis

Topic	Codes
1. Perceptions of the EIP approach	1.1 EIP concept 1.2 Definition of “evidence” 1.3 Definition of “research” 1.4 Conception of the usefulness of research 1.5 Access to research 1.6 Emerging topics
2. Type and utilisation of research evidence	2.1 Usefulness of research 2.2 The role of evidence in innovation 2.3 Transfer of evidence to practice 2.4 Integration of previous experience with scientific knowledge 2.5 Motivation to use evidence 2.6 Emerging topics
3. Researchers’ role	3.1 Researchers’ role 3.2 Collaborative networks between university and school 3.3 Emerging topics

Results

The presentation of the results is structured in three sections. First, we focus on conceptualisations of the central categories of our research question: *evidence*, *research* and *EIP*, as expressed by our informants. The type and uses of research evidence preferred by teachers are analysed next, showing how research might actually be used by them in teaching practice. In the last section, we outline the features of an educational researcher from our informants’ point of view, and what the relationship should be between academia and schools in order to foster the adoption of EIP.

In each section, we include selected quotes and paraphrases of participants statements that best illustrate each of the topics analysed. Our data analysis also includes the benefits and difficulties of EIP implementation, as indicated by the informants in this study.

Teachers' perceptions of evidence, research and EIP

Beliefs and perceptions about findings from academic research shape the way teachers think about EIP. Most importantly, they may influence how teachers take action to apply such findings in teaching practice, if they do so at all.

Overall, the informants agreed that evidence functions as *proof* to demonstrate facts and serves to advance any process. As one of the principals interviewed stated, the evidence is seen by practitioners as “proof, a document, a compilation of information that gives you clues about a fact that you intend to verify” (Informant T7).

At the school level, a positive view of the relevance of EIP in practice represents a predictor of further evidence implementation. As proof, evidence helps to demonstrate that teachers have addressed a teaching goal and allows them to show that there has been a change in student outcomes.

According to the informants in this study, evidence also reflects whether the teachers' methodology is having the expected impact on students' learning. The respondents perceived evidence as a resource that contributes to follow-up teaching, and, as a head of study states, evidence “helps you to make progress in any process” (Informant T8). In this sense, from the teachers' perspective, evidence is similar to the data gathering phase in research: a systematic process to collect information to measure an outcome. Conceived as an objective/valid proof, evidence also provides trustworthiness, as opposed to intuition or opinions in teaching practice. Thus, evidence allows the teacher not only to explain the changes in students' learning, but also to make decisions based on an analysis of the data provided by evidence.

Evidence can take different forms, such as documents and/or images in digital or paper form, recorded files, group projects developed by students, and so on. It can be expressed in numbers or expressions, or in a quantitative or qualitative manner. What seems to be more important for some teachers is the conception that it is teaching practice that generates the evidence itself. Although evidence is not separated from teaching practice, sometimes teachers do not recognise the evidence, nor do they collect it, as such. Informant T9, who had 12 years of teaching experience, stated: “What we lack is to step back and look at our evidence”.

As for research, the teachers emphasised that it is a tool that requires a systematic process starting with a definition of variables and followed by the study of its effects in a phenomenon. This is illustrated by one of the three principals interviewed, who considers that research is useful especially “when you want to see what effects a certain variable can have on any object under study” (Informant T7).

The teachers highlighted the importance of research in the educational field and in teaching practice, as it shows the “right path” to promote the student’s learning process. In order to trust research, it seems important for the teachers to see the positive impacts it has; for example, in the improvement on their students’ qualifications. A teacher with 21 years of experience expressed the idea that “when you see the data given by the research and how you help the student to learn, you believe that research is important” (Informant T3).

Related to research use, educational research is utilised as a general guide for preparing a class and, according to the teachers, in some cases it can help to define the school mission stated in the School Educational Project (*‘Projecte Educatiu de Centre’*, in Catalan).

At a systemic level, the informants agreed that research provides not only general educational knowledge, but also the reasoning and information necessary for educational change and innovation.

Although educational research is highly valued, it is complicated for teachers to apply it directly to their daily practice. One of the main issues for EIP implementation is time constraints, as one teacher states: “We do not have time to research and undertake the application at the same time” (Informant T1). The teachers therefore claimed that a lack of time diminishes the opportunities for them to be engaged in the research process. They would like to seek out, read and discuss research results, and to be part of a research team and/or research project, but they do not have the time to do so.

Similarly, the teachers sometimes perceive the practical implications of educational research as not being useful, as research is not usually conducted by teachers or researchers with a teaching background. This perceived gap between the person who produces the research (a scholar or academic at university) and the person who should be the final user of the research findings (a teacher in school) seems to be the most important difficulty when it comes to adopting EIP.

Finally, when asked about EIP, the informants agreed that it is an approach that is useful for promoting improvements in school and learning without relying on “intuition”, but instead taking recourse to objective proof of improvement. As one teacher with 12 years of experience highlighted: “[by implementing the EIP approach you can base your teaching practice] on observable, measurable aspects and not only on intuition” (Informant T5). From the teachers’ perspectives, the use of evidence provides not only tangible examples of their teaching practice, but also a feeling of security regarding their action in classrooms.

Although teachers usually have proof of their students’ assignments, such as test results, in-class exercises or group projects, it is important for them to have evidence, “objects”, of their teaching action. Such proof demonstrates to

school leaders and families that improvements in the learning process do actually exist over time due to their teaching. EIP could help teachers to validate their methods, strategies and actions in class, not only for themselves, but also by making their teaching more accountable.

Conceptualised as a process, the teachers mentioned that EIP involves certain phases, such as diagnosis, goal-setting and planification, implementation and evaluation. In this view, collecting evidence would be part of the implementation process, and the final stage would imply making decisions to enhance what has been done. EIP is therefore seen as an ongoing process that provides a clear direction in teaching, as it helps “to see the horizon, to see where the path leads. Sometimes you go blindly, by intuition”, as a head of studies said (Informant T8). Overall, EIP was conceptualised as a path that provides more certainty and objective fundamentals on the decisions teachers make while teaching.

Research use in teaching practice: Type and uses of research evidence

Educational research comprises a wide range of topics in the education field and usually presents not only findings, but practical implications for teaching practice. In this topic, we explore the applications of these findings to improve student learning in class and/or to promote school development.

According to the interviewed teachers, educational research is useful because it helps to detect *what works* in teaching practice. If they can detect which aspects of their teaching practice are having a positive impact on student learning, then they can emphasise these aspects. At the same time, research can also help them to distinguish what *is not working* in order to make a decision. A teacher with 29 years of teaching experience expressed support of this idea when she commented on the importance of research in the educational setting by affirming: “I think that educational research must be present and can be a positive force in the life of the classroom” (Informant T6).

Research findings are also seen as a tool for self-reflection for some teachers: reading a new bibliography based on research evidence makes them question their own perspectives and opens new questions regarding their actions as professionals in the education field.

At the same time, this reflection guided by research has in some cases occurred as a collective process, which seems to be a useful application of EIP for the school. Specifically, one of the teachers interviewed mentioned that it helped them to develop an assessment instrument. She explained that “the past

year has been very useful for us to start, we have undertaken reflection, we have designed an evaluation instrument” (Informant T5).

However, the use of research in current class-innovation projects or for the design of class sessions is still limited. The teachers explained that they prefer to consult other sources of information (e.g., other colleagues’ experiences and/or professional blogs), as they find it more accessible than academic sources (e.g., articles in journals). In this regard, they perceived the “language barrier” as the most significant difficulty: the participants claim that they are not familiar with the academic language in which papers are written: “If the paper is written in technical language, then it is not going to be significant for us” (Informant T10). The perception of abstract and conceptual language that is far removed from practical language diminishes the adoption of an EIP approach.

Perceived researcher’s role and collaboration between researchers and teachers

It is important to analyse teachers’ perceptions of researchers, as this provides valuable insights on how to address the perceived gap between the academic world and the school world. Although collaborative work has been recognised as one of the most important factors in fostering EIP, it seems that there are still some difficulties in implementation.

For the participants, a researcher could be a person who works collaboratively with the school on a particular project and during a specific period. For example, one of the teachers interviewed said “If we collaborate [with researchers], it helps us more. We are not used to this vision of research, and it suits us” (Informant T5). The participants agreed on the value of collaboration between the school and researchers to improve students’ learning and organisational development at school.

A researcher could help the school and teaching staff to navigate the implementation of an EIP process. In this case, the researcher’s role would be similar to an external consultant: a person who guides the phases and activities, provides feedback and support, and assists them in decision making throughout the process.

From the teachers’ perspective, although a researcher is not usually a school staff member, s/he must have previous experience as a teacher or practitioner at the school level. As mentioned in the previous section, it seems that a researcher with a prior teaching background could make a more significant contribution, as they “speak the same language” (Informant T6), according to the teachers interviewed.

Overall, collaboration between schools and researchers has positive impacts: it creates a specific moment to analyse teaching practice in detail, it facilitates the design of specific methods to collect evidence or to “recognise” it, and it promotes debate on educational issues among peers. Most importantly, the teachers emphasised the importance of collaboration between researchers and teachers because it could make them realise the value of their own teaching:

Sometimes you need someone who is not from the school (...) not to tell you what you have to do, but to ask you questions about your practice that make you realise the importance of it, and that is not basic. You return to it the importance that [your teaching practice] had. (Informant T9)

Discussion

In the present paper, we have reflected on the perceptions teachers have of the EIP approach and its application in teaching. We started by exploring different models that have stimulated the presence of evidence in public discourse and in the adoption of public policy. These models allow us to analyse and reflect on the perception of teachers as final users regarding the use of evidence in their classrooms, as well as their perception of the EIP approach at the systemic level.

We have seen that in the Catalan educational landscape, the “evidence-informed practice” policy has been recently initiated and rapidly adopted by many education stakeholders. However, our findings corroborate those of previous studies in the Spanish context and internationally that demonstrate teachers’ caution towards the use of educational research (e.g., Ion & Iucu, 2014; Perines, 2018, Vanderlinde & Van Braak, 2010; Williams & Coles, 2007).

We have seen that incorporating an evidence-informed approach in the public agenda is a good starting point for change, but it is not sufficient to secure the use of research evidence in practice. The adoption of evidence in teaching practice requires a diverse and complex configuration of factors, from teachers’ personal factors to school-related variables and systemic elements.

Our findings show that the use of research in practice is influenced by teachers’ perspectives on research, as well as by their ability to understand research language, decode research data, and make sense of research findings and adapt them to their class context. These findings corroborate previous studies (Cain et al., 2019; Flores, 2018; Lysenko et al., 2014) and highlight the importance of bridging the gap between academic research and teachers’ experience, as well as the importance of decoding research language for teachers’ use (Iftimescu et al., 2020).

Similarly, our findings suggest that in order to make use of research, teachers have to possess a strong capacity to engage with research data, to possess basic research skills, to adopt positive dispositions towards research and evidence, and to display a strong commitment to innovation in practice (Malin et al., 2020; Saha et al., 1995). In addition, having positive previous experience with research tends to contribute to making teachers more open and willing to engage with research (Iftimescu et al., 2020).

Personal commitment to evidence does not ensure its automatic adoption by teachers. The organisational environment is key, while the creation of an ecosystem favourable to the use of evidence and ensuring the resources required to implement it are also critical. Effective time use and providing proper spaces for interaction and reflection on practice are key elements to enabling teachers' reflection with peers. The role of school leaders is critical in this regard: they are the main actors who stimulate the teachers' engagement with research at the organisational level and create the conditions to enable teachers to reflect on their practice and to promote staff training. Moreover, allocating logistical and economic resources so that teachers can develop processes of collaborative knowledge exchange and gain access to relevant information are only some of the organisational aspects associated with teachers' predispositions towards the use of evidence in practice.

Conclusion

The study has several implications regarding the implementation of an EIP approach in the education system. First of all, at the decision-making level, it is critical to promote public policies that encourage the use of research evidence in schools. We have seen that in the Catalan public space, there are several initiatives, promoted by various educational contexts and with the participation of multiple stakeholders. Although not all of them include teachers as partners, they contribute to creating an awareness of the use of evidence in educational practice. However, public administration has to demonstrate leadership and vision, acting as a bridge between the policymaking context and the school/class environment. As can be inferred from the findings, evidence use in the Catalan context is currently situated at a crossroad between the *science-push model*, as higher education institutions are attempting to influence the research agenda required for evidence-based policymaking. However, looking at the school level, we can find islands of the *Social Activity Model*, demonstrating the need to examine the role of teachers in the adoption of EIP in more depth. The engagement of teachers can be interpreted as the attitude of organisations and

their members towards research, the political and managerial context likely to promote and favour research transfer and use, and the financial context needed to foster quality results. These are critical factors that are not present today in all Catalan schools, as there is no initiative at the systemic level.

The successful implementation of EIP in the education system has to take into account the realities of school and the teachers' capacities and values. Considering that the conception of research and the ability to use it are grounded in training programmes, the findings support the importance of reliable teacher learning and research capacity. This should involve robust in-service training to overcome the possible deficit of research during initial training. Such training should include strategies designed to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in research, transcending formal contexts and taking advantage of informal learning opportunities, and paying attention to the transference of these skills to the class context. At the school level, the transformational potential of the willingness of schools and teachers to participate in collaborative activities represents a facilitating factor for the use of research, and this can bring individual capacities to scale in order to contribute to more substantial school improvement. Our findings suggest that encouraging the aspirations of motivated teachers to use research in practice, the school system should be building a support capacity around teachers' professional development based on research evidence. Supporting teachers' involvement with research and creating opportunities for direct experience could strengthen practitioners' attitudes toward educational research and enhance its use in practice.

Although the study addresses the idea of bridging the gap between the contexts of policymakers and teachers, it cannot, at this stage, provide a full understanding of how efficient collaboration could be defined. Since evidence-informed practice appears increasingly more frequently in public discourse, it provides us with a sense of policymakers' positive disposition towards a decision-making landscape based on research evidence and opens the possibility of a meaningful relationship with research evidence. It is clear that in order to strength this relationship, efforts must be made by both parties. Teachers' capacity to engage with research must be stimulated and supported by the Educational Administration, while policymakers must align their decisions and political discourse with teachers' reality. In addition, more opportunities for researchers, policymakers and teachers to meet in both formal and informal contexts could contribute to such engagement from all parties.

Limitations

Our study sample was comprised of a limited number of participants, which reduces the capacity to generalise the research findings. The results presented must therefore be considered a first screening of the school reality, and future research should include a broader sample in order to strengthen the theoretical saturation of the findings.

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The Impact of Specific Social Factors on Changes in Education in Serbia

ANA PEŠIKAN*¹ AND IVAN IVIĆ²

≈ The political and economic changes that followed the adoption of the *Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia 2020* essentially betrayed the basic ideas and intentions of the strategy, creating a systematic threat to education and its role in the development of Serbia. This created an almost experimental situation for analysing the impact of political and social factors on changes in education. In the sphere of politics, new trends have emerged (centralisation of power; marginalisation of democratic institutions; encouraging foreign investment in companies with a low technological level, etc.) that strongly influenced changes ('reforms') in education (great centralisation in education, the strong influence of politics on education, imposing of some lower-level forms of education, reducing professional autonomy, etc.). The basic mechanism of transferring the general policy to education is changing the role of the most important national institutions in defining and implementing education policy: the National Education Council, the National Council for Vocational and Adult Education, the National Council for Higher Education, and the National Accreditation Body. The adoption of new education laws (2017) radically changed their status and competencies, resulting in a reduction of their independence and professionalism and strengthening the role of the ministry, through which the influence of the ruling political regime is transferred. Also, the role of the Chamber of Commerce in education has been strengthened. Such a system endangers the autonomy of educational institutions and teachers, as well as the quality of education. Consequently, these changes have a clear impact on the country's development and its international position.

Keywords: education policy, social change, political influence on education

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Vpliv posebnih družbenih dejavnikov na spremembe v izobraževanju v Srbiji

ANA PEŠIKAN IN IVAN IVIĆ

~ Politične in gospodarske spremembe, ki so sledile sprejetju *Strategije razvoja šolstva v Srbiji 2020*, so pravzaprav izdale osnovne ideje in namene te strategije ter s tem ustvarile sistemsko grožnjo izobraževanju in njegovi vlogi pri razvoju Srbije. To je proizvedlo skoraj eksperimentalni položaj za analizo vpliva političnih in družbenih dejavnikov na spremembe v izobraževanju. Na političnem področju so nastali novi trendi (centralizacija oblasti, marginalizacija demokratičnih institucij, spodbujanje tujih naložb v podjetja z nizko stopnjo tehnološkega razvoja itn.), ki so močno vplivali na spremembe ('reformne') v izobraževanju (velika centralizacija izobraževanja, močen vpliv politike na izobraževanje, vsiljevanje nekaterih nižjih stopenj izobraževanja, zmanjševanje strokovne avtonomije itn.). Osnovni mehanizem prenosa splošne politike v izobraževanje je spreminjanje vloge najpomembnejših državnih institucij pri določanju in izvajanju izobraževalne politike, tj. Državnega sveta za izobraževanje Republike Srbije, Državnega sveta za poklicno izobraževanje in izobraževanje odraslih, Državnega sveta za visoko šolstvo in Akreditacijskega telesa Republike Srbije. Sprejetje novih zakonov o šolstvu (2017) je korenito spremenilo njihov status in pristojnost. Posledica sprememb pa je zmanjšanje njihove samostojnosti in strokovnosti s sočasno krepitevijo vloge ministrstva, prek katerega se prenaša vpliv vladajočega političnega režima na šolstvo. Prav tako se je okrepila vloga gospodarske zbornice v izobraževanju. Tak sistem pa ogroža avtonomijo izobraževalnih ustanov in učiteljev pa tudi kakovost izobraževanja. Posledično imajo te spremembe jasen vpliv na razvoj države in njen mednarodni položaj.

Ključne besede: izobraževalna politika, družbena sprememba, vpliv politike na izobraževanje

Introduction

The literature asserts that the state context and politics are significant influences on the course of education and play an important role in shaping education policy, including the translation of policy into practice (Cooper et al., 2008; Fuhrman, 1989; Youdell, 2010). Analysts have discerned the importance of the political context, defined as the distribution of power and the structure and function of various groups, exerting a key influence on the state choice of mandates, inducements, or other strategies to influence local behaviour (Fuhrman, 1989). The relationship between education and social change is profoundly reciprocal. Social and political changes cause changes in education because it is deeply socio-culturally conditioned; conversely, quality education can be an agent of change in the socio-economic development of a society. People, banded in communities of practice, intentionally or unintentionally, adopt new socio-cultural realities and attempt to realise them. In such a way, these changes in practice enable changes in the lives of individuals (and their identity) and the course of social change (Vygotsky, 1980). The present work is, unfortunately, a sad story about the negative effects of new trends in the ruling politics on the quality of education in Serbia, and thus on the country's chances for future development.

Contentious political moves in education in Serbia

In our previous work (Ivić & Pešikan, 2012), we presented relevant reform waves in Serbia after the country's major political changes in the year 2000, finishing the review with the adoption of the Strategy of Education Development in Serbia to 2020 (SEDS, 2012). This paper aims to show how education has been influenced by general policy in the country since 2012, which has deviated from SEDS and well-established and developed trajectories of education development in Serbia. We will not systematically present the changes that have occurred in education in the country but will focus on the analysis of the basic mechanism of transferring political influence to education, on the major changes that this has brought to education and the consequent implications of these changes on (reducing) chances for the country's development.

The 2012 elections brought a coalition of the Serbian Progression Party (a national-conservative and right-wing populist) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (a left-wing nationalist and populist political party) to power. The ruling coalition was dominant in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia when the SEDS was adopted. Since 2012, in the sphere of politics, massive

changes have been made in relation to the development of the country and its democracy: centralisation of power; marginalisation of democratic institutions and practice; complete control of media; instead of investment in research and development (as emphasised in the SEDS and the action plan for its implementation) the main strategy is encouraging foreign investment in companies with a low technological level; providing economic incentives to foreign ICT companies while killing domestic capacities and encouraging a new wave of 'brain drain' (i.e., the departure of young educated professionals from the country) and similar. All this has had a significant impact on education, either direct (such as favouring a dual model of vocational education as a priority in education) or indirect (non-investment in science and higher education leads to a reduction in the quality of the workforce, less innovation and weaker international competitiveness of the country; or proven plagiarism of doctoral theses of some politicians in high positions destroys basic academic values, such as honesty and integrity, and ruins the reputation of higher education in society³, and confirms the practice of political employment, and similar).

The spirit of new political trends in Serbia is embodied in **the package of educational laws** (or their amendments) adopted from 2017 onward.⁴ These include the Law on the Education System Foundations⁵, the Law on Preschool Education, the Law on Primary Education, the Law on Secondary Education, the Law on Dual Vocational Education and Training, the Law on Textbooks, the Law on Higher Education, Law on Adult Education, Law on the National Qualification Framework, Law on Educational Inspection, Bylaw on Students Assessment in Primary Education, and the Bylaw on the Continuous Professional Development of Teachers. The changes were explained by the need to harmonise the relevant laws with SEDS 2020, as well as other regulations in the field of education, personal data protection, and public sector funding. Unfortunately, the reality is that the spirit of the new laws and the novelties they brought into education is quite contrary to the trends, intentions, and solutions elaborated in the SEDS 2020. This is reflected in the way these laws were drafted and the nature of the measures they adopted.

3 Despite the rhetoric that accompanied the enactment of the new law that the Law on Higher Education wants to increase the relevance of HE considering economic and social aspect; acquire functional knowledge and competences.

4 The set of new laws in education is published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 88/2017.

5 The law that regulates the basics of pre-school, primary, secondary, and adult education.

Key characteristics and implications of the adopted measures

The adoption of the new laws established new education policy and practices, changing the needed modern education trends into the means of greater political influence. Such large measures and the rather radical proposals they contain usually are based on some new education policy. In this case, this general concept is implicit (or is hidden), not explicit; therefore, it was necessary first to analyse all these individual measures and examine them as a whole, in order to decipher their general meaning (Education Forum, 2017). Based on such an analysis, our goal is to illustrate their intentions, the meaning of the adopted measures and their consequences on key examples.

The way the new laws were drafted

The work on the package of educational laws from 2017 was characterised by the following:

- Non-transparency: there is no data on the working groups that drafted these proposals (the structure of working groups was a secret, it was not possible to know who the members of the working groups are and what their expertise is, by what criteria they were selected, as well as the transparency of their work; frequent changing of working group members);
- Non-participatory work in isolation:
 - None of the institutions important for education (National Education Council of the Republic of Serbia; National Council for Vocational and Adult Education, and National Higher Education Council of the Republic of Serbia, trade unions, higher education, and research institutions) was involved in the preparation of new measures;
 - the content of the proposal could not be obtained publicly until the beginning of the public hearing;
- Formalism: the necessary democratic procedures have been formally respected, but essentially their meaning has been acted out: participants in the hearing could communicate their objections online with prior identification, which, with good reason, was perceived as a form of pressure on the participants in the hearing; extremely short deadlines for public hearings (deadlines were even shorter because it was not easy to find a proposal and read it); the discussion on the legal proposals was limited by the fact that the form for submitting objections asked for a specific article of the draft law to which the objections refer, which excluded the discussion on the general spirit and concept of the draft law;
- Partial approach: Instead of a comprehensive and balanced approach to

education, partial problem solving, isolated and without a ‘big picture’ in mind, without insight into the process of solving other issues and at other educational levels;

- No general conception explained and publicly communicated: There is no general conception or strategy for the development of education behind these new solutions; it was not elaborated and explicit;
- Non-systematic and absent internal compliance: without an explicit general conception of education, the selection of educational priorities were without a substantiated basis, selected on some other (political) reasons (e.g., dual education as a priority instead of the declared priorities in the SEDS, see later in the text);
- Chaotic: Practical solutions are neither interconnected nor based on theoretical approach and empirical evidence (for example, there was no concept of changes (much less reform) of general high school (gymnasium), changes in curricula were introducing for each grade separately, without a general picture, and the concept of graduation examination (*Matura*) was prepared before these changes and without an idea of their natures).

The preceding may sound like harsh statements. However, if we imagine a situation in which the needs and ideas of the leading political parties in the country should be implemented through education, then each of these characteristics suits the context well and becomes comprehensible. If we keep in mind the etic vs emic approach⁶ (Murphy, 2018), what happened in Serbia from 2012 to 2020 indicates that educational changes in the meantime have been conducted in accordance with an etic approach (Ivić, 2001; Ivić & Pešikan, 2012), the changes have been led (or dictated) externally and imposed on the education system. Thus, the way the new laws were drafted is just one of the manifestations of the translating the politics into education policy, the next, essential manifestation is the nature of the measures adopted by the new laws.

Centralisation of the education system

Changing the roles of the most important national institutions. A crucial mechanism of transferring the new governing policy to education was changing the roles of the most important national institutions in defining and

6 In 1954, linguist Kenneth Pike first introduced the terms ‘etic’ and ‘emic’. More recently, these two terms have been adopted to describe two distinguished approaches for understanding human social behaviors: emic: from within, and etic: from the outside. The etic tends to study behavior from outside a particular system. In contrast, the emic tends to study social behavior from inside the system (Pike, 1967, p. 37).

implementing education policy: the National Education Council of the Republic of Serbia (for preschool, primary, general secondary and arts education) and the National Council for Vocational and Adult Education. The adoption of the new laws has substantially changed their status and competencies: first, the procedure for their constitution and the structure of their members, and secondly, their role, the nature of their work. Previously their members were representatives of the stakeholders elected by the National Assembly; now, the minister submits a list of candidates to the government, which elects them. This reduced the independence of these bodies and enabled a greater impact of politics on education. Their role has changed from that of a decision-maker to an advisory body for a minister. Previously, they had much more professional autonomy, and they were the body that made the relevant decisions in education. For example, the National Education Council of Serbia was established in 1885; until 2017 (even during the socialistic one-party system), it was an independent educational body that made the decisions in education, among others as follows:

- determining: the course of development and improvement of the quality of preschool, primary, general secondary and secondary arts education; general and special achievement standards; competence standards for teachers, preschool teachers and their professional development; competence standards for managing directors; quality standards for textbooks and teaching tools; standards for the conditions for delivering special programmes in the field of preschool education; institution operation quality standards; the need for new textbooks;
- adopting: the fundamentals of the preschool education programme, curricula and syllabi for primary, general secondary and secondary arts education, part of the curriculum and syllabus for vocational secondary education and adult education (pertaining to general education subjects), and the fundamentals of the programme for early child development and care (EDC).

Thus, the competencies of these professional institutions are transferred to the minister, the ministry, or the government, which are political entities. This completely suppresses competence as a basic criterion in determining the holders of competencies. The great danger that follows from that is even greater politicisation of even purely professional educational measures.

As we have said, these national bodies were previously independent of the ministry and were a control mechanism for the implementation of education policy. With the new laws, the independence and professionalism of these bodies are reduced, as is the professional autonomy of schools and teachers. The

new education policy and governance could be characterised as highly centralised and completely regulated by the Ministry of Education of Serbia (MoES). With this top-to-down approach the role of the MoES is strengthened (i.e., the governing policy). The professional autonomy given to schools and teachers by the set of educational laws from 2017 is negligible, because the MoES makes all key decisions, especially regarding admission, curriculum, school management, employment of teachers and principals, service contracts and financing. On the one hand, the state professes a desire to professionalise teaching, and on the other, it constricts responsibilities attached to teachers' roles through the laws.

The fact is that an education system under centralised circumstances undermines the role of school and teacher and, consequently, the quality of education (Brooks, 1991; Erss, 2015; Gerrard & Farrell, 2014; Griffin, 1991). In a centralised school system, the ministry of education treats all schools as similar for control purposes, and there is little interest in understanding specific school cultures and supporting teachers' professionalism. Such an approach affects the initiative of teachers, and they feel far less professional in this system.

Teachers in such systems are beginning to feel that they are trusted neither to develop or select curriculum nor to teach it appropriately. This message is rather disheartening for many teachers since academic freedom and autonomy are two of the precious few jobs satisfiers which offset for them a multitude of dissatisfies, such as the perceptions of relatively low pay, inadequate working conditions, misbehaving students, critical parents, and a general lack of public support.' (Brooks, 1991, p. 153).

'In this de-skilled model of teaching [...] the teacher becomes little more than an assembly-line worker, performing mechanical tasks' (McNeil, 1988, p. 335), instead of their full active participation in the decision-making related to the implementation of an innovative curriculum (Ben-Chaim et al., 1994).

The literature indicates that teacher has a critical role in the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom (e.g., Fullan, 2001; Roehrig & Kruse, 2005; Roehrig et al., 2007). The teacher's perception of their role as specified in the curriculum affects the way they translate the curriculum into practice. The shift towards centralisation means a decreasing of local responsibility and freedom, particularly for the professionals (i.e., teachers and school leaders) to choose the best methods to attain the centrally formulated goals. Teachers think that the centralised curriculum attributes a strict role to them and views them as a presenter in the classroom (Kaya et al., 2012). Thus, progressive educational changes are significantly threatened. A change, an improvement of

teaching and learning process has to be initiated, planned, and implemented at the local level, and to involve educators in that process in such a way that they feel respected and that they are ownership of changes in school (Fullan, 2014; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015). If teachers have an opportunity to influence the process of teaching and learning, then teachers and schools do matter for students, they do make a change in student's life, and how a student performs and feels. Schools and their teachers can actually make a difference not only for student cognitive performances but also for a wide range of students' social-emotional outcomes, including student school behaviour, interest in school, self-concept and education aspirations. Differences in school average performances represent a bit more than 30% of the total variance in student performances, irrespective of the subject domain, on average across countries and economies participating in PISA and TALIS (OECD, 2021). A teacher who is not a competent and autonomous professional cannot educate his/her students to be critical thinkers and responsible decision-makers (Ivić, et al., 2003; Ivić, 2008; Pešikan, 2020). Principals are an important factor who influence the quality of the school work and students achievements. The procedure of election of the school principal is 'slightly' changed by the new laws. Based on the list of all candidates who meet the conditions and proposal for the election of the principal, the minister *elects* the principal of the institution and makes a decision on his appointment (Article 123 of the Law on the Education System Foundations), instead of the previous solution in which the ministry *approves* the school proposal for the election of the principal. Here, the avenues open for greater political influence on the work of the school and teachers, '[...] for indoctrination and for imposing obedience. Far from creating independent thinkers, schools have always, throughout history, played an institutional role in a system of control and coercion' (Chomsky, 2017, pp. 27–28).

Insufficient independence of the National Accreditation Body. The National Accreditation Body was established by the Law on Higher Education 2017 (LHE 2017) as an independent agency for quality assurance in higher education to be harmonised with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to become a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Within the ENQA report from 2018, the connection of the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (in Serbian: KAPK) with the National Higher Education Council of the Republic of Serbia (NHEC) and the MoES was analysed in detail. The fact that KAPK does not have its own bank account and depends on the administrative and financial services of the ministry is recognised as a limiting factor for planning, management, and efficiency in the work of the Commission. In the period after this ENQA report, the NAB

was established⁷ as an independent legal entity for accreditation and quality assurance of HE in Serbia that has its own bank account and would provide its own financing (not yet realised), independent of the MoES. The ENQA report from 2020 (ENQA Agency Review, 2020) pointed out that although NAB was granted the status of an independent legal entity, its independence is not fully clearly described in the LHE 2017, nor in the standards adopted by the NHEC, nor in the NAB's Statute. Concern was expressed about the fact that the ministry appoints seven members of the NHEC and (through the NAB Steering Board) all seventeen members of the KAPK, which does not fully ensure that there is no government influence on the work of the KAPK and its subcommittees (Pešikan & Parojčić, 2020). Also, a list of reviewers is selected by the NAB Steering Committee on the proposal of the NHEC. Concerns were reiterated, as expressed in previous ENQA reports, that the NHEC should not be in charge of establishing the KAPK at the same time and be the body to object and appeal against KAPK decisions. It was commented that the existing practice is not in line with the practice of other European agencies and that it harms the independence and integrity of the central body of NAT. Of particular concern was the possibility that, under the current appeals procedure, the NHEC's position would prevail over a decision made by the KAPC. It was concluded that it is necessary to additionally support the independence of the work of the NAB (Pešikan & Parojčić, 2020). Therefore, the NAB was established as an independent institution, but the NHCE has a key influence on its work, and through it, the MoES and the minister - because it has become advisory body to the minister.

Changing priorities in education in Serbia

The package of laws passed in 2017 also includes a completely new law, the Law on Dual Vocational Education and Training. Dual vocational education and training refers to work-based training: 'The student attends school and learns through work with the employer, in accordance with the qualification standard and the curriculum' (Article 9 of the Law). 'The scope of learning through work is at least 20%, and at most 80% of the total number of hours of vocational subjects, in accordance with the appropriate curriculum.' (Article 6 of the Law). For the 2019-2020 school year, 2,533 students were enrolled in the first grade of secondary school (84% of places filled), while the total number of students was 7000. The total number of dual educational profiles is 37, the number of secondary vocational schools in the dual system is 104, while the number

7 The Government's decision no. 02-371/2018-1 as of January 31, 2018 regarding to the establishment of the National Accreditation Body, the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 9, dated February 2, 2018.

of interested companies in the process of accreditation is 880.

Here, with a known employer, students are “learning” about real work, acquiring the knowledge that a particular employer needs, and who will provide them with jobs after graduation. But what if the employer fails? Or the technology changes? Then follows retraining, new learning, courses... In schools designed in such a way, students do not really acquire any knowledge, but rather more instruction, skills and routines needed to perform certain jobs currently required in the job market.’ (Šuvaković, 2019, p. 29).

When looking at MoES’s activities in relation to everything else, it is obvious that dual education has become a priority of education policy. Why is this a problem? The introduction of dual education is not a problem in itself, because this form of education is valid. The problem is, first of all, that too much importance has been given to this marginal form of education (that has no developmental character) under political pressure (Šuvaković, 2019). The adoption of this law was accompanied by extremely extensive promotional activities and great efforts were invested in persuading students to enrol in this type of secondary education. Second, dual education as the priority in the education policy is not in line with the strategy even with the measures for improving vocational educational training (VET) that it envisages. The future development of the country relies on the validity of the priorities chosen for the following decade. The strategic documents see quality higher education as the country’s main development resource (SEDS, 2012). Like all educational documents in the developed world, SEDS insists on the longest possible (measured by the number of years of schooling) and the highest quality education. The focus of SEDS is on serious reform of high schools as a way to develop and nurture the country’s future intellectual and cultural elite (SEDS, 2012). Only that elite can help keep Serbia from being a backward, developing country. The share of ‘smart’ jobs in global development and economic prosperity and the share of classic industries or physical jobs is incomparable. For example: job projections predict continued growth in professional, business, and scientific services sectors, including computer systems design and related services as well as management, scientific, and technical consulting services. The manufacturing sector is projected to lose 444,800 jobs, the most of any sector over the next decade. This sector also contains 12 of the 20 industries projected to have the most rapid employment declines. Factors contributing to the loss of manufacturing jobs include the adoption of new productivity-enhancing technologies, such as robotics, and international competition (U.S. Department for Labor, 2019, p.5). Most of the projected employment growth will be in jobs that require some kind

of higher education. In this light, the demand for raising the level of education of citizens and increasing higher education in the country is quite justified and means a completely different priority of education policy from dual education.

With the dual model of vocational education, the role of the Chamber of Commerce in education has been strengthened. The manner of allocating students in dual educational profiles is prescribed by the minister in cooperation with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce (Article 7 of the Law on Dual Education). Representatives of the Chamber of Commerce are also members of the Management Board of the NAB. The intention is good: strengthening the connection between higher education and the needs of the country's economy. The MoES declare that higher education need to 'connect with the economy', the need for some studies will be decided on the basis of market demand for particular professions, that 'human capital' must be trained to contribute to economic growth, the competitiveness of the country in the world, increasing the employment rate, creating new jobs, and similar. However, that is just one of the purposes of education. Global capitalism has placed education at the forefront of national competitiveness, and governments have created education policies primarily designed to serve the needs of the market. Certainly, enabling the young generations to earn a living and support the economic development of the country is a necessary part of education but not its only purpose and goal (Pešikan, 2020, p. 445). Such education dehumanises young people, quantifies their 'value' in economic terms and ignores the multidimensionality of their needs as evolving social and emotional human beings who, in partnership with critically enlightened teachers, have the capacity to be a factor in their destiny (McGregor, 2009).

Uzelac points out that 'the Bologna system' reduces man to *homo economicus*, and that 'the principle of appreciating knowledge as knowledge no longer rules, but only practical application'. Or, as Chomsky nicely put it: 'In the early stages of education, they prepare you for a social life where you need to understand the need to support government structures, primarily corporations - business classes.' (Chomsky, 2017, p. 29). The competency cited is not the only one that has been declared compulsory in secondary education in Serbia but it can be said to be crucial for the pro-systemic neoliberal socialisation of high school students. (Šuvaković, 2019, p. 18).

Digitalisation of education in Serbia: Yes, but for what purpose?

In Serbia, it seems that digitalisation has been introduced more as a fashion (as a tribute to the spirit of the times), and many of the initiatives (e.g., the creation of digital classrooms, the preparation of digital textbooks, and the

digital school diary) are not guided by a clear insight into the goals of digitalisation, what problems in education we are trying to solve with it, what the advantages of digitalisation in education are. More importantly, Serbia does not have enough experts in the application of digitalisation in education, and digitalisation promoters are not aware of the real risks of it (Ivić, 2019). Recent research findings on the effects of learning in online environments (LOE) are inconsistent and contradictory,⁸ so the application of LOE was carrying out carefully and reasonably in education in developed countries, mostly in higher education. The progressive integration of technology into schooling includes the following: in the lower grades of primary school, priority should be given to direct encounters of children with the world and other living beings and the use of simple technological tools in the classroom; computers and other virtual learning environments should be gradually introduced into the curriculum in the older grades of primary and secondary school; in higher education, digital technologies should be given a prominent place in the learning process and in later years significant time should be devoted to helping students develop the technical skills they will need when they graduate (Desrochers & Gentry, 2004, p. 572). The present paper is not the place to analyse the process of digitalisation in education in Serbia, but in light of the above, measures that should be mentioned include the introduction of the compulsory subject of Informatics from the 1st grade of primary school or programming from the 3rd grade of primary school; without providing information on the assumptions on which these innovations are based or on what preconditions need to be met and the like.

Without going into detail, in the context of this paper, we want to point out one simple fact: that the process of digitalisation of education in Serbia is not managed by experts in education, education policy, or improving the quality of teaching and learning. The centre for the management of the digitalisation process in education is not in the MoES but in the Prime Minister's Office. Hence, at the cabinet of the prime minister creates activities in this area and makes decisions that should be implemented by certain bodies in the Ministry of Education (MoES). Thus, an important issue of education policy that is closely related to the quality of education is addressed in a political rather than an educational context. Even if the prime minister had highly competent advisers, experts on these specific issues (and there are none), they would not be able to replace the system (i.e., the Ministry of Education), which would have to be authorised to create and implement education policy. Thus, digitalisation in education in Serbia is carried out according to political and not educational needs.

8 e.g., see: Bates, 2004; Boulton, 2008; Ivić, 2019; Law et al., 2008; Lin, 2018; McCutcheon et al., 2015; Means et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2015; Ni, 2013; Pešikan, 2020.

Conclusion

It was necessary to make changes in education during the social transition because education can be a catalyst for the social change and the development of both individuals and countries. Precisely because of its role in the development of society and the state, education must not be a place for the implementation of politically motivated measures. In this paper, we have endeavoured to show the main mechanisms and ways in which the governing politics in Serbia is implemented through education. The new important trends in politics (such as centralisation of power; marginalisation of democratic institutions; encouraging foreign investment in companies with a low technological level, etc.) have been transferred to education by adopting the new educational laws (2017). Serbian education has been seriously affected by key characteristics and implications of the adopted measures resulting, among others, in the centralisation of the education system; changing the role of the most important national institutions in defining and implementing education policy, reducing their independence and professionalism, and strengthening the role of the ministry; and changing priorities in education in Serbia. The shift towards centralisation in education has many implications, and one important is the decreasing of responsibility and professional freedom of teachers. The professionalism of teachers is, in fact, the empty rhetoric of policy-makers. They are calling for the greater professional status of teachers; however, there has been an increasing tendency of the legislation and education policy to limit the decision-making scope of teachers, thereby diminishing their professional status. This fact is undoubtedly to the detriment of the quality of education, and the only question is how severe that damage will be.

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Structural Over-Determination of Education Reforms and Agency

SLAVKO GABER*¹ AND VERONIKA TAŠNER²

∞ This article attempts to conceptualise the relationship between the individual (professional) and the structural in a period of relatively radical changes in society. The challenging and revealing dialectic of such relations is analysed through the combination of auto-ethnographic reflections and archival documents showing the changes in the functioning of a council of experts in a country that experienced and coped with three fundamentally peaceful transitions: the transition from a self-managed socialist economy to a market economy, the transition from a one-party socialist system to a representative liberal democracy, and from a republic that was part of a federal state to an independent state. The Expert Council of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (then still part of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia), later renamed the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia (at that time a liberal democracy with a market economy and an independent state), can serve as an example of the productive intertwining of individual (expert) and the structural in the formulation and the implementation of the functional transformation of the educational system. The contextualised account and assessment of the shifts that together helped bring about the independent state and its education system formation outlines the complexity and importance of reflexive governance in the times of transition, which, in itself, brings to the fore a number of relevant issues and invites and supports change in the educational system. Such an opportunity should not be missed by the country and its educators.

Keywords: expert council; change in society; change in education, missed opportunity, baccalaureate, gymnasium, general education, vocational education, socialism, governance

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Strukturna naddoločitev izobraževalnih reform in delovanje

SLAVKO GABER IN VERONIKA TAŠNER

☞ Članek poskuša konceptualizirati odnos med individualnim (strokovnim) in strukturnim v obdobju razmeroma korenitih sprememb v družbi. Izzivalna in razkrivajoča dialektika takih odnosov je analizirana s kombinacijo avtoetnografskih razmislekov, ob naslonitvi na arhivske dokumente, ki prikazujejo spremembe v delovanju strokovnega sveta v državi, ki je doživela tri temeljne miroljubne prehode in se tudi spopadla z njimi: prehod iz samoupravnega socialističnega gospodarstva v tržno gospodarstvo, prehod iz enopartijskega socialističnega sistema v reprezentativno liberalno demokracijo in prehod iz republike, ki je bila del zvezne države, v neodvisno državo. Strokovni svet Socialistične republike Slovenije (takrat še del Socialistične republike Jugoslavije), pozneje preimenovan v Strokovni svet Republike Slovenije (takrat že liberalna demokracija s tržnim gospodarstvom in z neodvisno državo), lahko služi kot primer produktivnega prepletanja individualnega (strokovnega) in strukturnega pri oblikovanju in izvajanju preobrazbe izobraževalnega sistema. Kontekstualizirani prikaz in ocena premikov, ki so skupaj pripomogli k nastanku neodvisne države in njenega oblikovanja izobraževalnega sistema, opisuje zapletenost in pomen reflektivnega upravljanja v času tranzicije, ki sama po sebi v ospredje postavlja vrsto pomembnih vprašanj ter vabi in podpira spremembe v izobraževalnem sistemu. Takšne priložnosti država in njeni edukatorji ne bi smeli zamuditi.

Ključne besede: strokovni svet, spremembe v družbi, sprememba v izobraževanju, zamujena priložnost, matura, gimnazija, splošno izobraževanje, poklicno izobraževanje, socializem, upravljanje

Introduction

We often read how complex and risky changes and reforms of education are (see Fullan, 2005, 2008; Hargraves & Fullan, 2009). Warnings and arguments about the complexity and risks associated with changes in education, and especially large-scale reforms, are undoubtedly more than justified.

Nevertheless, it seems equally true that educational changes do occur, including structural reforms, as part of broader changes in society. They may even be among the initiators of such broader, even substantial, change in concrete society. These are reforms that usually come as an opportunity and can occur as part of a broader, structural change in the nature of the economy, the political system, and similar.

We want to stimulate considerations on such school reforms by asserting that opportunities for productive and, at least to some degree, successful educational reforms appear and disappear with profound changes in society. Indeed, it may be that if we miss the window of opportunity for systemic change in education, we may have serious difficulties in enforcing changes in education, notwithstanding that such changes, even when reforms of the educational system are needed.³

In this article, we will focus on the example of one of the reforms driven by radical changes in the society, economy, political system and status of the country, which managed to design and implement a relatively successful reform in a complex and, in terms of the wider context, favourable time window for reform: Slovenia. Moreover, we aim to show that educational reform in Slovenia was deeply embedded in the deliberations, expertise, and political positionings of the last years of the socialist regime.

Looking back at the 1980s in Slovenia and in Europe, it is safe to say that uncertainty was one of its central trademarks. Embedded in the uncertainty were clear signs that the old was giving way to the new. However, how much the world would change, and with it the extent to which education and experts would change, we did not know in the few years before the radical transitions. In the years around the end of the millennium, to one of the authors of this article, the breadth and depth of the change came as a surprise even though he was part of the group⁴ that actively promoted and co-conceptualised the shifts in society and education away from socialist self-management structures.

3 Compare situation in newly established states that appeared on the territory of former Yugoslavia at least for the different PISA or TIMSS results.

4 The Šolsko polje (*School field*) group was one of the NGO formations of experts under the umbrella of ZSMS (*Alliance of Socialist Youth*) that were an inner-system formation that actively demanded changes in the political system and society.

The transitional nature of education and society can also be seen in the strange but productive mix of expertise and deeply politically tinged reflections directed at changing the system. On the one hand, relatively young and politically inexperienced representatives of a dissident party group (the Alliance of Socialist Youth) and, on the other hand, experienced highly established professional members, including Prof. France Strmčnik, Prof. Vid Pečjak, Prof. Janko Kos, Prof. Mirko Jurak, Prof. Marjan Hribar, Prof. Ivan Svetlik; Dr Darko Štrajm (among others). From a distance, we can claim that they were all agents of the times in the bourgeois sense, enabling and at times demanding changes – reforms not only of the general structures of Slovenian society but also changes in the conceptualisation of the structure and role of education in the emerging independent, market-oriented state governed by representative democracy.

The composition of the then Council of Experts of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (Council) was a combination of the establishment and new arrivals. In retrospect, it seems that this was a productive combination that allowed relatively smooth transitions, bringing new formation in parallel with the transformation of the former Socialist Republic of Slovenia as part of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia into the independent Republic of Slovenia, with representative democracy as the form of government instead of the socialist self-government type of political system. All of this was accompanied by the transition from the socialist self-government economy of associated labour to the market economy. If one follows Durkheim or Dewey, it is no wonder that a change in education was in line with them regarding all the above-mentioned changes.

What strikes us is how pedagogically and socially radical and deliberate shifts occurred during the *ancien régime* and not, as one would expect, only with the new state, the market economy, and the new political regime - representative liberal democracy.

Problematics and agents between the old and the new

Problematics⁵ discussed in the late 1980s and early 1990s came to the fore as the structured challenges of the time and were deeply formative for those who participated in this profound social metamorphosis, who were simultaneously agents in shaping the large-scale peaceful transition and developing the building blocks of one of the subsystems of the emerging independent state.

Given this background, it seems to be no coincidence that at the beginning of the work of the newly appointed panel of experts of the council, its president

5 The concept of 'problematics' we use in line with its formulations and use by Bachelard (1966) and Foucault (1984).

‘pointed out the exclusive competence of the Slovenian nation for the development of education on the territory of [the] Socialist Republic of Slovenia’ (MI, 1988, p. 1) and highlighted characterising the work of the mandate and the functioning of the expert councils that followed in the first decades of the then already independent Slovenia: ‘the need for scientifically based planning of education combined with parallel evaluation of the impact of changes in their programmes’ (Ibid., pp. 1–2).⁶ With this statement and with the first outline of the aim and regulative idea, the president of the council had pointed out its determination to co-create the nation’s path to independence. While the first was important, his second outline indicates another regulative idea, probably more telling of the character of the nation (the independent state) that emerged during the council’s mandate: the importance of knowledge and meritocracy to the ‘nascent state.’

Today, as we reflect on developments in our society and especially in education, the guide to doing so is the work of Alexis de Tocqueville: *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution* (Tocqueville, 1856/1952). Our considerations focus on the barely conceivable similarity between the process in which the new emerged after the French Revolution in the pre-revolutionary period and the process of conceptualisation and, to a certain extent, even realisation of the systemic features of post-socialist education in Slovenia in the last decade of the *ancien régime* of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia two centuries later. For the purpose of this article, we can start with the surprise we were confronted with while working with the archival material in order to obtain a better insight into the topic of change in education in Slovenia.

We believe that we never came under the influence of the idea of the particular originality of educational reform that changed the landscape of education in the country after its declaration of independence. We also believe that we do not share the idea that applies to a large part of Slovenian right-wing intellectuals and politicians, who perfectly fit the picture that Tocqueville painted for the situation in France when he wrote: ‘In 1789, the French, more than any other people, tried to separate their past from their future and to erode a chasm between what they had been and what they wanted to become. [...]. They spared no effort to make themselves unrecognisable’ (Tocqueville, 1856/2011, p.1).

We were facing the second of Tocqueville’s observations related to the situation in France, as valid for at least some of the social subsystems in

6 In the present article we use MI, date to denote minutes of the councils of both the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (from the certain point on only of Slovenia). In the resources part of the article, one can also find the date of the session minutes published on certain date denote. The personnel of the National Archive of Slovenia enabled us to access the material and make copies of it, despite the COVID-19 restrictions, we would like to explicitly thank them for their professional and kind support.

Slovenia around the time of profound change in our society. We can apply the words that follow to a large degree for the developments in the field of education, and it seems not only there. 'I was astonished to find again and again in the France of that time any number of the features that would strike an observer of France today. I discovered a host of sentiments that I thought had been born with the Revolution, a host of ideas that I believed to have been revolutionary ideas, and a myriad of habits purportedly bequeathed to us by that great event alone. Everywhere I found the roots of today's society firmly implanted in the soil of the old.' (Ibid., p. 3)

As it goes for the general shifts in society, it is even more so for education: the closer we came to 1991, the more distinctly we can see not only the birth of the spirit that brought new formally in place but also all the main ideas, shifts in diapositives and in quite a number of institutions and practices that characterise education in Slovenia today (Comp. Ibid.). In looking back, we not only 'discovered [...] the logic that would guide its first steps but, perhaps more important, early hints of its long-term aftereffects.' (Ibid.)

From society to education

Shifting the focus to the field of education, we will present a few selected cases of the above-mentioned new rationalities, mechanisms and practices that came into being with the old society/regime. At the start, we have committed to this task for purely scientific reasons: we wanted to reflect on the process of education change in Slovenia, yet in the process of this preliminary research, we have realised that not only in the case of Tocqueville's France but to quite a degree in Slovenia transition too prevailed the conviction that all-important and valid changes came with or after the 'great break with the past'. While we do not want to cherish the past, we still believe that without needed reflection of the process in which this new era came about, we reduce the potential to understand the present and future of our society and, in particular, of education. That is why we will present a few examples of structural changes at different levels of the educational system, from vocational education (VET) to upper secondary school.

We have already mentioned the 1988 call for professionally and scientifically sound and evaluated interventions in education by the council president, Prof. Lazarini. It seems significant that this call, like the one for 'evidence-based policymaking' formulated years later, was based on the gradually developed culture of 'evaluation studies' in education by the institutions of the previous regime. Today presentations of the results of such accompanied formulations

that priority due to the lack of funds 'should get research necessary for further development of education' (MI, 1990, p. 5).

Research and evaluation studies were not just commissioned by the institution and then left lying around left unused. At that time, the research had an impact on policy and brought about change in education.

Starting with VET, for example, we can read in the councils' minutes from January 1991 (See MI, 1991, p. 2). that present the public expert consultation on the 'modernisation' of upper secondary education in Slovenia in Poljče, based on the project entitled 'Future development of upper secondary education in Slovenia.' The results and the formulated proposals were the basis for the consultation, although the results of the project, which started in 1987, were only preliminary. The results of the so-called Sagadin's project⁷ presented a number of persistent dilemmas, mainly focused on the problems of types of programmes, organisation of schools and their management of 'vocational and technical' education in upper secondary education in Slovenia. Some of them were in focus during the reform process in the next two decades and remain with us in 2021.

Even then, some persistent issues, dilemmas, and internal tensions of secondary school change were thematised, presented, and addressed. We put forth a few:

1. The ratio between the general and professional parts of curricula in professional and technical education. One particular dilemma discussed at the session of the Council summarised by the minutes was inclusion or not of Health education and Art education in the 32-hours professional and technical curricula (comp. MI, 1991, p. 3).
2. The feasibility and need for the 'differentiation in the 3rd and 4th grade of these programmes as solutions that would enable opting for professional final exam or baccalaureate at the end of the programme' (Ibid., p. 3).
3. Experts and heads of the schools claimed the 'Baccalaureate should be inaugurated simultaneously for general education (*gimnazija* programmes) and for technical schools, to avoid drastic reallocation of the enrolment!' (Ibid., 4). The minutes certify that Council agreed with the claims from the public hearing in Poljče.

The dilemmas presented are only a sampling of those that address changes, even revolutions, already underway in education and other subsystems.

7 Named after the leader of the project – professor at the department of *Pedagogy – Faculty of Arts Ljubljana University*. At the time of the start of the project, the university was named after Edvard Kardelj – conceptualising the idea of socialist self-management and as such have been leading ideological figure of Socialist Federative Yugoslavia. The name was changed to the University of Ljubljana in 1990.

Moreover, we can see the spirit of the times in yet another conclusion written down in the presented minutes: 'technical education has to undergrow further changes in parallel with the changes in [the] economy and changes taking place in university studies.' (Ibid., p. 3). Even more directly, the same logic comes out of the conclusion that the 'sector of vocational and technical education must react and adapt simultaneously with the shifts in the needs of industry and technical development' – this is the reason for the double structure of the programmes: besides the 'core programme, there is a need for the flexible part, which will change without the extinction of formalities' (Ibid., p. 4).

Another aspect of this particular element of the reforming for the present and future in the frame of *ancien régime* it seems appropriate to at least mention challenges that seem to persist in professional and vocational education: the challenge of ever 'out-dated equipment students and teachers use in the process of education and training. This dilemma was addressed years by [the] joint formation of inter-enterprise education centres (MIC Novo Mesto; MIC Velenje; MIC Nova Gorica...)⁸ on the background of [the] relatively early formulated suggestion that we should for practical educational and financial reasons 'practice part of teaching transfer to the facilities of entrepreneur or craftsman while they have better equipment than out-of-date school workshops' (Ibid., p. 4).

Needless to say, this opened a Pandora's box of dilemmas and a long-running search for appropriate solutions.

Eco-awareness was also apparent in discussions on education. At the discussed meeting of the council after the discussion of how we could and should include the issue of ecology, while at the same time the discussion during the years was unfavourable to the inauguration of the new subjects in the compulsory curricula, another task fell on the shoulders of the support structure of the council, the National Board of Education: to present their proposal for the incorporation of ecology into the curricula (see MI, 1991, p. 4).

Structural changes also took place in alignment with the need for expert knowledge and the particular rationalities of different levels of education. From the presentation of the first minutes from the council session, it is evident that the scope of its decision-making was broad. Contrary to the present arrangement with specialised councils for *general education* (pre-primary education, primary education and general upper-secondary education); *vocational education council* (vocational and professional education); *adult education council*; *higher education council*), the discussed council covered the spectrum of the current four councils. Discussions and decision-making at the sections of

8 See MIC Novo mesto <https://www.sc-nm.si/mic/en>.

the council demonstrated a two-fold need: first, to establish specialised expert councils; second, to establish specialised institutions that will be competent to prepare materials for qualified decision-making related to the still-growing diversification of education in Slovenia.

Furthermore, the observations made in the presented process provided the background for institutional diversification that formally took place under the 1996 act regulating organisation and education in the country (ZOFVI, 1996).

The extent to which the problems of education and society are interwoven, up to and including *per-definitionem* questions of politics, is shown by the structure of the participants in the first meeting of the council.⁹

In the minutes from October 1988, we read that members of the newly established Council, besides its president 'comrade Lazarini, addressed the president of Education Community of Slovenia (ECS)¹⁰ comrade¹¹ Niko Žibret which [...] promised support of ECS to the Expert Council' and 'invited [him] to follow three running developmental projects (project concerning development of University; project concerning the development of upper-secondary education and project concerning adult education' (MI, 1988, p. 2). This reveals management relations and structure that the president of ECS pointed out to the council members, stating that they 'should in their decision-making take into consideration demands of society and material/financial conditions' (Ibid.). His words are telling ones while the next addressing the Council was 'comrade dr. Ludvik Horvat, President of the Committee of the Republic for Education. Niko Žibret, is in his style, added that 'material conditions should not overdetermine search for the best solutions' (Ibid.).

In contrast, Dr Horvat, who was the first 'almost minister' of education before the transition from socialism to representative democracy with a Montesquieu-type division of power, informed members of the Council about the 'preparations for the improvement of the legal frame of education (amending Act on *Usmerjeno izobraževanje*, preparations for the new act on *Pedagoška služba* and Act on Higher Education.). Presenting the spectrum of the acts they plan to change or accept, he also pointed out 'that major interventions into the

9 As mentioned in the introduction, decision-making in the council was substantially structured by the complex and manifold transitions that were not limited to education but they implied education sector as challenged and challenging one.

10 ECC (*Izobraževalna skupnost Slovenije - ISS*) was one of the associations put in place as a supposed venue at which working class form different sectors should, in the process of self-management, adjust interests. In the case of ECS (ISS): of associated labour in material production and the associated labour (schools) in education.

11 With 'comarade' we translate the Slovene word: *tovariš* which was, along with the female version *tovarišica*, a habitual way of addressing people in formal circumstances. The idea behind its use was equality, and being close and supportive to each other. During the transition period, it was replaced with the words *gospod* in *gospa* (mister and madame).

education programmes cannot take place without previous research' (Ibid., pp. 2–3). In line with the prevailing logic of the time, Dr Horvat also invited council members 'to decide on expert questions in education, leaving aside daily politics' (Ibid., p. 3). Thus, both lines of the 'executive branch' of the government-supported expertise grounded conceptualisation of transition to a new type of social arrangement. Such a message allowed a considered and thorough shift of education. The newly established body of experts accepted the opportunity with 'both hands'.

In this context, parallel to the gradual retreat of socialist self-government, the importance of professional decision-making is growing, supported by the development of the Ministry of Education's power.

How far we will travel – in the council and country as a whole, one would be able to observe upon realising that when during the first session of the Council under the 'current business' discussion on the removal of the subjects that have been of crucial ideological importance for the political system in the country and as such seen as pivotal for the formation of future generations, started. The President of the Council informed members that 'the Council for Education of National Council of the Alliance of Socialist Youth field for the discussion at the Council material entitled: "Beyond self-management with the basis of Marxism" (STM). [The] Council have been [sic] under the same point informed with the initiative of Federal secretariat for public defence to change curricula of the subject 'General public defence and self-protection' (SLO) in primary, upper-secondary and in tertiary education' (Ibid., p. 4).

With these announcements, a step-by-step and carefully considered removal of both subjects from the curricula at all levels of education began in Slovenia. Beginning in autumn 1988, it came to an end with the substantial reshuffling of Slovenia's society, political system, and education.

Today, it seems the process of the mentioned extraction of the above-mentioned ideologically structuring contents from the curricula has always been one step (but not too far) ahead of its time, ideologically and conceptually, because as the opener for the new in education in this segment, it started with the publication of the idea of the replacement of the STM subject with subjects 'civic culture', sociology, philosophy and psychoanalysis. The group that published this proposal operationalised the idea presented by one of the University of Ljubljana professors in 1986 as a possible way out of problems that were evident during the 1980s. Professor Andrej Kirn then wrote: 'Due to content (interdisciplinary structure of the subject and not always clear relation with the other subjects in education) and due to the ideological reasons (permanent reproach for indoctrination and *ideologisation*) socio-political and expert

pedagogical bodies should consider [whether] wouldn't it be better to instead of STM put in place sociology and politology or 'basics of social sciences [...]' (Kirn, 1986, p. 1425).

The council subsequently discussed the future of the above mentioned 'core ideological subjects of socialist regime' several times step by step removing them from the curricula. At its session on 12 April 1990 (MI, 1990a), the convention on the rights of the child was mentioned for the first time explicitly in relation to indoctrination as the reason for the radical change of the SLO subject. The ideological and political sensitivity of the interventions related to Slovenia demonstrates that *President of the presidency* of then still Socialist Republic of Slovenia Dr Janez Stanovnik for the first and only time addressed the letter to the council, suggesting considered handling of the matter in question.¹² The discussion started at the April session continued at the next one.¹³

Coordinated step-by-step positionings and repositionings demonstrate the fact that when Dr Zakrajšek, director of the National Board of Education at the session on 24 May 1990 proposed abrogation of SLO his proposal in the name of RKVIT, referring on the agreement of the education minister – Dr Peter Vencelj and defence minister – Janez Janša, supported deputy minister for education Stane Čehovin (MI, 1990b, p. 9).

The above-presented above took place as part of the surpassing of directed education, which was also inaugurated as part of a twice-missed approach in Slovenia:

- firstly, as part of the endeavour to subsume education to the logic of enterprise (to the logic of in the formulation of the day: associated labour) and
- second, as less obvious, but still profoundly false, as an endeavour to eliminate inequality the society with radical intervention in education.

The first process wanted to reduce school curricula to the preparation for the labour mainly in the sphere of material production; the second one, in contrast, wanted to reduce obvious attainment differences at the end of upper-secondary education by abolishing grammar school (*gimnazija*) as a supposed form of elitism (Milharčič-Hladnik, 1986; Tašner & Gaber, 2017). Both failures intersected. Upper-secondary education in *science and math* programmes and *social-science and linguistic* programmes, which the *ancien régime* in Slovenia smuggled through to sabotage the abolishment of *gimnazija* (Tašner & Gaber,

¹² See MI, 1990a, pp. 8–9 and formulation suggesting that we should considering efforts of the Federal secretariat for public defence to preserve common elements of curricula in all the parts of SFRY 'enforce our position step by step' (MI, 1990d, p. 4), half a year earlier.

¹³ See MI, 1990b and remember that sessions were rarely if ever short in duration.

2017) had the obligation to simultaneously prepare for employment and continuation of study in tertiary education.

We believe that minutes of council demonstrate the progressive return of grammar school and how it became upgraded by the baccalaureate programme, which would become external in the first half of the 1990s. This process took place in parallel with the inclusion of the International Baccalaureate in two before 'directed education' elite grammar schools (Gimnazija Bežigrad in Ljubljana and II. Gimnazija in Maribor).

Furthermore, gradualism is the most intriguing part of the mentioned re-inauguration. *Grammar schools* returned through detour by claiming the need for 'general upper-secondary education', which was needed in smaller towns that could not individually form sufficient enrolment in the specialised programmes.¹⁴

Still well in the period of Yugoslavia, at its third session on 8 of February 1989, the council discussed a proposal for the inauguration of 'general upper-secondary programme' (MI, 1989a, p 6). It came on the agenda, interestingly enough, as 'proposal of ECS' (Ibid.) and, as one would expect, 'majority of disputants [...] supported the submitted material [...]. Council voted for the changes and amendments of the curricula conclusion and in addition suggested [...] that both lines of the programme should incorporate the same activities included in the curricula and that 'work practice should be part of the programme B' (Ibid., p. 6). The incorporation of the 'work practice' in the programme, which obviously was designed as preparation for further studies, was only camouflage diverting focus from the steps of re-inauguration of the abolished *gimnazija* programme.

However, with the high level of consensus between the structures of socialist 'ECS', of the ministry of education in the nascent stage and council, dilemmas concerning further steps and ideas on how to approach them did not disappear.

The 5th session of the council on 28 of June 1989 brought on open the problem of foreign language teaching. The evident orientation of Slovenia to the West made evident that the new *lingua franca* at the territory of the country was English and that German, for centuries the prevailing first foreign language, was losing the competition due to the decisions of parents (MI, 1989d, p. 11).

While voting for the inauguration of the IB programme in the selected schools in Slovenia, part of the members of the council persistently voiced warnings concerning the teaching and learning foreign languages in the 'Slovenian schools'.

14 In MI from 16. 6. 1989 we read: 'The view has been formed that the Council of Experts has adopted an initiative for general secondary school [...] in the belief [...] that this will solve the problem of implementing educational programmes in smaller places, and that the number of science departments won't rise' (p. 5).

At its sessions in the second part of 1990, before the declaration of independence in June 1991, with tolerance and structured argumentation, the council discussed the topic of the inauguration of religious instruction in upper-secondary education in Slovenia. This was one of the problematic phenomena that marked further considerations on the type of education in the Republic of Slovenia in the 1990s (MI, 1990c; MI, 1990e).

Even more: on several occasions, on opened questions concerning a properly-rounded system of education that would be able to serve the country in the future. Thus, on its 11th session, the council discussed the 'draft of expert foundations of the programme of education in the Republic of Slovenia' and evaluated it as an 'appropriate basis for the preparation of the national programme of education' (MI, 1990d, p. 5.). In the discussion, a number of questions and proposals for the solution was presented that became part of the current systemic structure of education in the country. One was the idea to start primary education earlier than at seven years of age.¹⁵

Education and old/new social categories

If, in the concluding part, we consider the developments presented and reflected on above, we see as one of the important underlying characteristic of the discussed shifts, changes and from time to time developments that came close to the revolutionising change in what Basil Bernstein (1973, 2000, 2003) would with the use of Bourdesian categories positioning of the new middle class (NMC)¹⁶ in the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, and in particular in it most economically prosperous republic in Slovenia. The council of experts in this respect functioned as a mechanism of its positioning.¹⁷ Education be-

15 Related to the later fierce dispute among experts supported by some members of new middle class concerning the start of primary education at the age of 6 years, it seems telling that idea to 'start primary education at the age of 5' (Ibid., p. 4) and another later controversial solution to concerning 'the synthesis of external and internal differentiation'. In the same minutes (MI, 1990d, pp. 3-5), one can find productive suggestions related to the need for 'appropriate intertwining of instruction and education', as well as the statement that Slovenia needs 'the highest possible degree for as many citizens as possible' which was obviously related to the importance of adult education in the future«.

16 Social class remains an important regulator of the allocation of learners to the realm of privileged discourses and institutions (Bernstein, 2000). It is important to point out that the socialist system put the working class and the idea of simple equality at the forefront. Against this background, with the demands for Slovenia's independence, a new middle class began to position itself.

17 Shifts away from 'simple equality' (Walzer, 1983) with which the socialist regime in its final phase wanted to equalise the prospects of already differentiated population through the inauguration of *usmerjeno izobraževanje* (wage labour-directed education); public protest and unknown (at the time) number of signatures under the petition declaring open opposition to the abolishment of *gimnazija* (see Milharčič Hladnik, 1986) are just two signs of the structuring of this class that grow up in the growing functional differentiation inside socialism and led the nation out of that system toward future challenges.

came a relatively central moment of, although being relatively autonomous in its rationalities and actions (see also Bourdieu, 1970), the NMC struggle for its place in the society.

Bernstein's categorical apparatus, which is presented in more detail in Gaber and Tašner (2009), enables an understanding of school reforms in the frame of struggles for hegemony in the field of education. He understands the field of education as an 'arena' of struggle for the dominant voice in the formation of each generation. Following conceptualisation developed by Durkheim (1922/1956), he points to the importance of distinguishing between a) the field of education as a mechanism intended for the transmission of values, interests of non-educational actors (economics, politics, etc.) to new generations, and b) pedagogical discourse as an autonomous mechanism for structuring symbolic control or power in the field of 'school'. Slovenia, while reforming the field of knowledge acquisition and transition to the transition from the *ancien régime* to representative democracy and the market economy in parallel with the forming a nation-state, recorded an intense influence of 'non-educational actors' on changes in the education system. In this part of the paper, we will pay attention to 'pedagogical discourse' - in our case to the types of pedagogy that co-determined the debate on reform and also its concrete modes during the 'great transition' that back-clashed to the socialist final attempt to keep the grip on the citizens and at the same time repositioned different segments of population related to the inner structure of knowledge production and to the knowledge attainment.

Slovenia carried out a peaceful transition from socialist self-government to representative democracy through the simultaneous change of subsystems. In the pedagogical field, it is possible to perceive a conflict between three lines in the period of the transition from the old to the new regime. The first line, with Bernstein we will name it 'visible pedagogy', in its purest form, was represented by the demand for an external baccalaureate, which was planned at the time of the above-presented shifts in education and associated with the return of the grammar school. In parallel, 'knowledge tests' at the end of primary education were introduced and were also largely of an external nature. These shifts in pedagogical structuring in the time of transition also demonstrate the power and enormous self-esteem of the part of NMC that was in charge of the change in education. The transparency of pupil/student achievement and the system, as a whole, has also moved from this time and line to the *White Paper on Education* that became the organised reconsideration of the future of education in the independent nation. The basic idea behind this approach was the need to 'achieve internationally verifiable standards of knowledge in developed countries' (Krek, 1995, p. 16).

The reintroduction of the Matura, and to a large extent also the introduction of the external Matura, was accepted by universities and secondary schools as a 'project of national importance'. The circle of advocates of external scrutiny, as a recognisable feature of visible pedagogy, in Slovenia at that time included middle-class groups from the right spectrum through the central social liberal groups of advocates to the weakest part of the left, which abandoned the old type of socialism and opted for the social-democracy type. Several views seem to have been recognised, at least temporarily, in a joint desire for efficiency combined with the post-socialist belief in the need for external verification as a mechanism that could increase the fairness of the assessment. It both combined with then prevailing stake invested in the market economy as a standard-raising mechanism, and the need to demonstrate that the newly independent small nation could prove itself at the international field with knowledge. The mentioned combination of positionings, strivings and efforts gave an important impetus to the idea of visible pedagogy.

It is a strange fact of history that socialism, which was then seen as a symbol of opacity, ignorance, and promises without fulfilment, was probably the most important individual sponsor of a broad temporary coalition that supported the introduction of elements of visible pedagogy.

Against this background, the idea of external testing of knowledge after the first and second triad of primary school was proposed and legislated in education reform in the 1990s. The fairness and transparency of the achievements were particularly emphasised. Along the same lines, Slovenia's involvement in the IEA - TIMSS international research was supported. The earlier start of compulsory primary school also indicates the idea that weak conditioning and relatively late introduction of children from socially and otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds to primary school are not sufficient. Level lessons (*nivojski pouk*) were conceived and implemented as an attempt to find a way to reduce the backlog and at the same time as a mechanism enabling better achievements of all groups in the final part of primary school. It was in the trial phase in the Yugoslav period of the change in education described above.

What is conceptually and pedagogically interesting in this shift is the fact that two lines inside the same manly middle class developed. In parallel with the spread of the demand for standards of knowledge, social justice, which is based on achievements, and similar, the line of invisible pedagogy was getting stronger. This line relied professionally on process-oriented pedagogy, which was more oriented toward the learning process than to the results. This should, with greater certainty than the set standards of knowledge, and external evaluation of knowledge, level teaching, and similar, lead to the desired results.

Clearly set requirements (i.e., standards of knowledge, which also need to be achieved at a certain time) were signs of the 'technical conception of the school' in this line. (Comp. Perspectives, 1992)

The same line – not always the same representatives – during the great reform opposed the earlier start of schooling in Slovenia when introducing a nine-year primary school. In doing so, many arguments have been formulated that belong to the repertoire of invisible pedagogy. First, there was the argument here that children need to be left with a year of childhood more; then the argument of premature literacy burden, which should rather happen through play than teaching and learning; the argument that school kills creativity, among others. There were demands for the abolition of external assessment in primary school and even at the end of secondary education in grammar school. There was also special pressure on level teaching (*nivojski pouk*), which, in accordance with the principles of visible pedagogy, tried to enable the most successful in a small group to acquire additional knowledge, at the same time, groups with poorer results, also in smaller groups - at least close the gap to the average results. The measure itself also falls within the field of awareness of the need to take special measures to mitigate the consequences of the direct application of the principles of sequence and tempo in the context of visual pedagogy and goes beyond classical visual pedagogy.

Conclusion

Looking a few decades back, we can today see that agents of both lines through mutual confrontation also produced numerous examples of combinations of visible and invisible pedagogy. One of the important signs of combined pedagogy is the start of primary school - first grade - with a teacher and an assistant teacher. A basic idea of such a strengthening of the beginning was to provide the conditions for a successful start for all. At the same time, it is obvious today that special care for children from socially and otherwise deprived backgrounds was underemphasised by the social-liberal line in the then government of the country. A similar example of a mixed approach can be found at work in the formation of groups in kindergartens. There, too, Slovenia legislated a relatively favourable ratio between the number of children and adults – in order to enable individualisation - and underemphasised the need for special attention to be given to children from families with a smaller amount of cultural capital. When preparing the curriculum, experts of opposing parts of NMC agreed on the relatively weak educational role of the kindergarten, even in the last year before school. This was, of course, perfectly acceptable for

children from the families of the NMC, while we have missed the opportunity to take care of reducing the backlog of children from socially and linguistically disadvantaged families. Instead of a general avoidance of educational content, with a different approach, children from environments with restricted codes (i.e., a narrow spectrum of symbolism) lost the chance to enter primary education better prepared to face the refined code used in the schools.

If we add expert clashes related to internal evaluation and grading being obvious in the positioning around descriptive versus numerical assessment, for the purpose of our article, we can stop with the examples of internal – even pedagogically internal – tensions, clashes of interests in education in Slovenia today.

We conclude with the awareness of the limitations of our study of the transformation of particular education from *ancien régime* education to relatively structured and, in terms of presented knowledge results (PISA, TIMSS), comparatively successful system. Nevertheless, we hope that we have succeeded in addressing some pressing questions of change in education in turbulent times.

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Citizenship, Social Change, and Education

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≈ In recent decades, discussions regarding citizenship and citizenship education have evolved from a marginal issue in political philosophy and the philosophy of education to one of the most pressing topics in contemporary discussions about the civic aims of public schooling. The place and contribution of citizenship education in public schools have become central points of discussion and debate in terms of theory, research, policy, and practice. Yet, existing conceptions of citizenship education differ considerably over various issues, including the basic motivational impulses associated with the civic aims of public education. In particular, the recent upsurge of phenomena as diverse as hate speech, populism, the shrinking civic space, radicalisation, and violent extremism have shifted the main justificatory impulse from consequentialist to urgency-based arguments. This shift of emphasis has had some unreflected consequences related to the justification for citizenship education in public schools. The central purpose of this article is to expound on the two main impulses associated with the civic aims of public schools and their interrelationship with social changes. The main part contrasts these two opposing motivational impulses associated with the justification of citizenship education. Each of the two impulses is presented and then clarified with an example to shed light on the basic justificatory procedure associated with it. The concluding part of this paper sketches the most distinctive challenges of the alternative conception of justifying citizenship education and its interplay with social change.

Keywords: citizenship education, social change, education reform, radicalisation, violent extremism

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Državljanstvo, družbene spremembe in izobraževanje

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≈ V zadnjih nekaj desetletjih so se razprave o državljanstvu in državljanski vzgoji iz obrobja politične filozofije in filozofije vzgoje premestile v samo središče sodobnih razprav o državljanskih ciljih javnega šolanja. Vloga in pomen državljanske vzgoje v javnih šolah sta postala osrednji točki razprav z vidika teorije in raziskav pa tudi politike in pedagoške prakse. Kljub temu pa se obstoječa pojmovanja državljanske vzgoje precej razlikujejo glede vrste različnih vprašanj, npr. z osnovnimi motivacijskimi vzgibi, povezanimi z državljanskimi cilji javnega šolanja. Vzpon tako raznolikih pojavov, kot so: sovražni govor, populizem, krčenje državljanskega prostora, radikalizacija in nasilni ekstremizem, je glavni utemeljitveni vzgib, povezan z državljansko vzgojo, preusmeril od konsekvencialističnih argumentov k argumentom, ki temeljijo na nujnosti. Ta premik poudarka je imel nekaj nepremišljenih posledic, povezanih z utemeljitvijo državljanske vzgoje v javnih šolah. Osrednji namen tega članka je pojasniti dva glavna impulza, povezana z državljanskimi cilji javnega šolanja, in njuno povezanost z družbenimi spremembami. Glavni del prispevka analizira vsakega izmed obeh motivacijskih impulzov, povezanih z utemeljitvijo državljanske vzgoje. Vsak izmed njiju je predstavljen in nato še pojasnjen s primerom, da se osvetli osnovni argumentacijski okvir, ki je povezan z njim. Sklepni del prispevka prikaže najznačilnejše izzive alternativnega modela utemeljitve državljanske vzgoje in njegove povezanosti z družbenimi spremembami.

Ključne besede: državljanska vzgoja, družbene spremembe, šolska reforma, radikalizacija, nasilni ekstremizem

Citizenship, social change. and education: some preliminary considerations²

The debates over the status, scope. and justification of citizenship education in a plurally diverse polity have taken place across a range of academic disciplines. including political philosophy (Ben-Porath, 2006; Galston, 2002; Gutmann, 1995, 1999; Kymlicka, 1995; 2001; Levinson, 1999; MacMullen, 2007; Macedo, 2000; Reich, 2002; Rawls, 1993; Rosenblum, 2000; Tamir, 1995; Tomasi, 2001), political theory (Crick, 2000; Miller, 2000; Spinner-Halev, 1994), philosophy of education (Archard, 2003; Callan, 1997; Clayton, 2006; Enslin & White, 2002; Feinberg, 1998; Haydon, 2003; McLaughlin, 1992; 2000; 2003; Sardoč, 2010), education policy and curriculum studies (Lockyer et al., 2003), sociology of education (Arnot & Dillabough, 2000; Beck, 1998; Hahn, 1998; Parker, 2003) and other disciplines within the broader field of the social sciences and education (Cogan & Derricot, 1998; Kiwan, 2007; Starkey & Osler, 2005; etc.).

An interesting trend is observable in these discussions. On the one hand, there has been little disagreement over the centrality of citizenship as ‘a political conception of the person’ (Rawls, 1993) and the role of public education in the project of educating citizens as fully cooperating members of a polity. In fact, ‘the nature of citizenship and the education suited to its realisation’, writes Eamonn Callan, ‘have traditionally figured among the basic questions of normative political theory’ (Callan, 2004, p. 71). As Meira Levinson accentuates,

[c]ivic education is crucial in a liberal state, I suggest, because no matter what institutions and freedoms are built into the basic structure and constitution of the state, their realisation will always depend on the character and commitments of its citizens [...]. (Levinson, 1999, pp. 101–102).

As has been rightly emphasised by scholars who identify either as liberals, republicans, social conservatives and multiculturalists, the stability of a plurally diverse polity does not depend exclusively on the justice of its basic institutional framework but also on the virtues, dispositions and active engagement of its citizens and in the associative network of civil society (Dagger, 1997; Galston, 1991; Macedo, 1990; White, 1996). Creating virtuous citizens, Callan points out, ‘is as necessary an undertaking in a liberal democracy as it is under any other constitution’ (Callan, 1997, p. 3). In fact, without citizens who are equipped with civic virtues and other dispositions, writes William Galston, ‘the ability of liberal societies to function successfully progressively diminishes’ (Galston, 1991, p. 220).

2 Part of this research article is based on Sardoč (2012).

On the other hand, despite the convergence of opinion on the centrality of public education in educating students as fully cooperating members of a polity, citizenship education remains a strategic battleground between advocates of divergent traditions of political thought, as well as between scholars sharing the same normative outlook. For example, as John Tomasi emphasises, [...]
civic education has proven one of the most hotly contested terrains on which proponents of political liberalism have sought to differentiate their view from the various forms of ethical or comprehensive liberalism they seek to displace. (Tomasi, 2002, p. 196)

Interestingly enough, the 1990s have arguably been among the most productive periods for theorising about citizenship, social change and education, as 1989 stands out as 'Year One' on the calendar of contemporary social and political changes (Kymlicka, 1989; Taylor, 1994; Young, 1990). The fall of the Berlin Wall and 'France's headscarf affair' together with the 'Satanic Verses controversy' on the other, both taking place just a few weeks from one another. In particular, the collapse of undemocratic forms of government around the globe has had an inspiring influence on the overall positive impact of democratisation and the spread of the culture of human rights in formerly oppressive and undemocratic regimes. In contrast, the rise of xenophobic nationalism and religious fundamentalism in different regions of the world (e.g., the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia) together with a decline in social, civic and associational life in well-established liberal and democratic countries (Macedo, 2005; Putnam, 2000) have had a negative effect on the stability of our plurally diverse societies.

In particular, social and political changes have influenced the development of discussions over the foundations, nature, and value of citizenship and the discussions on the status, scope, and justification of citizenship education in a plurally diverse polity. In fact, there has been a serious concern both among scholars and policymakers over some of the most pressing challenges facing contemporary democratic societies, including the overall distrust among citizens in the institutional framework of a liberal and democratic polity, the increasing 'democratic deficit' and the resulting criticism that the rights-based conception of citizenship may lack the resources with which to respond to the phenomena that challenge the very foundations of diverse contemporary societies, such as hate speech, populism, the shrinking civic space as well as radicalisation and violent extremism (Sardoč et al., 2021). These social changes (and the associated challenges) have raised both theoretical controversies and practical problems, thus requiring a reconsideration of the civic aims of public education.

At the theoretical level, the civic aims of public education have remained a minefield of tensions, problems, and challenges that reverberate not only in scholarly discussions but have also come to play a central part in educational practice and everyday school life. For example, the introduction of citizenship education as part of the statutory school curriculum (e.g., in England with the ‘Crick Report’, in Slovenia as part of the comprehensive school reform in the 1990s) together with various other initiatives by major international stakeholders (e.g., the IEA ICCS survey³ or the *Council of Europe’s* ‘Education for Democratic Citizenship’⁴ initiative) have been a testament on the importance of civic aims for public education.

The central purpose of the present article is to expound on the two main impulses associated with the civic aims of public schools and their interrelationship with social changes. The main part contrasts these two opposing motivational impulses associated with the justification of citizenship education. Each of the two impulses is presented and then clarified with an example to shed light on the basic justificatory procedure associated with it. The concluding part of this paper sketches the most distinctive challenges of the alternative conception of justifying citizenship education and its interplay with social change.

The functionalist impulse

As a broadly philosophical problem and as a matter of educational policy, educating citizens as fully cooperating members of a polity is part of a more general problem about the civic unity, social cohesion and stability of a plurally diverse polity. As citizens, writes Walter Feinberg (1998), ‘Our primary obligation is to maintain the institutions, practices, and values that provide the conditions for a useful and productive life for all other citizens [...]’ (p. 211). In the Introduction to *Political Liberalism* (1993), John Rawls poses the problem of stability of a diverse democratic society as follows:

How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical and moral doctrines? (p. 4)

Part of the answer to the question of what citizenship education in a plurally diverse polity requires is primarily contextual since what constitutes

3 The IEA ICCS Survey ‘is the largest international, and only dedicated study of civic and citizenship education. It makes a substantial contribution to our knowledge about civic and citizenship education in schools and our understanding of how diverse countries prepare their young people for citizenship’ (Source: IEA ICCS <https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/iccs>).

4 For a detailed presentation of the *Council of Europe’s* work on education for democratic citizenship and human rights education, see <https://www.coe.int/en/web/edc/home?desktop=true>

citizenship and what constitutes 'good' citizenship is not exclusively a theoretical endeavour. Any 'regime' – a liberal democratic one included – needs the conditions necessary to promote common principles and shared public values and maintain its basic institutional framework. As Judith Shklar (1989) emphasises succinctly, '[g]ood citizenship simply is not separable from the sort of society in which it functions' (p. 12). Any political 'regime', then, has its own institutional framework that aims to perpetuate common principles and shared public values that aim to support it. The *locus classicus* for the thesis that public education is central to the cultivation of beliefs, values and virtues that in turn support its basic institutional framework is to be found in the introductory paragraph of Book VIII of Aristotle's *Politics*. I quote him here at some length:

The citizen should be moulded to suit the form of government under which he lives. For each government has a peculiar character which originally formed and which continues to preserve it. The character of democracy creates democracy, and the character of oligarchy creates oligarchy; and always the better the character, the better the government. (1999, p. 195)

William Galston eloquently summarises the classical Aristotelian justification for citizenship education, '[s]ince Plato and Aristotle first discussed the matter, it has been clear that citizenship education is relative to regime type' (Galston, 2001, p. 217). As Harry Brighouse (2000) rightly emphasises, standard arguments for citizenship education:

[...] often start with the need to maintain the state in some prescribed form, and then prescribe education of a certain kind to cultivate in children the characters likely to stabilise that state (p. 71).

Citizenship education, writes Galston (2006), 'aims towards practice and is relative to specific regime-types and particular communities' (p. 331). Given the centrality of public education in contemporary societies, attitudes to citizenship education are dependent on the particular conception of a citizen. John Tomasi (2001) advances an even firmer connection between the virtues of citizens and a regime type:

Different kinds of attitudes and activities are required of people as citizens within different types of regimes. Norms of good citizen conduct vary, for example, across theocratic, fascist, communist, and liberal regimes. But in every case, the norms applicable to people as citizens are given in terms of each regime's underlying ideal of societal success (p. 57).

A basic aim of citizenship education in a plurally diverse polity, then, includes the promotion of shared public values that will create a common ground

between different ethnocultural, religious, and cultural identities of its citizens as well as contribute to the maintenance of the basic institutional framework, including public education, that provides the conditions for a stable, ethical environment for all members of a political community. As Walter Feinberg (1998) rightly emphasises, public schools in contemporary liberal democratic societies perform two critical functions:

First, in complex societies they advance public safety and development by socialising children into the general rules of the society, by establishing in them a commitment to the safety and well-being of their fellow members, and by providing them with the skills to advance both their individual and the social interest. Second, schools are critical instruments for reproducing the basic values of liberal society itself and of assuring its continuation across different generations (p. 9).

In a plurally diverse polity, citizenship education shares with other models of citizenship education the requirement of stability, the requirement of civic unity, and the requirement of sustainability. These 'generic' requirements any model of citizenship education needs to perform in order to meet the required goals of civic reproduction have been most visible in educational reforms following post-1989 social and political changes.

A genealogy of citizenship education in Slovenia: main policy orientations

An example of this basic motivational impulse sketched above has been the introduction of citizenship education in Slovene public schools that was part of the educational reform in the 1990s. Social and political changes in Slovenia in the second half of the 1980s, together with the proclamation of independence in 1991, had an inspiring influence both on the overall positive impact of democratisation and the spread of the culture of human rights as well as a decisive impact on the status, scope, and justification of citizenship education in public schools. One of the most important curricular changes was the abolition of two explicit ideological school subjects closely associated with socialism. Immediately after the democratisation and the independence of Slovenia in 1991, the *Self management and the basics of Marxism* school subject was withdrawn from the curriculum. At the elementary education level, the *Social and moral education* school was replaced with the experimental school subject *Ethics and society*.⁵

5 For a detailed presentation of citizenship education implementation in Slovenia, see Šimenc and Sardoč (2016).

Moreover, part of the reform of public education that took place between 1996 and 1999 was the introduction of the school subject entitled *Citizenship education and ethics*. In fact, the entire reform of the public school system in Slovenia – according to *the White Paper* – was based on the common European heritage of political, cultural and moral values manifested in human rights, a state governed by the rule of law, pluralistic democracy, tolerance and solidarity. The *Starting Points for Curriculum Reform* (1995) which formed one of the most important documents of the educational reform of Slovene public education, emphasised that the aims of public education are:

- individuals and their development (as cultural, creative, and working social beings aware of their environment),
- freedom and responsibility of those who participate in the education of students, parents,
- equal opportunities in education for all individuals and different social groups,
- tolerance and solidarity as contents and as a way of educating, national identity and openness to international cooperation.

Moreover, the *White Paper on Education in Slovenia* (1996) and the educational legislation which came into force in 1996, both of which set systemic, normative and legislative framework of public education, emphasise that the basic aims of public education in Slovenia take into account several recommendations by leading international organisations in the field of citizenship education, including those of the *Council of Europe*, UNESCO, among others. Two civic aims, in particular, have been emphasised in the *White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia*: 1) civic literacy and the knowledge of human rights; 2) education for and participation in democratic processes (Krek, 1996, pp. 44–48). Furthermore, Article 2 of the *Elementary School Act* states that the main aims of elementary education in Slovenia are:

- developing consciousness of citizenship and national identity, knowledge about Slovene history and its culture,
- educating for general cultural and civilisational values which originate in the European tradition,
- educating for mutual tolerance, respect for differences and cooperating with others, respect for human rights and basic liberties, thus developing abilities required for living in a democratic society (*Elementary School Act*, art. 2).

As this example clarifies, the social changes of the 1990s in Slovenia (and several other countries that were on the path of democratisation) have had a

twofold transformative influence on the civic aims of public education. The first change has marked a transition in the understanding of citizenship as a shared political status associated with free and equal membership in a political community. The second and related change marks a transition from a purely proceduralist understanding of the functioning of a polity and its basic institutional framework to an approach that emphasises the role and the importance of civic virtues. In this sense, civics and citizenship education is part of a more general problem about the stability of a plurally diverse polity and maintaining its basic institutional framework.

The compensatory impulse

Alongside the consequentialist justification associated with the ‘functionalist’ impulse sketched above, contemporary scholarship on citizenship education tends to advance another way of justifying the civic agenda of public schools. In recent years, there has been a departure from the functionalist justification of citizenship education towards alarmist proclamations founded on urgency-based justifications that question the vitality of our democratic institutional framework. The prevalence of alarmist proclamations about the civic erosion and social fragmentation of our societies poses a range of separate problems at the level of justification, as according to this interpretation, the primary role of citizenship education in public schools is not *constitutive* but primarily *compensatory* in nature.

Urgency-based arguments associated with alarmist proclamations have started to arise primarily due to a set of phenomena that challenge the very core of the liberal and democratic institutional framework we inhabit, including hate speech (Waldron, 2012), fake news, populism (Galston, 2018), the shrinking civic space (Deželan et al., 2020) as well as radicalisation and violent extremism (Sardoč et al., 2021). On this interpretation, the social unity of contemporary societies has been seriously undermined due to several ‘dysfunctional’ phenomena, which are supposed to have corrosive effects on shared public values of liberal and democratic societies. At the same time, the stability of contemporary pluralist democracies has been challenged by a decreasing level of civic participation and a general carelessness about community involvement and the common good (Sandel, 2020).

Another important ‘urgency-based’ justification has been advanced under the banner of securitisation. For example, post-9/11 scholarship on radicalisation and violent extremism has been built around the weaponisation of fear. Despite the consensus that radicalisation and violent extremism represent

a major challenge to the political, economic, and social security of contemporary societies, the weaponisation of fear leads to the 'social construction of risk' (Githens-Mazer, 2012, p. 557). In fact, the transformation of otherwise completely legitimate and largely unproblematic social phenomena into a security risk is one of the key challenges the strategy of securitisation as a process of social construction of security faces (Floyd, 2019).

Conclusion: implications for future research

Ever since Antiquity, the role of public education in general and of citizenship education, in particular, has been to support the polity and its basic institutional framework by creating a virtuous citizenry. As exemplified by Aristotle (1999), the classical understanding of citizenship education linked the ideal of a citizen as a fully cooperating member of a polity with a particular model of a political community. In contrast, contemporary arguments for the necessity of citizenship education depart significantly from this classical understanding of the aims of educating citizens as its different forms of justification rest on the alleged failure of our shared institutions to educate citizens as fully cooperating members of a polity.

The two motivational impulses associated with citizenship education sketched above are both primarily of purpose: why should public schools engage in citizenship education? A straightforward answer is basically uncontroversial and contains two separate propositions. First, as the functionalist impulse makes clear, any polity needs to create and support the conditions of its stability and the maintenance of its basic institutional framework. Second, due to a range of contemporary challenges (e.g., populism, hate speech, radicalisation and violent extremism, diversity, civic disengagement), the function of citizenship education is primarily compensatory in nature. Nevertheless, the compensatory impulse delimits the scope of citizenship education as exclusively restorative. In particular, the consequentialist arguments sketched above maintain that citizenship education is primarily a prerequisite of stability (or security in the case of radicalisation and violent extremism). Despite a *prima facie* attractiveness of urgency-based justifications, its very strength has become its most pressing liability due to the instrumentalisation component.

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Consequentialist Reasons for Some Education Reforms

ZDENKO KODELJA¹

≈ The reasons for education reforms – as a particular form of social reforms – are either consequentialist or non-consequentialist. However, the reasons for the education reforms that are briefly discussed from the perspective of the philosophy of education in the present paper are above all consequentialist. These are the reasons for proposed education reforms in EU countries whose strategic aim is equated with the enhancement of two values: creativity and innovation. It is supposed that these education reforms will have good effects and not that they are good in and of themselves. Therefore, although creativity and innovation might be seen as having intrinsic value, they are – in these education reforms – treated predominantly as instrumental values. It seems that the introduction of such education reforms can be understood as a decision founded not on causal explanation, but rather on the basis of a special type of teleological explanation, which has the logical form of a “practical syllogism”. In this case, the occurrence of an action is explained in terms of the goals and purposes of the agent; it shows that the agent did what s/he did because s/he tried to achieve a certain goal and believed that certain means were necessary or sufficient for achieving this goal.

Keywords: education reforms, aims, instrumental values, creativity, innovation

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Konsekvenencialistični razlogi za nekatere reforme izobraževanja

ZDENKO KODELJA

∞ Razlogi za reforme izobraževanja kot posebne oblike družbenih reform so konsekvenencialistični ali nekonekvenencialistični. Razlogi za reformo izobraževanja, ki so na kratko obravnavani v tem prispevku z vidika filozofije vzgoje, so predvsem konsekvenencialistični. To so razlogi za tiste predlagane reforme izobraževanja v državah EU, katerih strateški cilj je enačen s krepitvijo dveh vrednot: ustvarjalnosti in inovativnosti. Pri tem se predpostavlja, da bodo imele te reforme izobraževanja dobre učinke, ne pa to, da so že same po sebi nekaj dobrega. Čeprav se mogoče zdi, da imata ustvarjalnost in inovativnost intrinzično vrednost, pa se v teh reformah izobraževanja obravnavata predvsem kot instrumentalni vrednoti. Zdi se, da uvedbe takšnih reform izobraževanja ni mogoče razumeti kot posledice odločitve, ki temelji na vzročni razlagi, ampak prej kot odločitev, ki temelji na posebni teleološki razlagi, ki ima logično formo »praktičnega silogizma«. V tem primeru je neko dejanje pojašnjeno z vidika ciljev in namenov akterja; kaže, da je akter storil to, kar je storil, zato ker je poskušal doseči določen cilj in je verjel, da so določena sredstva nujna ali zadostna za dosego tega cilja.

Ključne besede: reforme izobraževanja, cilji, instrumentalne vrednote, ustvarjalnost, inovacije

Introduction

Education reforms are a particular form of social reforms. According to Jon Elster, there are essentially two types of reasons for social reforms. Some are *consequentialist*, grounded in a belief that the reform will have good or desirable effects, while others are *deontological*, based on the conviction that the reform is a good thing in and of itself (Elster, 1987, p. 709). However, the reasons for some of the education reforms – or their constitutive elements – that I discuss briefly in this paper from the perspective of the philosophy of education are above all consequentialist. It is supposed that these education reforms in EU countries – one of whose strategic aims is equated with the enhancement of two values: creativity and innovation – will have good effects: improving “enterprise development and Europe’s ability to compete internationally” (Council of Europe, 2009, p. 3), and not that they are good in and of themselves. Moreover, although it might seem that creativity and innovation have intrinsic value, they are – in these education reforms – treated predominantly as instrumental values. Therefore, even if such education reforms, which are only a means to achieve the desired goals, have good consequences, their value is mostly instrumental. However, there is no guarantee that the introduced reforms will achieve the desired goals, because reforms and goals are not necessarily in a causal relationship; reformers as decisionmakers can merely believe in such a connection when they decide to introduce such reforms. If this is so, then the introduction of such education reforms can be understood on the basis of a special type of teleological explanation, which has the logical form of a “practical syllogism”. In this case, the decision to introduce education reforms is explained in terms of the goals and purposes of those who made the decision. This means that they did what they did because they tried to achieve a certain goal and believed that certain means were necessary or sufficient for achieving this goal.² In the present paper, the education reforms are intended as a means to achieve two goals: “enhancement of creativity and innovation” in all students, on the one hand, and improving “enterprise development and Europe’s ability to compete internationally”, on the other. However, the means proposed in EU documents (such as changes in curricula and teacher training) to achieve the first goal will not be discussed here.³

2 At this point, I leave aside the question of whether intention itself can be the cause of action, as causalists think, or whether the connection between intention and action is purely conceptual and logical in nature, as intentionalists think (Von Wright, 1971, pp. 39–53).

3 Among the means that are presumed to make it possible to achieve this goal (“enhancement of creativity and innovation” in all students) are, for instance, mentioned and discussed changes in: curricula, teacher training, pedagogy and assessment, use of ICT and digital media, educational culture and leadership (Cachia et al., 2010, pp. 9–11).

Creativity and innovation as instrumental values that constitute an important aim of one of the proposed education reforms in the EU

One of the strategic and, as such, most important aims of EU education policies since 2009 has been: “Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training” (Council of Europe, 2009, p. 3).⁴ Since educational aims are understood as values that education should aim for, and since values are values just because they are something good or are thought to be good,⁵ it seems to be reasonable to conclude that enhancing creativity and innovation was declared as a strategic aim because creativity and innovation were seen as something so good that enhancing them deserves to be a strategic aim. The question is, however, whether they were chosen as one of the strategic aims because of their intrinsic or extrinsic value. For the purpose of the present paper, this is certainly a very important question. However, it might be seen as a problematic question as well. Why? Because it already presupposes that creativity and innovation can have intrinsic value. This presupposition is wrong in two cases: firstly, if there is not at all such a thing that has intrinsic value; and secondly, if only one thing, which is neither creativity nor innovation, can have such value.

Philosophers who have serious doubts about the idea of intrinsic value, or even reject it, belong to different philosophical traditions and use different arguments to justify their doubts and objections to the widely accepted theory that the intrinsic goodness of something is a genuine property of that thing.

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- 4 Innovation and education were already considered as a means to achieve a key goal (“knowledge society”) established by the EU in 2000, in the Lisbon Strategy. In 2009, the European Commission declared the “European Year of Creativity and Innovation” in order to promote creativity and innovation as key skills of all individuals “through formal and non-formal education”. The main aim was “to create an environment that is conducive to all forms of creativity and innovation, whether artistic, cultural, social or technological, and to promote the practical use of knowledge and ideas” (EUR LEX, 2008). The Commission also stressed “the importance of encouraging creativity and innovation within education and training systems, which are themselves essential to the proper functioning of the knowledge triangle (education-research-innovation)”. According to the Commission, that year “should lead to in-depth reflexion on the teaching methods and means of assessing learning achievements. Motivation and a sense of initiative at the heart of creativity and innovation should be further developed throughout the educational pathway of young and not-so-young people alike” (ibid.). Entrepreneurship, as defined in the EU documents, “refers to an individual’s ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives”. As such, it is seen as a “key competence for growth, employment and personal fulfilment”, which should be acquired throughout education from primary schools to university and lifelong learning (EUR LEX, 2006).
- 5 This claim seems to be justified at least in the context of philosophical theories of values that define them as “things that are good”. William K. Frankena, for instance, says that utility values are “things that are good because of their usefulness for some purpose”; extrinsic values are “things that are good because they are means to what is good”; intrinsic values are “things that are good in themselves or good because of their own intrinsic properties”, and so on (Frankena, 1973, ch. 5).

“Especially well known for their dissent are Thomas Hobbes”, “who believed the goodness or badness of something to be constituted by the desire or aversion that one may have regarding it, and David Hume”, “who similarly took all ascriptions of value to involve projections of one’s own sentiments onto whatever is said to have value” (Zimmerman, 2010). Later, similar arguments were used by the so-called “non-cognitivists”. Among them we can find both emotivists and prescriptivists, who argue that there are no moral properties or moral facts and, therefore, that judgments about goodness and badness are not descriptive statements about the moral properties of a certain thing, but rather either expressions or evocations of feeling and attitude, or something that constitutes a kind of command as to how we are to act. This means that a claim that something is good is not a statement about that thing, which can be true or false, but an ascription of value to it, which can be neither true nor false, since it is an expression of feelings, attitudes, evaluations, recommendations or prescriptions.⁶

However, there are also other kinds of arguments that have been used for defending the idea that nothing has intrinsic value.⁷ If we accept them, then it is obvious that the previously asked question – whether creativity and innovation were chosen as one of the strategic aims of EU education policies because of their intrinsic or extrinsic value – is illogical and nonsensical. The same could be said if the claim that only one thing can have intrinsic value were true, under the condition, of course, that for those who defend this claim, creativity or innovation is not such a thing.

According to Kant, for instance, the only thing that is intrinsically good or, in other words, good in itself, that is, good independently of its relation to other things, is a good will; Kant argues that the only thing “which can be regarded as good without qualification”, that is, as unconditionally good, is “a good will”. A good will is, therefore, good not because of its consequences, but “in itself” (Kant, 2004, pp. 63–64).⁸ This does not mean that other things cannot be good, but that they are not good in all circumstances, and “can also be extremely bad and hurtful when the will is not good” (Ibid., p. 63).

6 Referential authors are, for example, Charles L. Stevenson, among emotivists, and Richard M. Hare, among prescriptivists.

7 Monroe Beardsley, for instance, claims that all value is extrinsic and that nothing has intrinsic value (Beardsley, 1965, pp. 1–17).

8 Since only rational beings can have a good will, and good will is the only unconditional good, they have unconditional or, in other words, absolute value. As such, rational beings are an end in themselves and “not merely a means for arbitrary use by this or that will” (Kant, 2004, pp. 105–107). For this reason, they must treat one another as ends in themselves. In other words, just because they are ends in themselves, they “serve the will as a subjective ground of its self-determination” (Ibid., pp. 104–105). Since “the will is conceived as a power of determining oneself to action in accordance with the idea of certain laws”, it follows that the law that determines the will is the categorical imperative formulated as: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” (Ibid., pp. 106–17).

Another theory according to which only one thing is intrinsically good is hedonism. Hedonism is usually interpreted as the ethical theory that defends the idea that “there is one thing, and one thing only, that is intrinsically good, namely pleasure” (Ross, 2002, p. 99). However, George E. Moore totally disagrees with such an interpretation. In his opinion, hedonistic utilitarianism “does *not* assert that pleasure is the only thing *intrinsically* good. ... On the contrary, it asserts that any whole which *contains* an excess of pleasure over pain is intrinsically good” (Moore, 1912, p. 73). It seems that this interpretation of hedonism, as opposed to the first one, allows the conclusion that creativity and innovation, too, can have an intrinsic value if a whole – let us say a creative and innovative job – contains an excess of pleasure over pain.

In addition to this interpretation of hedonism, there is a variety of other philosophical theories that reject the idea that one and only one thing can be intrinsically good. In fact, these theories are widely accepted. As a result, there are different lists of things that are – or are supposed to be – intrinsically good,⁹ including creativeness (White, 1982, p. 9). Even if this is not a proof of their existence, it is at least proof that several philosophers argue that things that are intrinsically good exist. To discuss the arguments for and against their existence would exceed the purpose of this paper. The main purpose of this paper is to show that creativity and innovation in the context of EU education policies have instrumental value and that the very aim of education is not “enhancing creativity and innovation”, but rather improving “enterprise development and Europe’s ability to compete internationally” and “engendering personal fulfilment” (Council of Europe, 2009, p. 3). In order to justify this thesis, it is enough to quote the first part of the explanation of the aforementioned strategic aim, where it is stated: “As well as engendering personal fulfilment, creativity constitutes a prime source of innovation, which in turn is acknowledged as one of the key drivers of sustainable economic development. Creativity and innovation are crucial to enterprise development and to Europe’s ability to compete internationally” (Ibid.).¹⁰

9 The most known is the following classical list of intrinsic goods: truth, goodness and beauty. One of the longest lists of intrinsic goods is that given by William Frankena, which includes: life, consciousness, and activity; health and strength; pleasures and satisfactions of all or certain kinds; happiness, beatitude, contentment, etc.; truth; knowledge and true opinions of various kinds, understanding, wisdom; beauty, harmony, proportion in objects contemplated; aesthetic experience; morally good dispositions or virtues; mutual affection, love, friendship, cooperation; just distribution of goods and evils; harmony and proportion in one’s own life; power and experiences of achievement; self-expression; freedom; peace, security; adventure and novelty; and good reputation, honour, esteem, etc. (Frankena, 1973, pp. 87–88).

10 The fact that EU politicians understand and treat creativity and innovation as instrumental values is also evident in the explication of the Conference Theme of this ECER Conference: “National governments and the European Union see innovation as increasingly important for the development of the 21st century knowledge society. It may contribute to economic prosperity as well as to social and individual wellbeing and may, therefore, be an essential factor for creating a more competitive and dynamic European society. In the effort to manage the challenges facing societies and economies, political agencies and systems expect educational research, the social sciences and humanities to find solutions for developing creative and innovative education as a means to foster creative competences and innovative skills among the next generation” (Conference Theme, ECER 2013).

What follows from this explanation is that in this context, both creativity and innovation have predominantly – if not only – instrumental value. This means that both are supposed to be something good not because of their intrinsic properties, but rather because they lead to other good things (Kant, 2004, p. 4): “personal fulfilment”, “enterprise development, and to Europe’s ability to compete internationally”. Since creativity and innovation have a value only in virtue of being a means to an end, they are instrumental values. However, although they are both instrumental values, there is a difference between them: innovation, as a matter of fact, is an end to which creativity is a means.¹¹ Despite this, both have instrumental values since innovation is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end, which – in this case – is, as we have already seen, “enterprise development, and Europe’s ability to compete internationally”. Now, the question is whether this end is an end in itself or only a means to another end. This is an important question for two reasons. Firstly, if this end (“enterprise development and Europe’s ability to compete internationally”) is not something that is valuable for its own sake but *for the sake of something else* to which it is related as a means to another end, then innovation has instrumental value only if this other end (the one that is the final end in the given means-end relation) has intrinsic value. For, according to some interpretations, there can be no instrumental value without intrinsic value. Secondly, if the statement “innovation has instrumental value” means “innovation is conducive to something that has intrinsic value”, then it follows that intrinsic value exists.¹²

Therefore, if things can have intrinsic value, then creativity and innovation can have it as well. Moreover, if they can have intrinsic value, then it would be possible that creativity and innovation were chosen as the strategic aim of EU education policies because of their intrinsic goodness. Since they were not – or better to say, there is no evidence in the aforementioned EU documents that they were – it seems to me reasonable to conclude that they were intentionally chosen because of their instrumental value.

If this conclusion is correct, then the substantial part of the subtitle of this paper “Creativity and Innovation as Instrumental Values”, can be understood in two different ways: as a statement of fact, which is either true or false, and as a value judgment, which is expressed as an implicit critique in the sense that creativity and innovation are treated only as instrumental values. Needless

11 Innovation is defined as “to introduce change in society and in the economy”, and creativity as “to imagine something that did not exist before and to look for new solutions and forms” (Manifesto for Creativity and Innovation in Europe).

12 Beardsley rejects such interpretations and argues that the existence of at least one intrinsic value is not a necessary condition for the existence of instrumental values. In his view, what is necessary is to accept the following definition: “X has instrumental value” means “X is conducive to something that has value” (Beardsley, 1965, p. 64).

to say, this kind of critique is only possible if there are intrinsic values and if creativity and innovation have intrinsic value. And the opposite: if those who deny either the existence of things that are intrinsically good or claim that only one thing can have intrinsic value are right, then such critiques are absurd. It would be illogical to criticize and blame EU politicians for treating creativity and innovation only as a means if they cannot be anything more than that.

On the other hand, it seems to me that this critique is in some way justified even if some philosophers are in considerable doubt about intrinsic values, since there is no sign at all that politicians in the EU treat creativity and innovation as means because they know or believe that intrinsic values are impossible, and they therefore treat them in the only possible way, that is, as a means. More plausible seems to be the assumption that they think that intrinsically valuable things exist, but, despite this, treat creativity and innovation as if they cannot have intrinsic value. And the opposite: some formulations in EU documents give the impression that they treat some other things, such as economic growth and the competitiveness of Europe, as if they were ends in themselves. Consequently, education, too, is treated by politicians primarily as a means of improving the economic situation in the EU, by helping to provide the kinds of workers that are equipped with the kind of competences that involve creativity and the ability for innovation. For this reason, it is perhaps worth repeating what Alasdair MacIntyre critically said in his famous article 'Against Utilitarianism' already half a century ago. He emphasised "that education should not aim only at instrumental goods – access to jobs, increased industrial production, increased consumption of goods and services, which in turn keeps up production, and so on", since a society and its education system that pursue "only means, without paying attention to any ultimate ends which these means might bring about", are irrational (MacIntyre, 1964, pp. 8–9; White, 1982, p. 14).

However, the question is not only whether creativity and innovation have – in the discussed EU document – predominantly intrinsic or instrumental value, but also whether enhancement of creativity and innovation – as a strategic aim of EU education policies – is in a causal relationship to "enterprise development and to Europe's ability to compete internationally", which seems to be the real goal of such education reforms. It is possible that reformers, that is, decisionmakers, only believe that creativity and innovation are in causal relation, and that their decision is based on the conclusion followed from the

so-called “practical syllogism” or “practical inference”,¹³ which has the logical form: (1) A wants B. (2) A believes that B will not occur unless he does C. (3) Therefore, A does C.

A practical syllogism is a teleological explanation that explains the occurrence of an action in terms of the goals and purposes of the agent; it shows that an agent did what he did because he tried to achieve a certain goal and believed that certain means were necessary and/or sufficient for achieving this goal.

In our case, the introduction of such an education reform can be explained in the following way: (1) Reformers would like to achieve the previously mentioned goals (“enterprise development and Europe’s ability to compete internationally”); (2) Reformers believe that these goals will be achieved only if they themselves introduce the education reform (whose aim is: “Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training”); (3) Therefore, reformers introduce such an education reform.

What should be stressed here is that we do not know whether the introduction of the education reform will enable the achievement of the intended goal, since, for the teleological explanation, it is not important at all whether the means (education reform) is in causal relation with the goal or not. The only thing that is important is that the reformers believe that the introduction of the education reform is necessary for achieving the intended goal. A similar understanding, that is, in accordance with the theory of practical syllogism, can be applied to the previously discussed education reform proposed by the EU and aimed at the enhancement of creativity and innovation, which is, in fact, a means to a further aim: “enterprise development and to Europe’s ability to compete internationally”. This seems to be the real aim of such education reforms.

Nonetheless, such teleological explanation does not solve one of the key problems related to the consequentialist arguments for social reform, which is, as Elster argues, that it is difficult “to assess before the fact what the consequences will be of a reform” (Elster, 1987, p. 710). Education reformers also face this problem: How can they know what the consequences of their decision will be? In fact, they cannot know in advance whether the consequences of introducing education reform will be better than they would have been if the reform

13 Von Wright explicitly links his theory of the practical syllogism to the work of Aristotle and also to that of Elizabeth Anscombe (von Wright 1971, pp. 26–27; cf. Anscombe, 1963). However, Anscombe (1989) claims that von Wright’s so-called ‘practical inference’ is not practical at all. What von Wright calls ‘practical inference’ is a theoretical inference put to a practical use. The inference (I): *X* intends *p*; *X* believes that *p* implies *q*; Therefore, *X* intends *q* is not a special form of inference. The only real logical inference involved in (I) is the purely theoretical inference (*modus ponens*): (MP) *p*; *p* implies *q*. Therefore *q*. An agent might put MP to practical use by reasoning from his intention to obtain *p* to *q* as the sufficient means, but this practical use of MP does not amount to a new form of inference (1989, p. 390).

had not been introduced. Only after recalculating the positive and negative consequences can it be determined whether their decision was justified or not. Even then, a question remains: How can we know if they made the right decision if we need to know the consequences of their decision and compare them to the consequences that would have arisen if they had decided otherwise?

Conclusion

The discussion so far – which has been limited to treating creativity and innovation as instrumental values and at the same time as objectives of education reforms aimed at increasing the competitiveness of EU countries in the global market – needs to be understood in a broader framework of neoliberal policies. In this neoliberal context, which was also characteristic of EU policies at the time, education is not seen only as a precondition for developing creativity and innovation, but also as a key element of the nation state's ability to improve or maintain economic prosperity. Furthermore, the need for education reforms is, in the neoliberal context, mainly justified by economic reasons, especially the need to provide a more educated and more creative, innovative and flexible workforce that will enable the nation state to compete successfully in the global market. Such arguments have so often appeared in the EU and some other international documents, as well as in the government programmes of many countries, that nowadays they seem almost self-evident. Some decades ago, however, the reasons why politicians decided to reform education were quite different.¹⁴ Social mobility and the well-being of individuals were much more important at that time. However, these differences only prove that there are different priorities; they do not prove that economic reasons are considered as the only reasons for education reforms today. Equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, for instance, are still cited as goals of education reforms (Council of Europe, 2009,

14 Such a conclusion seems to be at least partly confirmed by the review of education reforms in European countries in the last century. In addition, it also seems that creativity and innovation did not play a significant role in the education reforms of that time, that is, until 2009 (Garrouste, 2010). On the other hand, the 2010 research report on a project that started in December 2008 already shows a shift in the emphasis on creativity and innovation in education in EU countries. This study, for instance, "shows that the terms 'creativity', and 'innovation' and their synonyms are mentioned relatively often in the EU27 curricula". However, "many teachers and education experts ... feel that the curricula in their countries do not, as yet, sufficiently encourage creativity and innovation, mainly because they are not clear how creativity should be defined and how it should be treated in learning and assessment". In addition, "curricula are often overloaded with content, which reduces the possibilities of creative and innovative learning approaches in practice" (Cachia et al., 2010, p. 9).

p. 3).¹⁵ What has changed is that among the reasons that politicians and reformers use to justify education reforms, economic reasons are undoubtedly the most important (Levin, 1998, pp. 131–132).

Consequently, the understanding of creativity and innovation has changed, as well. Creativity, for instance, has a long history as both a term and a concept in the fields of European art, philosophy and theology (Tatarkiewicz, 1980, pp. 244–265).¹⁶ Something similar can also be said for the concept of innovation, whose meaning has changed throughout history and in accordance with its different definitions in scientific, technological, humanistic, economic and managerial literature (Godin, 2008). For the purpose of the present paper, it might be useful to mention that innovation has not always been seen as something good, that is, as a value.¹⁷ Nowadays, however, creativity and innova-

15 However, the question is whether the stated goals are compatible with each other. Is, for example, “active citizenship” compatible with “entrepreneurship”, that is, with the neoliberal conception of man as “human capital” or as a “self-entrepreneur” (cf. Laval, 2018, pp. 55–58), if active citizenship is a characteristic of a political man? Wendy Brown (who extended Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism to the issue of democracy) claims that “as humans become capital for themselves, but also for others, for a firm or a state, their investment value, rather than their productivity, becomes paramount; moral autonomy and hence the basis of sovereign individuality vanishes; and the space and meaning of political citizenship shrink” (Brown, 2015, p. 78). Moreover, one of the consequences of neoliberalism is the replacement of the political man (*homo politicus*) by the economic man (*homo oeconomicus*). This “neoliberal triumph of *homo oeconomicus* as the exhaustive figure of the human is undermining democratic practices and a democratic imaginary by vanquishing the subject that governs itself through moral autonomy and governs with others through popular sovereignty. The argument is that economic values have not simply supersaturated the political or become predominant over the political. Rather, a neoliberal iteration of *homo oeconomicus* is extinguishing the agent, the idiom, and the domains through which democracy – any variety of democracy – materializes” (Ibid., p. 79).

16 The concept of creativity appears “only at the very end of antiquity: specifically, in the sense of fashioning something *from nothing*. But the initial view of creativity was a negative one; it held that *there is no creativity*” (Ibid., p. 251) because creation *de nihilo*, as Lucretius argued, does not exist. In Mediaeval theology, the existence of creativity (understood as *creatio ex nihilo*) was affirmed by the idea of God as a creator. In the nineteenth century, “the concept of creativity was transformed” radically and “the meaning of the expression changed” because “the requirement ‘from nothing’ was dropped. Creativity in the altered construction became the making of *new things* rather than the making of things from nothing” (Ibid.). Although “not every novelty sufficed for creativity”, “in the end it was novelty that defined creativity. With the new concept, a new theory arose: creativity was an exclusive attribute of the artist” and “*the artist alone is a creator*” (Ibid.). However, “in the 20th the idea has arisen that ... not only artists but persons active in other departments of culture may likewise be creative. Creativity is possible in *all* fields of human production” because “novelty occurs in works not only of art but likewise of science and technology” (Ibid., p. 254).

17 Just the opposite: “innovation was pejorative for a while. Until the eighteenth century, a “novator” was still a suspicious person, one to be mistrusted. Before the twentieth century, there had been two episodes in history where innovation was opposed. The first was in political and religious matters. Because of tradition, political change was negatively received, and because of orthodoxy, innovation was considered heresy; thereafter innovation was identified with the introduction of anything deviant in political affairs and in the Church. The second episode was during the eighteenth century, when inventors started making money from their inventions. Projectors, as the innovators were then called, became objects of satire by many authors because of insufficient science, bad management and fraud” (Ibid., p. 24).

tion are seen as very important values. They are predominantly understood as different but interrelated concepts. Creativity is seen as the process of developing and expressing novel ideas, knowledge and practices, while innovation is viewed as the practical implementation of these ideas, knowledge and practices in new products or services that create economic value. Conceived in such a way, creativity is, as previously discussed, a means and not an end. As such, it primarily has an instrumental value: it is valued first and foremost because it is a necessary condition for innovation. However, not only creativity but also innovation has an instrumental value, because it, too, is a means to an end. This is evident from the explanation of innovation as “harnessing creativity for business growth” (Jolly, 2003), as well as from the aforementioned real reason for introducing education reform (which emphasises the enhancement of creativity and innovation in education): “enterprise development and Europe’s ability to compete internationally”. In the neoliberal context, however, innovation is not only a personal skill and, therefore, something that should be enhanced “at all levels of education and training” in “an environment that is conducive to all forms of ... innovation, whether artistic, cultural, social or technological” – as stated in the previously discussed EU documents – but is, according to Luc Ferry, the essence of neoliberal capitalism, as well. The latter’s philosophical reinterpretation of the idea of innovation as a source of capitalism defined as “creative destruction” (Schumpeter, 1942) into a concept of “destructive innovation” reveals the paradoxical nature of the permanent process of innovation, which destroys the present in order to create the future. From this perspective, neoliberal capitalism is seen as something that forces us to submit to the perpetual logic of innovation for the sake of innovation, which not only leads to progress in economic and some other areas, but also to the incessant “rupture with all the forms of heritage, patrimony, and tradition” (Ferry, 2014, p. 14). It is precisely this deconstructive side of the innovation process that seems to be overlooked or deliberately silenced when innovation, along with creativity, is established as the goal of social and education reforms.

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Education Reform and the Normalisation of Private Education in Slovenia

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∞ This article examines the long-term effects of the regulation of private education adopted in the course of the education reform in 1996 and the sustainability of the guiding principles that served as the starting point for this regulation. It reviews the guiding principles of the introduction of private education, the goals of the reform laid down in the White Paper in 1995 and the regulations introduced on the basis of these tenets. It follows up on the 'life' of the legal solutions and the history of (attempted) amendments of the legislation, which generally start in the Slovenian Parliament and then proceed all the way to the Constitutional Court. The article also examines the effects of the adopted regulation: how the private education sector has established itself and what kind of relationship it has developed vis-a-vis public education. The second part of the article explores certain developments in the field of education in Slovenia and on the global scale, using them as the basis for assessing the sustainability of the goals that guided the education reform. The thesis proposed by the article is that it is the normalisation of private education in Slovenia should be considered the main achievement of the education reform.

Keywords: education reform, private education, human rights, normalisation

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Šolska reforma in normalizacija zasebnega šolstva v Sloveniji

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☞ Članek obravnava dolgoročne učinke urejanja položaja zasebnega šolstva v šolski reformi iz leta 1996 in »trajnost« načelnih izhodišč, iz katerih se je izhajalo. Prikaže načelna izhodišča uvajanja zasebnega šolstva, cilje sprememb, kot so opredeljeni v Beli knjigi leta 1995, in zakonsko ureditev, ki je bila vpeljana na osnovi načelnih izhodišč. Spremlja »živiljenje« zakonskih rešitev in zgodovino (poskusov) sprememb zakonodaje. Zakonodajo se najprej poskuša spremeniti v parlamentu, potem pa se politika spreminjanja nadaljuje na ustavnem sodišču. Članek opisuje tudi »učinkovanje« zakonodajnih rešitev: kako se oblikuje sektor zasebnih šol in kak odnos se razvije med javnim in zasebnim šolstvom. V drugem delu članek obravnava nekatere globalne procese na področju edukacije in na tej osnovi ocenjuje »trajnostnost« ciljev, iz katerih je reforma izhajala. Teza članka je, da je glavni dosežek reforme normalizacija zasebnega šolstva v Sloveniji.

Ključne besede: šolska reforma, zasebno šolstvo, človekove pravice, normalizacija

Introduction

One of the prominent elements of the education reform that ensued from the White Paper (1995) and the adoption of new legislation in 1996 was the introduction of private schools. At the time, the situation appeared to be unprecedented, since reforms generally build on what is already in existence rather than introducing something completely new; however, the legislation in education applicable prior to the reform did not provide for private education. This change gave rise to much uncertainty, since it was not very clear how the structural changes and the introduction of a new element would affect other elements and the field of education as a whole.

The reform can be evaluated from various aspects; with twenty-five years of hindsight, two considerations can be put centre stage. The first relates to the long-term effects and the stability of the legislative solutions introduced in the course of the reform, including a review of the achievement of the objectives pursued by the reform. The second refers to the sustainability of the guiding principles that served as the starting point for the introduction of changes. The education reform was designed in specific social circumstances as a response to issues relevant at the time. A quarter of a century later, global developments are marked by new trends, so it makes sense to examine whether the principles that guided the regulation of private education are still valid.

Education reform in Slovenia in 1996

Before 1991 (i.e., prior to Slovenia's declaration of independence), private schools did not exist in Slovenia. The new education legislation that came into force in 1996 introduced private schools into the education system. However, from a historical point of view, private education had been present in the territory of Slovenia. At the time of the Habsburg Monarchy, private schools were in existence, but they were few in number and not financed by the state. After the First World War and the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the new state adopted an even less favourable approach to private schools, so their number soon dropped even further; after the Second World War, private schools were prohibited (Šimenc, 1996).

It may seem as if the education reform put Slovenia in an extraordinary position, since the introduction of private schools could start from scratch without being limited by an established tradition of private education. However, this was not the case. At the time of independence in 1991, two religious secondary schools providing education for clergymen were already operated by

the Roman Catholic Church, but the education provided was not formally recognised. Furthermore, the Waldorf elementary school was founded in 1992, so education had already undergone some internal differentiation before the education reform. The new legislation adopted in 1996, therefore, only introduced private schools *de iure*, while they had *de facto* already existed. Private schools had also been partly integrated into the education system: certificates issued by these schools were officially recognised; private schools were also awarded public funding on the basis of concessions. Nevertheless, these were only partial and makeshift solutions. The education reform in 1996 included private schooling in the education legislation, thereby providing private education with a regulatory framework at a system level (Krek & Šimenc, 1996).

The goals pursued in the regulation of private schools in 1996 were defined in the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia as follows:

The goal for regulating the status of private schools is a legal situation whose requirements for the establishment of private schools and the principles of their operation will be fully transparent. The legal situation of private education should be in agreement with the stipulations of international declarations and conventions signed by Slovenia. The relation between the public and the private sector should enable private schools to enrich the public offerings, enable parents to choose the type of education they wish for their children, contribute to a better adaptability of the public system, and complete the public school network (but not limit or destroy it). Mechanisms for the quality control of private schools are needed; at least, in the areas where they are replacing the public school system. The private school sector must be clear and transparent enough so that parents, in deciding on a certain private school, know what they have chosen and do not send the children to schools whose quality and educational orientation are not completely known. Substitutional private schools should be accessible to all classes of [the] population. (Krek, 1996, pp. 238–239)

The quote refers to the key goals of the regulation of private education. A crucial element of the mission of private school regulation is mentioned in the second paragraph: international conventions required Slovenia to change its legislation so as to enable parents to choose the appropriate education for their children, also providing the choice of private schools. There is no doubt that international declarations and conventions oblige the state to facilitate the establishment and operation of private schools. Moreover, the goals listed above also refer to two significant aspects of the approach to private education: on the

one hand, the establishment of private schools must be facilitated, yet on the other hand, private education must be regulated to ensure that private schools do not jeopardise the public school network.

Since these goals are very general in nature, it is useful to verify to what extent the adopted legislation actually provided for the implementation of these goals. The legislation adopted in 1996 was based on the conceptual design of private education defined in the White Paper. Several provisions refer to private schools, particularly the *Organisation and Financing of Education Act* (Law, 1996), but only the most pertinent will be discussed in detail below.

Article 17 of the *Organisation and Financing of Education Act* (Law, 1996) defines the adoption process for curricula of private schools that provide officially recognised education and contains the requirement of ‘an equivalent education standard of private schools’ (Ibid., p. 40).² The benchmark for the assessment of the education standard of private schools is public school curricula. Article 86 stipulates the conditions that must be met by private schools for them to be eligible for public co-funding. The co-funding rate is determined as a ratio of the funding allocated to public schools, granting private schools (elementary and secondary) 85% of the funds allocated to public schools for their day-to-day operation. The aim of the co-financing of private schools was to ensure an appropriate quality of education for children in private schools but also to avoid private schools becoming a privilege of the children of the wealthiest parents. Public funding of private schools allows tuition fees to remain relatively low. Article 87 refers to limitations of public co-funding for private schools in case ‘the existence of the sole public school in the same school district is jeopardised’ (Ibid, p. 148). If a public elementary school is threatened by the existence of a private school, the funding of the private school is discontinued. Article 88 limits the tuition fees charged by private schools to 15% of the amount allocated to public schools per student. Not only does public co-financing allow for affordable tuition fees, making sure that access to private schools is not limited to the elite; public funding also involves clear conditionality: to receive public funding, private schools must agree to limited tuition fees. Article 89 links the remuneration of professional staff in publicly co-funded private schools to remuneration levels in public education. This is another provision aimed at protecting public education: private schools receiving public funding cannot use higher salaries as a means to attract the best teachers from public schools, thereby undermining public education.

2 For schools using alternative pedagogical approaches (Steiner, Montessori, etc.), this requirement is more relaxed: the act only requires them to provide ‘the minimum knowledge that allows for a successful completion of schooling’ (Law, 1996, p. 40).

These provisions demonstrate how the goals and principles defined in the White Paper were translated into legislation. The private domain is defined in relation to the public domain. Private school curricula must ensure an appropriate quality of education. Public co-funding is available but subject to clear conditionality, with all regulations serving the same purpose: making sure that the existence of private school does not undermine the quality of education and making private schools accessible to everyone.

Further development of the regulatory framework of private education

The regulation of private education adopted in 1996 paved the way for various attempts to regulate the relationship between the public and private domain, some even running contrary to the initial arrangement. In fact, the government in power between 2004 and 2008 placed a strong emphasis on competition and the private sector. In 2007, the government submitted a bill to parliament, aiming to amend the relevant legislation along the same lines. The document contained several reasons explaining why legislative changes were required, also referring to changes related to private education. Explaining the aim of the changes to be introduced, the document referred to the White Paper, claiming that ‘The Amending Act is in line with the principles and goals of the White Paper from 1996’ (Ministry, 2007, p. 8).

One of the key proposed amendments was equalising the public funding for private and public schools. This would mean that private schools would no longer receive 85% of the funds allocated to public schools but would be granted the same amount. The rationale behind this proposal made reference to the small number of private schools: ‘In the school year 2005/2006, 0.8 per cent of pupils and students were enrolled in private elementary and secondary schools (0.12 per cent in elementary schools and 2.02 per cent in secondary schools)’ (Ministry, 2007, p. 8).

This meant that the aim of the regulatory framework was no longer ensuring the quality of private education and protecting the public school network as enshrined in the White Paper; the new mission was to compete with Europe in terms of the quantity of private schools. The proposed amending act established a ranking of countries in terms of the number of children enrolled in private schools and proceeded on the basis that Slovenia’s goal should be to improve its ranking. The government document first made reference to the White Paper, but then introduced a goal based on the premise that the higher the number of private schools, the greater the benefit for the country. This goal

is not compatible with the principles and goals of the White Paper. This shows that the White Paper left such a powerful impression on the debate on education in Slovenia that politicians referenced it even when proposing measures contrary to the Paper itself.

The attempts to amend the education legislation in 2007 were only partially successful. The reason for their failure was protests: the teachers' trade union (SVIZ) presented the National Assembly with a call for action, 'For high-quality public education' signed by over 71,000 individuals who opposed the increase of public funding awarded to private schools to the same level as that awarded to public schools. (Protner, 2010, p. 57) Because the legislative procedure failed, several deputies lodged an appeal before the Constitutional Court, claiming that the inequality in the public co-funding of public and private education was unconstitutional. The court rejected the appeal for procedural reasons. A similar appeal was then lodged by parents whose children were enrolled in a private primary school. The Constitutional Court ruled in 2015 that the inequality in the public co-funding of public and private primary schools was contrary to the Constitution. The ruling was unexpected since the court had already ruled on the matter in 2001, upholding the concepts enshrined in the White Paper.³ The key argument put forward by the Constitutional Court was the following:

In contemporary democratic societies, the mandatory aspect of education (i.e. mandatory elementary education) is interpreted in a narrow manner as referring only to the content of the statutory curricula rather than as also referring to the educational establishments providing these curricula. Paragraph 2 of Article 57 of the Constitution (which stipulates that "primary education is compulsory and shall be financed from public funds") therefore guarantees children the right to participate in mandatory officially recognized primary education free of charge, regardless of whether this education is provided by a public or private establishment. (Constitutional Court, 2014, par. 20)

The Constitutional Court did not refer to any specific source to substantiate its claim that what mattered in contemporary democratic societies was the content of education and not whether this education is provided by private or public schools. However, this claim, deemed by the Slovene Constitutional Court as self-evident and requiring no justification, could well give free rein to the extensive privatisation of education (Šimenc, 2016).

3 Some commentators feel that it needs to be pointed out that the position of the Constitutional Court on the funding of private education in 2001 was adopted when the matter at issue before the Court was not the funding of private schools but rather an article of the Organisation and Financing of Education Act referring to confessional activities in public schools. (Rifel, 2016)

It can be concluded from the above that the manner in which the relationship between public and private schools was conceived in the White Paper was so convincing for Slovene society that it took a ruling of the Constitutional Court for this arrangement to be changed. The ruling of the court requiring the equalisation of the funding of private and public elementary schools was perceived by the public as contentious; the parliament also failed to adopt the necessary legislative amendments to implement it. As a result, a second dispute challenging the constitutionality of the legislation on the financing of private schools was launched. In 2020, the Constitutional Court again ruled that elementary education must be free of charge for private school students; however, it limited this requirement to mandatory curricula. Since public schools also receive public funding for non-mandatory curricula, this ruling of the Constitutional Court maintained the differentiation between the public funding of public and private schools.

Changes in education in the post-White Paper period: global developments

The period after the adoption of the White Paper was marked by the encroachment of neoliberal ideas into the field of education. Economic globalisation has gradually diminished the importance and influence of nation-states and has contributed to the development of 'market-based reforms and hence characterized the essence of globalization of education: decentralization, privatization, and increasing efficiency of education' (Sahlberg, 2004, p. 68). The creation of a global education industry (Verger et al., 2016) is fostered by transnational institutions, such as the World Bank, and transnational corporations that promote the privatisation and standardisation of education at the global level; the effects of this are most evident in parts of Latin America, Africa and Asia where public education systems neglected by economically weak countries have gradually become commercialised and privatised.

At the international level, these trends evoked many responses. Reports of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education point out that the right to education is jeopardised in periods of quick proliferation of private schools and underscore the responsibility of states for the exercise of the right to education and the need to ensure that education remains a public good. (Special Rapporteur, 2014, 2015). In the 2019 report, the Special Rapporteur informs the Human Rights Council and States Members of the United Nations about the newly adopted *Abidjan Principles* and recommends their full implementation (Special Rapporteur, 2019).

The Abidjan Principles, bearing the full title *The Abidjan Principles on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education*, represent the most comprehensive response to global privatisation trends in education. This complex document is meant to provide guidance to governments facing these new developments.⁴

The point of departure for the text is the importance of the right to education which is under threat in many places due to the growing privatisation and commercialisation of education, giving private interests and profit-making free reign. This is why the principles highlight the role of states and their obligations to provide for the exercise of the right to education. According to the Principles, this obligation is closely related to the provision of free public education. The second overarching principle thus reads as follows: ‘States must provide free, public education of the highest attainable quality to everyone within their jurisdiction as effectively and expeditiously as possible, to the maximum of their available resources’, and the fifth overarching principle explicitly states: ‘States must prioritise the funding and provision of free, quality, public education [...]’ (Abidjan Principles, 2019, p. 7)

The Abidjan Principles underscore that states should realise the right to education by prioritising a free, quality, public education system accessible to everyone and that the respect of all requirements arising from human rights is a prerequisite for the co-funding of private schools. All of the above clearly indicates that global developments have shifted the focus towards certain aspects of the right to education that had previously not attracted much attention. The responsibility of states to realise the right to education has gained significance, and potential negative effects of the privatisation of education have been recognised. The Abidjan Principles may be a document of weaker authority compared to the generally recognised international acts on human rights; however, similar changes in focus can also be seen in the interpretation of those documents. The fact that no modern state can simply withdraw from the education sector and leave all responsibility for education to private actors has also been highlighted in rulings of the International Court for Human Rights. The ruling in the case of Louise O’Keeffe is a particularly relevant case in point.

In 1973, Louise O’Keeffe was a student at a national school when she was sexually assaulted by her teacher Leo Hickey. The abuse she had suffered led O’Keeffe to bring proceedings against both Hickey, as well as the state. Her action against the Republic of Ireland was dismissed in Ireland, citing the type of

4 The document was adopted in February 2019 as a result of three years of consultations involving independent experts around the globe, with a group of international NGOs acting as the main driver of the drafting of the Principles.

school she had attended as the key argument for the dismissal. National schools are schools that are merely funded but not managed by the state, since these are private schools with denominational management. Because the school was not managed by the state and the teacher Leo Hickey was not a civil servant, Irish courts ruled that the state could not be held responsible for any abuse taking place in these schools. The applicant, therefore, turned to the *European Court of Human Rights* which ruled in 2014 that the state was responsible for the violation of Article 3 of the *Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms*.

Commentators highlight the significance of the ruling for understanding the obligations of the state when it comes to the protection of rights, especially in the field of education. Several points made on the grounds of the delivered judgement are of particular relevance.

Moreover, the primary education context of the present case defines to a large extent the nature and importance of this obligation. The Court's case-law makes it clear that the positive obligation of protection assumes particular importance in the context of the provision of an important public service such as primary education, school authorities being obliged to protect the health and well-being of pupils and, in particular, of young children who are especially vulnerable and are under the exclusive control of these authorities (ECtHR, 2014a, par. 145).

Due to the nature of this obligation, the state cannot simply evade the duty of protecting a child simply because the child attended a private school. The grounds of the judgement thus place a particular emphasis on the obligation of the state and the fact that the abuse occurred in a primary school that is deemed 'an important public service. The ruling gives particular consideration to the obligation of the state: 'It is an inherent obligation of government to ensure their protection from ill treatment, especially in a primary education context, through the adoption, as necessary, of special measures and safeguards' (ECtHR, 2014a, par. 146).

According to the analysis of *Renáta Uitz*, the French version of the ruling clearly shows that the obligation of the state does not relate to a particular right arising from a particular article of the convention; as put by the court, it is 'in the very nature of the government's tasks in public primary education. In the words of the French version "les pouvoirs publics ont l'obligation, inhérente à leur mission, de protéger [...]" [para 146, emphasis added], which translates literally as "public authorities have an obligation, inherent in their mission, to protect [...]" (Uitz, 2014).

The ruling of the court thus emphasises two things: firstly, that primary education constitutes an important public service; second, that the state therefore has a positive obligation to protect children in primary schools. The ruling is accompanied by a dissenting opinion of five judges, which is yet another indicator of the significance of the O’Keeffe ruling for the regulation of the relationship between the state and private education. This opinion highlights some additional points in the ruling:

A democratic society may flourish only in a State that respects the principle of subsidiarity and allows the different social actors to self-regulate their activities. This applies also to the domain of education. Legislation pertaining to private education should respect the legitimate autonomy of private schools. Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 guarantees the right of parents to ensure education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. It is clear that the democratic State has to respect the education choices of the parents as well as the parents’ primary responsibility for the development and well-being of their children (ECtHR, 2014b, par. 7).

The dissenting judges are also critical of the court’s ruling: ‘We regret to note that the Court, established to ensure the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, promotes as a remedy for rights violations a model of the State which restricts the scope of freedom and individual responsibility’ (ECtHR, 2014b, par. 20).

What the judges point out in the dissenting opinion is that the ruling constitutes an extension of the state’s obligations. In their opinion, private schools have the autonomy and the right to regulate their activities themselves, which would mean that interventions and the regulation of private education by the state should be limited. However, the result of the ruling is that the state’s obligations and its competences in this area are being extended in the name of the protection of children’s rights. This means that the state is obliged to regulate the operation of schools, including private schools in greater detail, so as to adequately protect the rights of children. The dissenting opinion also stresses that judges were not unanimous and that a small group of judges opposes the court’s ruling.

Furthermore, the ruling represents a shift in the interpretation of international acts on human rights. Commentators of the ruling note that its long-term effects are not yet entirely clear; however, it is clear what direction they will take. The court’s ruling indicates that the state has a vital role in the field of education and that this role obliges it to not leave the responsibility for this

field to others. The interpretation of human rights is not oriented towards the withdrawal of the state from education but rather towards states being more involved in this area.

Achievement of the objectives of the reform

The reform can be assessed based on its own benchmarks, specifically in terms of the implementation of the goals it had set for itself. Such evaluations have already been undertaken (Globokar, 2011; Šimenc, 2003) and have concluded that the objectives of the reform have largely been fulfilled. A 'legal situation whose requirements for the establishment of private schools and the principles of their operation will be fully transparent' (Krek, 1996, p. 238) has been established, which is fully in line with the first objective of the White Paper. Parents have been given the possibility to opt for private schools, 'mechanisms for the quality control of private schools' (Krek, 1996, p. 239) are in place, public co-funding allows for lower tuition fees, making sure that private schools do not become elite institutions. The results of secondary school leaving examinations prove that private secondary schools provide high quality education (Globokar, 2011; Šimenc, 2003). Researchers have not detected any indication of private education fostering the establishment of elite private schools (Flere & Klanjšek, 2011). When it comes to general upper secondary schools, the Slovene enrolment system might be conducive to the emergence of elite general upper secondary schools; however, in this case, the elements of elitism are not exclusively related to private general upper secondary schools. The growth of private education is sustainable, since no private school has terminated its operations. The establishment of private schools has not jeopardised the existence or quality of public schools. It follows that the development of private education has been consistent with the objectives enshrined in the White Paper of 1995. The same conclusion was reached in the analyses included in the White Paper of 2011 (Krek & Metljak, 2011), which do not recommend any significant changes concerning the regulation of private education.

Another question that now arises is whether the definitions contained in the White Paper have stood the test of time. The answer is provided in the White Paper of 2011, and it is affirmative. Taking human rights as the point of departure cannot be questioned, so the assessment of the guiding principles of the introduction of private education in the White Paper of 1995 is also positive. Since it is now 2021, this appraisal can be amended. In the context in which the White Paper of 1995 was drafted, human rights were synonymous with the withdrawal of the state from the field of education, particularly in the sense

of protecting the education sphere from political or ideological interventions. When it comes to private education, the White Paper considers human rights primarily in terms of the protection of individuals from state interventions (parents' rights, the right of private schools to exist and operate); meanwhile, the more recent developments in the field of human rights mentioned in the previous section have shifted the focus to the role of the state as the guardian of human rights. Certain provisions from the White Paper of 1995 could nowadays, therefore, be worded differently.

The ruling of the European Court of Human Rights discussed above also indicates the same trend in the understanding of human rights. In the White Paper, the reference to human rights was made in the context of private education primarily to draw attention to the state's responsibility to permit the establishment of private schools and allow parents to choose a type of education; the reference to human rights was less pronounced when addressing the points that the state must regulate private education and set up certain limitations for their operation. Today, what is increasingly in the spotlight is protecting the rights of children and the positive obligation of the state to implement mechanisms for the protection of these rights. From this point of view, it can be said that the objectives of the White Paper have stood the test of time, but that is not entirely the case when it comes to their wording. When assessing the achievement of the objectives of the White Paper, it is worthwhile to examine a process in private education that is so obvious it might just be overlooked.

Normalisation

One of the benchmarks used for the evaluation of the effectiveness of any regulation in the field of education is its sustainability and stability. Frequent changes give rise to uncertainty, making it impossible for schools to plan for the long term. This is particularly true of fundamental systemic measures such as the regulation of the relationship between private and public schools.⁵ However, stability is related not only to appropriate regulation but also to the acceptance of private schools in society, which is something that can be articulated using the concept of normalisation. This concept was introduced by Stephen Bax to capture the process of the gradual introduction and uptake of new

5 Stable funding which is an important element of the regulation of private education is taken for granted in Slovenia to such an extent that people struggle to understand reports coming from certain Austrian (Becker, 2016) and Croatian (Jarić Dauenhauer, 2016) private schools complaining about unstable and unreliable funding by the state.

technologies in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).⁶ According to Bax, the normalisation of an innovation is dependant not only on teachers who start using a new technology but also on students, parents, and the broader social environment. Given that the use of a new technology is affected by the characteristics of the novelty, just as much as by the social context, the concept of normalisation can also be applied – with modification and some caution – to the introduction of other innovations in the education system.

Bax (2003, pp. 24–25) considers the adoption of a new technology to be a seven-stage process. Initially, a few enthusiasts will use the novelty while the majority remains sceptical. Then, some people try it out, but most reject it. Positive recommendations lead to new attempts. The novelty is being used, but the public still reacts with fear or exaggerated expectations. By the end of the normalisation process, the novelty has found its place in the education system and it becomes so integrated in the system that everyone uses it without a second thought, and its use does not warrant any special attention.

According to Bax, the initial fear and resistance as well as the advocacy, great expectations, and enthusiasm that mark the individual stages of normalisation are not irrational reactions but rather an integral part of the adoption process of any novelty. If this ‘logic of normalisation’ is transferred from individuals to society as a whole, it could be said that private education has become largely normalised in Slovenia. Private schools no longer inflame public controversy or motivate letters to the editor, fierce opposition, or tireless advocacy, all of which are integral parts of the normalisation process, according to Bax. Private schools have found their place and become a part of everyday life that is taken for granted and no longer provokes strong reactions.

It should be recalled that the initial years of operation of the Waldorf school were marked by criticism and debates among professionals (e.g., Kosovel, 1997) as well as in letters to the editor (e.g., Divjak, 1995). This was hardly surprising, since schools practising alternative methods were an unknown quantity for the public. In those early days, private schools even reported making adjustments to their curricula in order to bring them closer to those of public schools (Šimenc, 2007). Given that such strong reactions from the public have become a rare occurrence, it could be said that the normalisation period is over. Speaking on behalf of Roman Catholic schools, Roman Globokar

6 Bax chose a rather unfortunate term to designate his concept of a gradual adoption of technological innovation in education. The term ‘normalisation’ had been used several times before Bax’s work to denominate various concepts that are significantly different from Bax’s. In the humanities, the most influential concept of normalisation is that of Foucault (Maze, 2020). However, certain authors have a similar understanding of the concept of normalisation as Bax and their theories give normalisation a scope that goes beyond the field of education. The most striking case in point is the normalisation process theory (May & Finch, 2009).

(2016) can thus report: 'We have always had an excellent cooperation with public schools; our teachers are members of expert groups for individual subjects and the matura exam at [the] national level, students of various public faculties regularly complete their practical training at our schools' (p. 8). Private schools have become a part of the Slovene education sphere, but that simply cannot be taken for granted. As recently as in 2015, Globokar's preface (2015) to the journal recalls the situation in which private schools faced misunderstanding and prejudice: 'The publication of the contributions to the symposium seeks to increase the visibility of Catholic schools and overcome the prejudice and misconceptions existing in Slovenia.' (p. 7).

It can be argued that it is the normalisation of private schools that should be considered the greatest achievement of the education reform. Even though it may not be obvious at first sight, the state has made a significant contribution to the acceptance of private schools in society by adopting a regulation that stipulates the conditions schools must fulfil to be officially recognised and eligible for state funding. These 'obstacles' that private schools must overcome can be considered a state guarantee for private schools. Once the curriculum of a private school is officially recognised, after its implementation has been subject to monitoring and once it has been established that it allows students to obtain the required knowledge, a significant milestone is reached. In the eyes of the general public, the new private schools are no longer perceived as a novelty bordering on an experiment but as officially recognised schools with a state guarantee. What may have appeared to be a limitation imposed on private school has turned out to be a condition for their acceptance in society, meaning a condition for their normalisation.⁷

Conclusion

The present article presents the regulation of private education adopted as part of the education reform of 1996 and attempts to modify the adopted legislative solutions and goes on to evaluate both the achievement of the goals pursued by the reform as well as the relevance of the principles that guided the reform in the present time. The discussion in the article suggests that the regulation of private education introduced by the education reform in 1996 has stood the test of time. It has done so quite literally, since the solutions that were introduced are largely still valid today even though they were scrutinised by the

⁷ The politics of polarisation which, according to Galston, are characteristic of the attitude towards education in the USA (Galston, 2005, p. 57) could be mentioned as the opposite of the normalisation logic. What is typical of polarisation in Slovenia is a discourse strategy centred around the notion of a 'state monopoly' over education (e.g., Stres, 2009; Štuhec, 2016).

Slovenian Parliament and the Constitutional Court. In most countries of Western Europe, there was a period in time when an arrangement of private education established and consolidated itself to such an extent that it is perceived as self-evident today. In this sense, the Slovenian regulation has been a success. It has survived the polarisation phase and has contributed to the normalisation and stability of private education.

The analysis in the article also shows that a trend has emerged in the international arena in the period since the education reform towards interpreting international documents on human rights with greater emphasis on the role of the state in guaranteeing the right to education. The focus is thus no longer on protecting private schools from state intervention, but rather on the positive obligation of the state to implement mechanisms for the protection of the right to education and the rights of students in education. The discussion has also highlighted the 'productive' role of state regulation in the field of private education: as it turns out, the regulatory interventions of the state in the field of education generally impose limitations on private schools, but they can also provide strong support for their normalisation.

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Shifting Regulative Ideas of Education Policy and Practice: The Case of Quality Assurance in Education in Slovenia

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Based on Foucault's concept of the dispositive, the paper attempts to show how societies and schools have been functioning for some time now by regulating three dispositives: juridical, disciplinary, and security. While the crises of the 1970s shifted the combination of dispositives in education in the West towards security, this shift in the rationality of education policy and practice did not occur in Slovenia until the 1990s, following the broader political transition to democracy and a market economy. The paper aims to present these shifts through the structuring of quality assurance mechanisms in education in Slovenia in the previous two decades. First, the concept of quality assurance is presented as part of a broader change in society and education. This is followed by analyses of the dynamics of the conceptualisation, implementation, and regulation of quality assurance in education in Slovenia. Complementarily, following Bourdieu's approach, seven interviews with experts from the field of quality assurance are presented, with the aim of reflecting on the past and shedding light on the current state of affairs in quality assurance in education in Slovenia.

Keywords: quality, dispositive, security, education, regulative idea

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Ugotavljanje in zagotavljanje kakovosti v šolstvu v Sloveniji: zamiki racionalnosti edukacijskih politik in praks

ŽIVA KOS

~ Izhajajoč iz Foucaultevega kategorialnega aparata, družba in šole že dlje časa delujejo na prepletu treh dispozitivov: juridičnega, disciplinskega in dispozitiva varnosti. S krizo sedemdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja zahodne družbe zaznamuje zamik dispozitivov v smer dispozitiva varnosti, medtem ko je ta zamik v edukacijskih politikah in praksah v Sloveniji mogoče zaznati šele v devetdesetih letih dvajsetega stoletja v povezavi s prehodom v demokratični politični sistem in tržno ekonomijo. Prispevek tematizira omenjene zamike na primeru vzpostavljanja mehanizmov ugotavljanja in zagotavljanja kakovosti v vzgoji in izobraževanju v Sloveniji v preteklih desetletjih. Koncept ugotavljanja in zagotavljanja kakovosti je najprej predstavljen kot del širših zamikov v družbi in polju edukacije. Sledi analiza konceptualizacij, implementacije in regulacije ugotavljanja in zagotavljanja kakovosti v vzgoji in izobraževanju v Sloveniji. Izhajajoč iz Bourdieujevega pristopa, prispevek v izhodiščno zastavitev vpenja analizo sedmih intervjujev z eksperti in ekspertinjami s področja ugotavljanja in zagotavljanja kakovosti v vzgoji in izobraževanju v Sloveniji z namenom refleksije preteklih in prihodnjih izzivov politik in praks ugotavljanja in zagotavljanja kakovosti v šolstvu v Sloveniji.

Ključne besede: kakovost, dispozitivi, varnost, vzgoja in izobraževanje, regulativne ideje

Introduction

Mechanisms of governance of the post-war state in Western society were organised around the security dispositive² (Foucault, 2008b, 2009), with the productive regulation of liberties, political economy and social security shaped as a series of political interventions that alleviated social problems and regulated the gap between the ‘wealthy’ and the ‘less fortunate’. At that time, Slovenia was still embedded in the socialist rationalities of government and planning as part of a mixed disciplinary and security dispositive (cf. Foucault, 2008b, 2009).

In this light, the shift from this mix to the security dispositive in Slovenia came with a delay compared to in the West. The transitions from socialism to representative democracy and the establishment of security mechanisms took place when the post-war welfare state was in decline in the West, as it had become economically ‘unsustainable’. As a result, neoliberal rationality, which criticised the regulatory ideas and mechanisms of social regulation and the political economy, presented itself as a rational and promising alternative that could correct the economic and political mistakes of the post-war era (Mirowski, 2015). Liberal markets, economic freedom, the deregulation of social and institutional systems, and the centrality of the individual became some of the regulative ideas that transformed society and education. In this light, Slovenian transitions took place on the axes of the legacy of the productive elements of socialism and the welfare state and the dominant ideas of the neoliberal rationality of the time. Centralised, state regulation was no longer an option, and various ideas emerged about how systems, institutions and individuals could or should be governed. Some of them were new, but most of them were shifted, repositioned and reshaped to fit the liberal rationality of governance (Foucault, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Popkewitz, 2002).

Education was among the many areas that underwent these transitions. As part of the transitions, school reform was based on the consensus that Slovenia needed a quality education system comparable to developed Western European education systems. This meant a shift towards Western normativity, with a view to implementing the pillars of a sustainable, long-term system. This paper presents one of the possible reflections of the structuring and positioning of quality assurance in education in Slovenia³ and its shifts taking place as part

2 Political discussions, especially after the Second World War, had a strong moral focus, as high unemployment, inflation and an unstable price market (Judt, 2010) posed a serious threat to fragile democracy. Fear of extremist and revolutionary ideas had become part of the collective memory, and economic regulation had taken over the central role in ensuring the ethical and moral wellbeing of society.

3 Up to tertiary education.

of the wider political, economic and social transitions. (e.g., Razdevšek Pučko, 1992; Zgaga, 1997)

Based on reviewing existing documents and materials produced over the previous two decades,⁴ seven interviews were conducted in November 2020, using Bourdieu's approach of reflective sociology (1989, 1999). The interviews were with experts from six public institutions⁵ who have been and remain involved in the processes of structuring quality assurance in education in terms of its content and systemic changes. The objective was to analyse reflections concerning the past and current challenges related to quality assurance in education in Slovenia.

Regulative ideas of quality assurance in education

The concepts of Foucault (2008a, 2008b, 2009) enable us to understand the way education has become a contemporary security mechanism in modern societies. Following Foucault, societies, at least since the 18th century, have functioned as shifting relations of three dispositives: the juridical, the disciplinary, and the security dispositive (Ibid.), which shape the rationalities, regulative ideas, and mechanisms of dealing with different aspects of insecurity in individual and collective life.

Shifts can be observed in education from the late 1970s onwards. Central regulation, which prescribes and controls the aims and goals of education for schools and teachers, and deregulation have shifted towards ideas of individual and group evaluation and self-regulation. Here again, however, the momentum of the juridical dispositive (the government prescribes the content of education) and the disciplinary dispositive (the government controls and supervises practices) has not disappeared, nor has the need for social security and social welfare. The neoliberal 'new' and the political economy and welfare state 'old' in education have been repositioned in different ways depending on national and global agendas.

This shift towards the security dispositive in Slovenian education was outlined in the first *White Paper on Education* (Krek, 1995), which aimed at open education connected with the rest of Europe in terms of language learning, comparability with international knowledge standards, intercultural

4 Some explicitly referred in the text, others analysed in previous work in the monograph of Gaber & Kos K., 2011).

5 The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the National Institute for Education, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, the National School for Leadership in Education, and the National Examinations Centre.

education, and similar. In addition, the common belief was that kindergartens and schools should provide education for all members of society based on common values. The educational goals focused on the education of the individual as an autonomous being and the formation of an enlightened citizen. The basic principle of equal opportunity for school achievement was also defined as taking into account the differences among children and their right to choose and be different. The principles of broad accessibility, quality and fairness had to be incorporated into the relevant legislation. The *White Paper* (Ibid.) served as the basis for far-reaching reforms, which were reflected in the adoption of a series of laws on the organisation and financing of education and aspects of the different levels of education. With the school reform of the 1990s, Slovenia was on its way to creating an internationally comparable education system that could provide social stability and security.

Given the immense scope of the impending reform, experts and policy-makers realised at the time that the systems could not cope with such extensive reforms very often. The aim was to embed a mechanism in the system that would allow it to change and adapt the sector and its sub-sectors to the changing needs of society. One of the internationally prevalent ideas of the time was the idea of quality assurance in education, but this had its own internal tensions (Krek, 1995; Lapajne, 1993).

The basic elements of a system that would ensure quality and comparable skills and performance included stable financial resources, which would allow for supportive material conditions for schools, and adequate teacher salaries, which would provide teachers with a secure environment for teaching and professional development. At the same time, curricula were reformed, and legislation was adapted to the changes.

Nevertheless, compared to Western societies, the structuring of quality assurance (QA) in Slovenia came with a delay.

What and who is QA for?

The logic of QA in Slovenia was structured at a crossroads where increasing enrolment in education, increased public spending, the greater role of knowledge in society, the economic crisis of the 1970s, and the withdrawal of the welfare state intersected.

In light of the increasing importance of expert knowledge in education, teachers were given more autonomy and more responsibility. Teacher education and training became a university course, giving teachers a new professional status and a legitimised claim for autonomy. Among the first demands on the

part of teachers was the demand for knowledge standards and educational performance. Rising enrolment rates in secondary and tertiary education made it necessary to address the problem of the devaluation of knowledge and degrees (e.g., Lapajne, 1993; Razdevšek Pučko, 1992; Šebart Kovač, 1995; Zgaga, 1997)

The second demand was from the economy and the needs of the labour market: the demand for a competent workforce with 'applicable' knowledge and a correspondingly qualified population, accompanied by the demand for lower taxes.

The third demand came from the state, which was under pressure from the economy and the public to ensure the quality and security of education, in parallel to the pressure of the tax burden and the rational use of public finances (Gaber & Kos, 2011, p. 13).

The logic of QA, therefore, emerged as a complex, sometimes contradictory process on the axes of various issues regarding the governance of education. For example, the issues of the growing population enrolled in education, increased public investment, the growing role of knowledge, the increased expectations of the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, and similar issues have all been characterised by the decentralisation and minimisation of the role of the state government. Nonetheless, the need for ensuring comprehensive quality was irreversibly embedded in institutions as a specifically neoliberal conceptualisation of an older and productive security dispositive. Schools were expected to play their part in providing security in times of constant change, risk and uncertainty. While it was no longer possible to provide the population with securities based on full-time employment and decent pay, schools and education could offer lifelong learning and the idea of (continuous) improvement (Ibid., pp. 11–12).

The period of transition in Slovenia was full of expectations and hopes regarding education. Quality education was seen as the promise of a better future for individuals, families and the nation.

The structuring of QA in education in Slovenia

Some elements and practices of QA were present in Slovenia before the concept of quality itself developed. These were evident in various school practices during the socialist period, including annual plans and the evaluation of them, strategies for inclusive schools, monitoring gender ratios, and similar. Furthermore, there were organisational changes in the mid-1970s with the introduction of self-governance⁶ in education and other areas of socialist

6 In Slovenian: *samoupravljanje*.

interest, which heralded shifts from disciplinary/control mechanisms to security mechanisms.

However, the 1990s broke away from socialist 'planning enthusiasm' and instead placed high expectations on the individual and his/her opportunities, on an abstract ideal of success and opportunity, on the alignment of school conditions, and on quality.

The quality system in Slovenia was introduced gradually and not without problems. The basic elements were outlined at the end of the 1990s, but it took more than two decades to develop a structure resembling a QA system in education. In the following section, we outline the basic elements of quality in education from the 1990s until today, keeping in mind that some of the elements of QA introduced in the 1990s have changed, while other elements have been added (Ibid., pp. 16–23)

Educational achievements and external evaluation⁷

In light of the reform activities of the 1990s, the need for the external evaluation of students' performance gained support from teachers and schools, as well as some parents and experts. It thus became one of the first elements of QA. International research on the importance of national examinations provided the necessary evidence for the evaluation and comparison of educational outcomes, even in countries without such a tradition.

In 1993, the National Examinations Centre was established, assuming responsibility for the external⁸ evaluation and assessment of student performance. The first trial Matura (ZMat, 2007) examination was successfully implemented in 1995. External evaluation of achievements was also introduced in primary schools (ZOŠ, 1996; Regulations on the National Testing, 2013).

In addition to national external evaluations, at that time, experts and decision-makers also supported participation in various international comparative assessments, such as TIMSS, PISA, and similar. These studies, in particular, were and remain the focus of interest of the research community, policymakers, and the general public. Secondary studies carried out by the Educational Research Institute provide a detailed insight into the dynamics of the systemic opportunities for policymakers.

7 In addition to national and international assessments of student achievements and school inspection, part of the external evaluation with regard to the initial accreditation of educational institutions is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. This will not be addressed in this paper (Pravilnik o vodenju razvida).

8 External evaluation is compulsory at the end of the ninth grade of primary school (it is optional in the sixth and third grades) and at the end of secondary school as general or vocational baccalaureate, Matura. (ZMat, 2007; ZOŠ, 1996; RIC, n.d.).

With the reform, the School Inspectorate (ZSOI, 2005) remained part of the system, but its role was shifted from control to guiding and monitoring legislative compliance, and assessing possible misconduct in terms of organisation, the use of financial resources, and the protection of students' rights.

Performance data on student achievement offered a promise and a means of evaluating the whole system in terms of assessment and diagnosis (Eurydice, 2009).

Internal evaluation

In parallel with external evaluation, an internal evaluation approach was established by the first two projects, *Ogledalo [Mirror]* (1999) and *Modro Oko [Wise eye]* (2001), which were designed and supported by the National Institute of Education. External evaluation was seen as complementary to internal school evaluations. On the one hand, the limitations of external monitoring and control were recognised; on the other hand, internal evaluation – particularly self-evaluation, which was gaining popularity internationally – was recognised as a mechanism for enhancing the capacity of schools and teachers to reflect on, improve and strengthen quality in areas where external mechanisms were unproductive or were seen as challenging the autonomy of schools (MacBeath, 2004).

The juridical basis for self-evaluation was outlined by *Organisation and Financing of Education Act* (ZOFVI, 2007, 2008). Articles 48 and 49 assign the responsibility for the internal evaluation of quality in the form of self-evaluation to school principals, who are responsible for preparing annual self-evaluation reports for their schools. This self-evaluation report must then be discussed and approved at the level of the school council.⁹

However, the process of self-evaluation, and thus the structuring of the system of QA and education as a whole, was not regulated at the system level. This means that self-evaluation at the school level and the development of the concept of self-evaluation and its instruments was and still is financially supported and developed through various projects led by different, mainly public institutions responsible for different aspects and levels of education.

The first two projects were followed by other projects led by other public institutions, usually at least partially tailored to specific levels of education. This had a significant impact on the milieu of self-evaluation practices. In addition

9 The council is composed of three representatives of the entity financially responsible for schools, five representatives of the staff, and three representatives of parents. For detailed information on the organization of the school council, please see, *Organisation and Financing of Education Act*, art 46.

to the two aforementioned projects, other projects such as *Ponudimo odraslim kakovostno izobraževanje – POKI* [Offering Quality Education to Adults], which was under the leadership of the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, and *Kakovost vzgojno izobraževalnih organizacij, Zasnova in uvedba ugotavljanja in zagotavljanja kakovosti* [The Quality of Educational Organisations, The Design and Implementation of Quality Assessment and Assurance], which was led by the National School for Leadership in Education, have left their mark on self-evaluation. The National Institute for Vocational Education also leads projects supporting and developing the quality and evaluation of vocational education and training.

Attempts to find a common framework

Looking back at the development of quality in education, it seems that the national assessment of student performance was introduced with the greatest consensus and consideration at the level of policy and juridical regulation, in practice, and stable funding. However, the debates on the external evaluation of student performance were accompanied by criticism from those who considered external evaluations, including international comparative evaluation (such as PISA and TIMSS etc.), as part of neoliberal attempts to subject education to competitiveness, school ranking, and economic rationality. Some of the criticism came from a section of teachers who saw the potential for excessive intervention in education. Over the previous two decades, various actors have tried to reshape the way in which national performance evaluation is organised at the system level. There have, for example, been attempts to make the results of school performance public and thus make rankings possible (Dnevnik, 2017), to redesign the place of national performance assessment at the end of primary school in relation to the selection criteria (Ibid., 2015), and, most recently, to modify the dynamics around Matura examinations (24ur, 2020), among others. External assessment of achievement was nonetheless structured and introduced as part of the QA mechanism in education, together with the redefinition of the role of the school inspectorate (ZSoll, 1996). Despite these changes,¹⁰ external evaluation and assessment have remained a more or less stable element of QA.

The dynamics of self-evaluation are more complex and fragmented. As mentioned above, various public education institutions have developed approaches to self-evaluation, usually with specific objectives for different levels

¹⁰ We recognise that these could be a separate part of analytical insights, but at the moment such insights are beyond the scope and possibilities of this paper.

of education and financed by project activities. This means that project activities are gradually discontinued as soon as the funding runs out.

The need for a common national framework at the system level was raised by the professional and expert institutions and schools themselves. The need for quality protocols and common indicators was outlined, as well as the need for tools, a database that schools could use, and appropriate training for teachers and school management.

The first attempt at a common framework took place between 2009 and 2014 as part of a project led by the National School for Leadership in Education, entitled *Zasnova in uvedba ugotavljanja in zagotavljanja kakovosti* [The Design and Implementation of Quality Assessment and Assurance]. One of the goals of the project was to propose a common framework that could provide guidelines for a national framework for quality in education. The project involved the cooperation of experts from public institutions in the field of education.¹¹ Among other activities and results of the project, a monograph entitled *Kakovost v šolstvu v Sloveniji* [Quality in Education in Slovenia, 2011] (Kos & Gaber, 2011) was prepared, which included an overview of quality at different levels of education (except tertiary education), a common proposal and guidelines for policymakers, as well as some theoretical contributions by international authors.

This monograph served as a starting point for the *National Framework for Quality Assessment and Quality Assurance in Education*, which was adopted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport in 2017. The *National Framework* made it possible to finance the second project with the aim of further developing a common model for assessing and ensuring quality in education: *Vzpostavitev, dopolnitev in pilotni preizkus modela ugotavljanja in zagotavljanja kakovosti na področju vzgoje in izobraževanja* [The Establishment, Supplementation and Pilot Testing of a Model for Quality Assessment and Assurance in the Field of Education, 2016–2018]. The project was again a consortium partnership.¹² Guidelines and materials for teaching and learning about quality in education were developed with four sub-areas: student performance and achievements in child development and learning; professional development of teachers; safe and encouraging learning environment; school climate and culture. In addition, standards and indicators for the areas of kindergarten, school management, and indicators for the area of quality management, as well as a quality team competence profile were

11 The University of Ljubljana, the Faculty of Education, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the National Institute for Education, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, the National School for Leadership in Education, and the National Examinations Centre.

12 The National School for Leadership in Education, the National Institute for Education, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, the Education and National Examinations Centre, and in cooperation with 32 development and pilot schools.

developed. An extension of the project was planned in order to obtain additional funding for its implementation and dissemination.¹³

In the monograph, *Kakovost v šolstvu v Sloveniji* [Quality in Education in Slovenia], evaluations of the system were also recommended. The elements established can be found in the *National Framework for Quality Assessment and Quality Assurance in Education*. One part contains an assessment and evaluation of data such as demographic trends, investment in education, student performance, and similar., as well as an evaluation of schools' self-evaluation reports. In addition, external evaluations, national evaluation studies and research projects are planned in order to provide additional insight into the quality of the system.

Reflections on the past and present

In addition to an overview of milestones drawing on the analysed documents and processes outlined above, seven semi-structured interviews were prepared and conducted in November 2020 to reflect the current and future challenges in QA in education in Slovenia, building on continuities and discontinuities of the last two decades

Experts interviewed have all been, and some still are, personally involved in the structuring of the QA system; the interviewees are also all experts from public institutions in the field of education: the National Institute of Education, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, the National School for Leadership in Education, the National Examinations Centre, and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

The methodology used for the interviews follows the Bourdieu approach (Bourdieu, 1989, 1999) to reflect on the processes of QA in education in the light of the rationality of the field and institutional practices and its agents. The presented section of the interviews is based on the parts of the interviews that contribute to the understanding of the common, current challenges for QA in Slovenia. The interviewees¹⁴ were asked to share their expert experience on the beginnings of QA, its development, and its current state of affairs. The interviews highlighted four complementary problems that can help us to understand the drawbacks of QA in Slovenia today: governance of quality at the system level, the financing of quality, the issues of quality theory and research

13 Funding has so far been held back due to the current priority of managing the consequences of COVID-19.

14 The interviewees answers will be presented anonymously, using the alphabetical order of the interviews as they were performed, from interviewee A to G.

in relation to policymaking, and the aspect of collaboration. These will be presented in the next sections as possible axes of current or future attempts to regulate the QA in education in Slovenia.

Regulating quality at the system level

The general consensus among the respondents is that quality in education must be regulated at the level of the system, or as interviewee C put it: 'Concern for quality should be seen as the quality of the functioning of the system itself.' (C)

There seems to be a lack of common stirring, which includes defining quality and aligning the existing mechanism into a functional whole. Consequently, a number of interrelated aspects of the problem occur. The first problem is twofold and concerns the role of both expertise and coordination. With regard to expert knowledge, expert A summarises: 'We are full of words about quality and equity, but we systematically avoid formally defining how we understand quality, what it is and should be; we have avoided defining it for twenty years, as it is difficult to measure and define.' (A)

With regard to coordination, different but similar concerns were expressed; for example, interviewee C points out: 'We are dealing with quality at different levels of education. In schools, we still need a broader framework, otherwise we are just shifting the emphasis without a specific direction or goal.' (C) Similarly, expert B reflects: 'At the level of public institutions or individuals, we cannot do much for the system. It should be a joint commitment, but we do not have the power to do it, we cannot do it.' (B) Expert D adds the necessity of communication: 'The various activities in schools are not coordinated because we simply do not have adequate communication with each other. Regular communication and cooperation should be the Ministry's concern, as they are the ones who should govern the system, not us.' (D)

The experts feel that without systemic recognition of the work being done by schools and public institutions, their efforts are not validated. The dissatisfaction is expressed by expert E: 'The quality system has been in place for some time, but lacks adequate appropriation and recognition by the Ministry. After the last project was completed, the Ministry again failed to anchor the project results at the system level, which meant that the necessary changes in legislation had to be adopted, the results approved by the Quality Council, etc. In this way, the results would receive recognition.' (E)

Due to the longstanding lack of steering, there is an emerging discrepancy between legislation and what goes on at schools. One of the statements

summarises the problem: 'Legislation is not adapted to what goes on in schools.' (E)

The more critical statements concern governance and policy, and go beyond the issues of QA. Expert A expresses the frustrations: 'This is bad policy. There is no continuity. There is a lack of understanding of the need for long-term education policy plans that are not exclusively linked to this or that government.' (A)

Similarly, expert F comments: 'With no government on the side of the Ministry and a lack of communication and communication between public institutions, quality is seen as a partial concept, not as a whole.' (F)

Looking back and assessing which periods have been productive for developing QA, some of the interviewees believe that success is too closely linked to politics. Interviewee E, for example, sees this not only as the problem of specific persons in positions but the way the system works: 'The leaders of public institutions have too much room to pursue their own interests.' (F). Nevertheless, as interviewee G explains: 'Politics has an important role to play. When Dr Makovec Brenčič was minister, we had progress but quality was part of the coalition agreement of that government.' (G)

Financing of quality in education

In terms of financial regulation, mechanisms for regulating QA in education are seen as problematic.

QA in education is mainly financed via various projects. Not only the way in which the project outputs are used, but also the inability to assure stable, regular financing of QA development and activities is a problem shared by the experts interviewed. Expert E assesses the situation as follows: 'The quality depends on European Social Fund (ESF) funding. When projects come to an end, we usually have a funding gap of at least a year, during which time not much can happen. This has happened at least two or three times so far.' (E)

Expert B shares similar concerns: 'There are advantages and disadvantages of ESF project funding. It looks as if it will stop again, but it should continue. What effect will this have on schools? In another project, we did something and then again nothing. The message is not good.' (B)

The consequences are reflected in a similar way: 'Symptomatic of this seems to be that actions are postponed, even stopped. This current project proposal should already have been approved by the Ministry's cohesion department, but instead, it has been there for several months. We have no information, but it does not look good. Once again, actions are postponed, stopped ...' (B), expert B adds.

Expert F goes a step further and offers a possible solution to the problems of recognition of work and accounting for the use of project financing beyond the project's lifetime: 'The impact and outcome of projects should be evaluated, monitored and upgraded. It is a question of long-term education policy.' (F)

Some of the experts believe that the way politics and finances are regulated for QA is irresponsible. 'I do not want to sound too critical, but how many projects have there been in the last two decades? How much money has been spent under the quality agenda? Every time a new minister comes, they talk about quality and possible new projects, but you can see that some people who have been working in this area for longer than the minister's new cabinet have grim smiles on their faces. You know how the story ends.' (A)

While all of the experts recognise that stable funding is necessary and is the responsibility of the Ministry, they also recognise that some attempts have been made to ensure more stable funding: 'There have been attempts to ensure regular and stable funding at the level of the system, but they have not got through Parliament. The public institutions involved opted to recruit new staff and did not think that QA could be entrusted to the existing staff. In the end, it involved too much money.' (G) One of the experts also sees another possibility: 'If not through the ESF, we must try to embed quality in the annual work plans of public institutions. This is a fair way to stabilise the area.' (B)

Theory and research in QA

Another aspect of QA problems in education concerns experts and expert knowledge. Some of the experts share the opinion that part of the reason why politics has too much influence on the development of QA is the lack of engagement of researchers and experts in the field of QA. One of the statements sums up part of the topic: 'I am critical of education experts and politicians. Quality is not framed conceptually. This step has not yet been taken. It is clear to me that pedagogy, educational science, is different from other fields, but still these extreme deviations cannot exist. The government changes, and we have a completely new concept. This is due to a lack of consensus and cooperation among experts, and then a new minister comes in or a new interest is put forward on behalf of a particular group. I think that this does not happen in this way in other areas.' (A)

Expert D shares this opinion: 'We need consensus at the societal level and at the level of education experts, and we lack the cooperation of researchers, universities and policymakers at the system level.' (B)

Expert knowledge is seen as important at various levels and in all of the institutions involved. Some of the experts believe that part of the problem is that we need more knowledge on all sides: ‘Coordination by the Ministry is necessary, but not sufficient. We need people who understand the issues to move things forward.’ (G) Instead of expert knowledge, we have managers and bureaucrats, Expert F believes: ‘We have this bureaucratic discourse that determines QA, there is no knowledge about education, quality in terms of content. Then non-experts, bureaucrats decide what is important, necessary, good. Education experts do not have the appropriate place.’ (F)

However, some of the experts interviewed have different emphases and views on expert knowledge about QA in education and its use, from emphasising management to various ideas on where and how data should be used regarding the content of QA discourse:

One expert believes: ‘Quality must be a rationality of management; it must be embedded in the way we do things. The results should be used to adapt the way we manage things. We do not have a long-term plan, and reforms are overdue. Here and there is a document, for example, a White Paper. Nobody takes it seriously, it is not properly discussed, we do not talk about it ...’ (D)

There is also a need for data that could bring an additional dimension to the way quality is assured. While none of the experts deny the productivity of data, only a few recognise the importance of the need to use data. Expert D states: ‘We need data, we need research. Without data, you cannot govern the system, and then you can combine with qualitative data to develop knowledge and understanding and make informed decisions.’ The same interviewee goes on to add: ‘There is this perception that data, statistics lie, that quality cannot be measured. If that were true, why do countries with a developed and stable system collect data? Databases are necessary.’ (D)

Some of the experts also detected shifts taking place internationally in the discourse on QA. ‘Having attended international conferences and events for some time, I can see a shift in focus from discussions on employability and efficiency to more general educational issues.’ (E)

Concerning problems of government – or lack of government – as well as the lack of a functioning system of QA, the basic problems of teachers’ positions, adequate teaching materials, and similar have become an issue related to QA. Some of the experts are concerned that without elementary inputs at the level of schools, teaching, and learning, QA is an empty promise. Expert F, explains: ‘There seems to be a need to rethink the basic elements of school

education in terms of quality, such as curricula, textbooks, and so on. These are all elements of quality teaching and learning.' (F)

Collaboration

Collaboration is a much-discussed topic among the experts interviewed, and it is recognised as an important aspect in the development of QA. All of the experts agree on the need for more collaboration, not just amongst teachers and schools, but also between public institutions, universities and the ministry.

For example: 'We need collaboration in order to efficiently combine everything we have produced over the last twenty years.' (B) Moreover: 'We need to build institutional collaboration to ensure quality in an appropriate manner.' (D) 'Communication is essential, and we must believe in the idea – we must show that it works.' (C) 'Collaboration is the only way to build trust.' (E)

Various examples and suggestions for improving collaboration were also mentioned in the interviews. As an example of good practice, QA activities at the EU level were mentioned:

'The EU is a different story, a different way of communicating. We discuss things a lot, share experiences, think about future developments. We have to report and not just tick numbers and boxes, but be very detailed in terms of content.' (D)

'We need events to meet, to discuss things. Separately for the existing schools and for the system issues. These are two different issues.' (D)

'You cannot address questions of the system in the same way as questions concerning schools. Schools can, of course, make a contribution, but the focus must be separate.' (E)

Old problems persist

While most of the problems have been identified in previous attempts to structure QA (Gaber et al., 2011, p. 52–61; The National Framework for Quality Assessment and Quality Assurance in Education, 2017), there seems to be little progress. Governing QA appears to be part of broader problems in terms of how governance is understood. In terms of the security dispositive (Foucault, 2008b, 2009), it looks as if we have reached the limits of the extremes inherent in neoliberal regulative ideas of instrumental interest and the lack of value-based commitments in education (Biesta, 2010, 2013). This is reflected in the way policy is made and is related to an issue that goes beyond the scope of the present paper (Štremfel, 2016). Nevertheless, the problem concerns the

way education policy and QA policy is made and managed, concerning which the problems of individuals in decision-making positions are only part of the problem. This is reflected in both the substantive development of QA and the financial aspect of governance. However, both aspects have the same common claim: the need for collaboration and long-term planning of aims and goals in education that provide stability and security of the system at all levels. In this light, research and expertise should have a proper place concerning political and managerial or bureaucratic agendas. The latter are criticised as problematic as they offer a false sense of security while problems within education and its place in changing societies are left on the sidelines (Alvesson, 2014; Biesta, 2010, 2013; Wallerstein et al., 2013). For Slovenia, this, in turn, means the likelihood of lagging behind in comparison to Western education systems.

While struggling with the old problems, the potential of the QA mechanism itself is being undervalued in terms of its productive abilities to meet the educational needs of the present and the future.

Concluding remarks

Despite the gaps and sometimes pessimistic views on the current state of affairs in QA in education, it seems that the regulative notion of quality has been embedded in the rationality of institutions and individuals in education. Also, the problems put forth in the interviewees seem to support the idea and the need for the development of quality in education (in the past as well as in the future) and emphasise the need for collaboration on different levels. This is also seen in the light of the future challenges in education and society during the COVID-19 pandemic; it seems that collaboration is an emerging rationality of security in education and society. Collaboration and collective commitments are recognised for their productive contribution to the stability and security of societies, education, and individuals even by international players such as the OECD (e.g., PISA, 2018), while extreme competition and individualism is no longer the only rational and possible option. (e.g., Castells, 2012; Rifkin, 2007, 2015; Wallerstein et al., 2013). The problematic put forth thorough developments of QA in Slovenia, and those emphasised by the experts interviewed, seem to be a part of much-needed discussions aimed at examining and building new educational realities, taking into account the lessons learned.

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A New Image of Preschool Institutions in Slovenia: Conceptual, Systemic and Curricular Backgrounds

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☞ Until their conceptual, systemic and substantive reform in the 1990s, preschool institutions in Slovenia were recognised predominantly as care institutions, on the one hand, and as “preparatory institutions” for school or pre-primary school, on the other. This paper presents an analysis of preschool education in Slovenia based on theoretical starting points, international comparative analyses of quality indicators for preschool education and curricular documents, as well as the results of Slovenian and foreign empirical research on early child development and learning. The analysis was conducted from the viewpoint of conceptual, systemic and curricular solutions. In particular, we emphasise the need to update the *Curriculum for Preschool* and resolve any professional dilemmas related to the efficiency and equity of preschool. In conclusion, we specifically highlight certain possibilities for improvements in Slovenian preschool education.

Keywords: sociocultural theories, quality of preschool, preschool curriculum, efficiency and equity

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Nova podoba slovenskih vrtcev: konceptualna, sistemska in kurikularna ozadja

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☞ Slovenski vrtci so bili do konceptualne, sistemske in vsebinske preno-ve v devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja na eni strani prepoznani kot prevladujoče varstvene ustanove, po drugi strani pa kot pripravjalnica za šolo oziroma pošolani vrtci. V prispevku na podlagi teoretičnih izho-dišč, mednarodnih primerjalnih analiz kazalnikov kakovosti predšolske vzgoje v vrtcih ter kurikularnih dokumentov, izsledkov slovenskih in tu-jih empiričnih raziskav o zgodnjem razvoju in učenju otrok analiziramo predšolsko vzgojo v slovenskih vrtcih z vidika konceptualnih, sistem-skih in kurikularnih rešitev. Posebej poudarimo nujnost posodobitve Kurikuluma za vrtce ter strokovne dileme, ki so povezane z učinkovito-stjo in s pravičnostjo vrtcev. V zaključku poudarimo nekatere možnosti za izboljšanje predšolske vzgoje v slovenskih vrtcih.

Ključne besede: sociokulturne teorije, kakovost vrtcev, Kurikulum za vrtce, učinkovitost in pravičnost

Introduction

In the decades after the Second World War, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, significant positive developments occurred in Slovenian preschool education, going both in the direction of systemic and substantive solutions. Especially with the expansion of the network of preschool institutions in the 1970s, an increasing number of toddlers and children were included in unified public preschool institutions for children of all ages, and the share of children included increased from around 40% to 50% between the beginning and the end of the 1980s. Partly by offering all-day programmes lasting from 8 to 10 hours, preschool institutions successfully followed the relatively high proportion of employed women, taking over childcare while parents were at work. In 1971, preschool institutions were included in their first independent legal act. The initial, predominant role of childcare and the significant medicalisation of preschool institutions changed with the adoption of the *Educational Programme for the Upbringing and Care of Preschool Children* (Educational programme, 1979), which was the first state-approved programme for preschool institutions, followed by the *Educational Programme for Preparing Children for Primary School* (Educational programme, 1981), which was intended for children a year before entering school and was compulsory for all children, either in full-year form or in a shortened pre-primary school. Both programmes were based on biologicistic and normative views on childhood, or on developmental psychological theories that emphasise developmental milestones or ages at which all or most children acquire certain skills and abilities, and demonstrate expected behaviours. As a result, the programmes defined in detail the objectives and content for each age group of toddlers/children, while at the implementation level the programmes largely followed school work organisation, such as detailed scheduling of planned activities, routines, outdoor activities, sleep and meals. In the *Educational Programme for Preparing Children for Primary School* (Educational programme, 1981), content related to the acquisition of academic skills dominated.

In the 1990s, after Slovenia gained independence, both political and economic changes, as well as changes in governance and new scientific and professional views on education and the implementation of the concept of children's rights, demanded a reform of the entire education system, including preschool education in preschool institutions (Starting points of curriculum renewal, 1996; White paper, 1995).

The purpose of the present paper is to examine how the conceptual, systemic and curricular changes that took place in the second half of the 1990s and

later followed contemporary, mainly sociocultural views concerning childhood and preschool education, and to understand individual differences in children's development and learning, including factors such as family and the wider social environment. We are also interested in how increasing the percentage of children enrolled in preschool and assessing the quality of preschool education are linked to ensuring the efficiency and fairness of preschool.

Modern conceptions of the child, childhood and preschool

Newer notions of the child and childhood, learning and education, as well as preschool and its effectiveness and equity are mainly related to the assertion of the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, Bruner and their contemporaries, such as Karpov (2005), Astington (2000), Olson and Torrance (1996). In the introduction to the first English translation of Vygotsky's book *Thinking and Speaking*, Bruner wrote: "Vygotsky's conception of development is at the same time a theory of education" (Bruner, 1962, p. viii). Vygotsky described a child who is not a small version of an adult, but rather a person whose thinking works "in a different way, using different means" (Yudina, 2007, p. 4). In one of his last texts, entitled *The Problem of Age*, he noted: "A child's chronological age is not a credible or reliable criterion for determining the current stage of development" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 192). At the baseline, he agreed with Piaget that a child's development takes place through developmental stages and that his or her thinking at each subsequent developmental stage is more logical. However, Vygotsky defined developmental stages more flexibly regarding age and emphasised the great influence of the social and cultural environment as well as learning in the individual's development (Vygotsky, 1981, 2010).

Below we present some key highlights from sociocultural theories, such as developmental stages, teaching and learning in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), collaborative learning, learning by imitation and inclusion, symbolic child play, shared reading, language, children's communicative and metalanguage abilities, social and cultural context, and the continuum in development and learning or emergent abilities (e.g., Bodrova & Leong, 2007; 2015; Cheyne & Tarulli, 2005; van Oers, 2007; Wertsch, 2000). In Slovenia, these theories were more or less successfully integrated into the conceptual and substantive solutions of preschool education in preschool institutions during the reform of preschool in the second half of the 1990s.

The *Curriculum for Preschool* (Curriculum for preschool, 1999) as a national document for work in preschool institutions, replaced the previously

valid documents the *Educational Programme for the Upbringing and Care in Preschool Children* and the *Educational Programme for Preparing Children for Primary School*. The shift in the conception of the child and childhood and in educational concepts is already reflected in the replacement of the term educational programme with the term curriculum. The term preschool curriculum is broad and in addition to planned activities also includes all other activities and interactions, the spatial and temporal distribution of activities, and the hidden curriculum. Unlike previous documents, the curriculum defines objectives in all six areas (movement, language, art, society, nature and mathematics) for children of the first age group (ages 1 to 3) and the second age group (ages 3 to 6). Only certain examples of activities are determined, separately for the first and second age groups. The curriculum is a partially structured document that includes the transition from content-oriented to goal-oriented and process-development planning of educational work (Kroflič, 2001).

The curriculum also incorporates the modern concept of readiness for school, which takes place as a readiness for learning at all ages of toddlers and children (Kruger & Tomasello, 1996; Marjanovič Umek, 2016; Stipek, 2002; Watson, 1996) and not just the year before entering school as preparation for school. Cheyne and Tarulli (2005) point out that knowledge is generally understood as knowledge formed in emergent processes, and not just at a particular chronological age of children. The results of several empirical studies (e.g., Marjanovič Umek et al., 2006; Marjanovič Umek, 2016; Marxell & Clifford, 2004; Stipek, 2002) confirm that a child's age is not a key factor that could in itself determine whether or not the child is ready to enter school. There are a number of other factors, among which particular mention should be made of the education of the parents of children included in preschool, the school programme, and the intellectual and language competences of children.

The curriculum and the planning of educational work in preschool

In the two decades since its introduction, the implementation of the *Curriculum for Preschool* has not been systematic, methodical or directly monitored (e.g., Pajntar Cotič & Zore, 2018).

The results of individual studies presented below indicate certain shortcomings in the *Curriculum for Preschool* at both the written and implemented level, while the comparative analysis of Slovenian and specific new foreign curricula provides an insight into the similarities and differences between curricular documents.

In an extensive longitudinal study, researchers (Marjanovič Umek & Fe-konja, 2008; Zupančič & Kavčič, 2007) assessed the impact of preschool on various areas of child development and school performance. The area of language was one of the more critical areas. Children who entered preschool at about one year of age were rated by their parents and preschool teachers as more sociable and with stronger willpower than those who entered preschool later, at about three years of age. At the same time, it emerged that preschool itself did not have a significant impact on children's language development. There were no significant differences in language competence between children who had entered preschool at the age of one and those who had entered preschool at the age of three, except among children whose parents had a low level of education. If rated as a quality institution, preschool compensated for some of the shortcomings in language development of children whose mothers had a low level of education and came from a less supportive family environment. In all four consecutive assessments of children's language, the mother's education was a more important factor than the age of the toddlers/children at the time of enrolment in preschool. Preschool did not have a significant influence on the language of children of mothers with higher education and a favourable family environment, which means that children who were included in preschool at the age of one or later achieved comparable results in language tests.

Relatively large differences between preschool institutions, as well as between groups within the same preschool institutions, are seen in the results obtained in research on the quality of preschool at the process level. Case studies of preschool self-evaluation (Marjanovič Umek et al., 2005) showed that most preschool institutions achieved a medium level of quality, and that only one preschool institution achieved exceptional quality in both the first and second age groups. A lower process quality was assessed particularly in the area of encouraging toddlers' language in classes for the first age period. Educators rarely encouraged infants to speak in routine activities such as eating, preparing for bed and staying outdoors.

The area recognised as the most critical was the promotion of language in toddlers and children, especially in the first age groups, where various activities (e.g., eating, sleep routine, outdoor activities) offered possibilities for language development in toddlers/children.

The question of whether the curriculum should include more modern texts with an in-depth explanation of the conditions, methods and approaches to promote the development and learning of toddlers and children, or whether continuous professional education should be strengthened or undergraduate education of preschool teachers modernised remains open.

The results of several studies show that additional training of preschool teachers has a significant impact on the quality of educational work with children. Israeli researchers (Korat et al., 2003) studied symbolic play as a context for the development of early literacy in children aged five and a half to six years. The researchers were curious as to how preschool teachers can follow the principles of promoting the development and learning of children in the ZPD when engaging in children's play. For this purpose, the preschool teachers first spent two months educating themselves on topics from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as well as the implementation of theory in practice. After the period of the training, the researchers observed, recorded and analysed how the preschool teachers guided the symbolic play of children in preschool groups. They found significant changes in the involvement of the preschool teachers in play and its management in the ZPD of children, while the children successfully used several symbolic notations in symbolic play with different content: drawing, and writing numbers and letters. Similarly, Slovenian authors (Marjanovič Umek et al., 2019; Marjanovič Umek et al., 2018) found that preschool teachers successfully incorporated knowledge acquired during a two-month in-service training – specifically, content on language development and learning and early literacy in a broader sociocultural context, the impact of activities such as symbolic play, reading together, speaking with children, and children's language development and early literacy – into additional activities carried out during planned work and the hidden curriculum, with children aged five to six years. Since the study had two basic objectives – to assess the short-term and long-term effects of additional activities in the promotion of early literacy of children – all of the children included in the study were evaluated three times (twice while in preschool, before and immediately after additional activities, and for the third time the following year at the end of the first grade) in several areas of early literacy: graphomotor skills, metalinguistic awareness and storytelling. The results of the study showed, among other things, that the children made significant progress in all areas of early literacy during the first and second evaluations, and that the children who made more progress in graphomotor skills and metalanguage awareness between the first and second evaluations also showed better graphomotor skills and higher metalanguage awareness at the end of the first grade of primary school. The progress was maintained until the end of the first grade. However, this was not true for children's storytelling, as the progress made in this area was not maintained to the end of the first grade of primary school.

Reviewing curricular documents in countries such as Norway (Framework Plan for Kindergartens, 2017), Sweden (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2018), Finland (National Core

Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2019) and Iceland (The Icelandic National Curriculum Guides for Preschools, 2011), which have an organisation comparable to preschool education in Slovenia, i.e., a unified preschool and recognised high-quality preschool education, shows that in these countries curricula are regularly updated at intervals of less than ten years. Curricular documents are structured in different ways and are extensive, but they all include defined basic principles and objectives of preschool education and areas of activity, and specifically highlight play as a method of learning in preschool. The areas of activity are comparable, albeit differently named: language and early literacy; movement and health; the natural, social and cultural environment; and artistic expression. All of these areas are generally also included in the Slovenian curriculum. Based on more detailed comparisons of content and activities in different areas, and taking into account the results of certain aforementioned Slovenian studies, we must point out the weakness of the area of language, which should include some more modern objectives, more detailed placement of language in a broader sociocultural context, and derived connections in the direction of early (also digital) literacy of toddlers/children. Specialists in specific areas should therefore update the language area in the *Curriculum for Preschool*, as well as all other areas that were written more than twenty years ago and today no longer fully reflect the development of individual scientific disciplines and the understanding of the early development and learning of toddlers/children.

The issue of children's entry into school or postponement of compulsory schooling, which has been recorded in Slovenia in the last ten years, could also affect changes in the curriculum document, probably in the direction of greater adjustment of objectives and activities to the objectives and standards of knowledge of the first grade or the first triad of primary school. In Slovenia, statistical data on enrolment in preschool and school show that the share of compulsory school children who postpone schooling for one year is growing significantly. For example, five years ago, 6% of first-graders were seven-year-olds, compared to 11.7% in the 2019/20 school year (Statistical information: Education, 2020). Adapting the curriculum, in particular adapting the operational objectives for older preschool children to the standards of knowledge in the first grade of primary school, would be a step backwards from the modern notion of children's readiness for school. While in Slovenia the reasons for delayed schooling have not been systematically studied, the authors of studies in other countries recording similar trends in the non-inclusion of children of compulsory school age in school (e.g., Dunlop, 2003; Stipek, 2002; Watson, 1996) note that the implicit theories of parents and preschool teachers about the notion of childhood

and early learning is largely to blame. These theories concern creating the myth about a happy childhood, about childhood as a time of play, about school being too demanding and “putting pressure” on children, about greater success of children who join school a year later, and the like. However, research findings (e.g., Bickel et al., 1991; Stipek & Byler, 2001) confirm that postponing schooling for a year does not in itself bring general added value to children’s development and performance, and that any initial differences between younger and older pupils in the first grade of primary school even out relatively quickly.

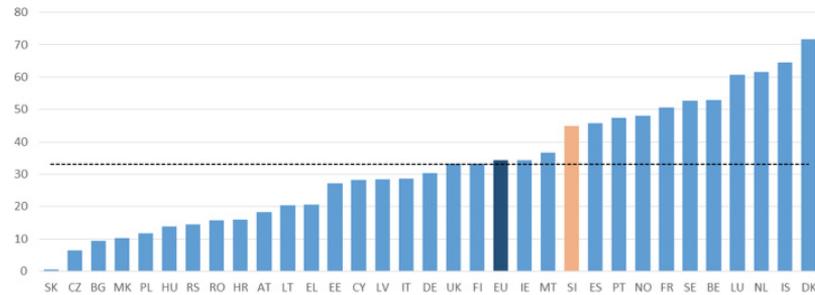
Between the efficiency and equity of preschool

One of the indicators of equity of preschool in terms of ensuring equal opportunities is the share of children included in preschool. Preschool is not compulsory, but should be accessible to all toddlers/children, regardless of their age or their parents’ level of education, including children of migrants, children with special needs, children of working parents and those with one or both parents unemployed, as well as both rural and urban children.

In Slovenia, as in most European countries, the share of children of all ages included in preschool has increased significantly in the last ten years. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (Statistical information: Education, 2020), in the 2019/20 school year, 82.7% of children aged one to five were included in Slovenian preschool institutions: 67.5% of toddlers aged one and two years, and 94.1% of children aged from four years to school entry. Over the last decade, the inclusion of toddlers/children of all ages has increased by a quarter, inclusion of toddlers up to three years of age by 17.5%, and the inclusion of children aged four and five by 6%. The share of Slovenian toddlers/children included in preschool compared to other EU countries (Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe, 2019), prepared for 2017, shows that in Slovenia a higher proportion of toddlers of up to three years of age are included in preschool than the EU average (34%) (Figure 1), while the share of children aged from four to school entry included in Slovenia is 92.1% and is lower than the EU average (95.4%) (Figure 2).

Figure 1

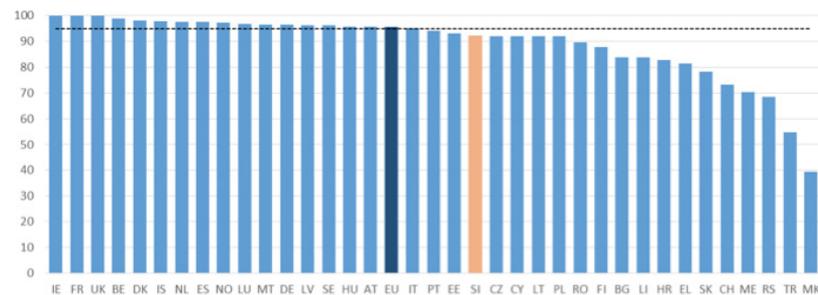
Shares of toddlers up to three years of age included in preschool (data for 2017)



Note. The dotted line shows the recommendation of the Council of Europe for 2020, i.e., 33% inclusion of toddlers up to the age of three. Adapted from Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe, 2019.

Figure 2

Shares of toddlers aged from four years to school entry included in preschool (data for 2017)



Note. The dotted line shows the recommendation of the Council of Europe for 2020, i.e., 95% inclusion of children from the age of four until they enter school. Adapted from Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe, 2019.

As can be seen from the comparative data, Slovenia exceeded 33% inclusion of children in preschool in 2017, and is nearing 95% inclusion of children aged from four years to school entry (92.1% in 2017, 94.1% in 2020).

The growing share of toddlers up to the age of three included in preschool is important from several points of view. Neuroscience findings (e.g., Bruer, 1999) confirm that sensitive periods in infant and toddler development are based on early brain development in terms of structure and function, as well as

on an understanding of the role of education and parenting, which provide a stimulating (symbolic and emotional) environment for early learning. This is therefore the time when the development of infants/toddlers is the most rapid and their learning most efficient; the experience gained during this period is intense, long-term and irreversible. At the same time, both Slovenian and foreign studies (Marjanovič Umek & Fekonja Peklaj, 2008; Sylva et al., 2004; Zupančič & Kavčič, 2007) confirm that if toddlers are included in preschool as early as the age of two or three, it has a positive effect on current development and learning as well as on the subsequent development of academic skills and knowledge. In Slovenia, the share of employed parents (especially mothers) of children of all ages is high. In 2017, the employment rate of mothers aged 25 to 54 with one child in Slovenia was 84% (10% higher than the EU average), while the share of mothers with two children was 88% (15% higher than the EU average), and with three or more children was just over 80% (23% higher than the EU average) (Statistične informacije. Materinski dan, 2019). A comparative analysis made for EU and EEA countries (data for 2005) showed that in Slovenia the difference between the share of employed mothers of three-year-olds and the share of three-year-olds included in preschool was among the highest (Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities, 2009).

The data given in several studies shows that in Slovenia, as in other EU countries, the share of toddlers/children of all ages included in preschool is gradually increasing. At the same time, the results of studies (although not fully comparable in terms of the children's age and the methodology used) show that in Slovenia there is a trend of reducing differences in the inclusion of toddlers/children in preschool according to parents' education or family environment.

Data collected in the study *Working for Inclusion* (2010) relate to the inclusion of toddlers in 2005. Compared to other European countries, there is significant inequality in Slovenia between the shares of toddler mothers with a different level of education, in favour of toddler mothers with higher education. The share of toddlers included in preschool whose mothers have a low level of education was 11% lower than the share of toddlers whose mothers have a high level of education, whereas in some countries, such as Denmark, Sweden and Finland, the differences were very minor.

Subsequent analysis of statistical data collected in the EU-SILCV database (Podlesek et al., 2010), which includes data for toddlers and older preschool children for 2008, showed, among other things, that the proportion of toddlers included in preschool whose mothers have a low level of education is 20% lower than the share of mothers with a high level of education, while the share

of children aged three to six included in preschool whose mothers have a low level of education is 9% lower than the share of mothers with a high level of education.

The results of a comparative analysis conducted within the OECD (*Education at a Glance, 2018*) show that in all of the countries involved, the proportions of toddlers (aged three years and younger) included in preschool of mothers with higher education are higher than the proportions of included toddlers of mothers with less than a university degree. The data valid for 2014 shows that Slovenia is one of the countries that has a medium-high share of all toddlers included in preschool, and the difference between the group of toddlers of mothers with higher education and those with less than higher education is small (5%) and statistically insignificant. High involvement and relatively small differences between groups according to the mother's education are recorded in Norway and Denmark, for example, while extremely low involvement and small differences between groups of mothers according to education are recorded in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Differences in the inclusion of toddlers according to their parents' education, with a high level of inclusion of toddlers in preschool, are large in the Netherlands and Belgium, for example, while there is low inclusion of toddlers in Austria and Poland. The data also show that the majority of mothers of toddlers with higher education include the toddler in preschool at a younger age than mothers of toddlers with low education. In Slovenia, as in Turkey, the USA and Slovakia, the share of mothers with higher education whose toddlers were included in preschool for two years or more is as much as 18% higher than the share of toddlers with mothers with a low level of education.

The data collected in a comparative study in which researchers deal with the fairness of school systems (*An Unfair Start, 2018*) also show a relatively favourable ratio for Slovenia in terms of inclusion in preschool of children from two different groups: children from the fifth of the poorest and the fifth of the richest families. Data for 2016 shows that among the 29 countries surveyed, there are 16 countries in which the difference in the proportion of children aged three years and more belonging to the groups of the poorest and the richest families was statistically significant, always in favour of children from the richest families. In Slovenia, the difference between the two groups of children is relatively small (8%) and is not statistically significant. The differences are the largest (over 40%) in Croatia and Bulgaria, where the inclusion of children in preschool is low, and the smallest in Iceland and Belgium (from 2 to 3%), where the inclusion of children in preschool is high.

In Slovenia, the differences between the shares of toddlers/children included in preschool based on their parents' education are decreasing. As the

share of toddlers/children of parents with low education is still lower than the share of toddlers/children of parents with higher education, and as the regional distribution of the share of all toddlers/children included in preschool is uneven (The proportion of children included in preschool institutions, 2020), more detailed information needs to be obtained as to why some parents do not choose to include their toddlers/children in preschool. There are probably several factors involved. One of them is the influence of implicit theories of parents about the development and learning of children, because, as a rule, less educated parents also have less knowledge about early development and learning of toddlers/children and the possible support of preschool in their development and learning (e.g., Marjanovič Umek et al, 2016).

One group of children exempt from the preparation and adoption of appropriate systemic (financial, personnel) and substantive solutions in preschool is the group of immigrant children. With only a framework document entitled *Guidelines for the Inclusion of Immigrant Children in Preschool Institutions and Schools* (2012), working with these children is left entirely to the individual preschool.

A high quality preschool that is recognised as having a positive impact on the current and long-term development and learning of children, particularly those from less supportive family backgrounds, includes both fairness and efficiency. In the last ten years, determining and ensuring the quality of preschool education in preschool institutions has been increasingly linked to efficiency, which is assessed in terms of the benefits of preschool education for the development of human capital or the labour market, or as an investment in people in early life (e.g., Heckman, 2012). A broad-based study entitled the *International Early Learning and Child Well-Being Study (IELS)*, which was developed within the OECD (OECD, 2015), includes internationally comparable assessment of the results of children's learning in five-year-old children in the following areas: self-regulation, oral language/emergent literacy, emergent mathematics/numeracy, executive function, focus of control, and social skills. Several purposes of the study have been determined: providing an in-depth insight into the development and learning of children at an early age, which is the most sensitive age regarding development and learning, as well as regarding influencing the improvement of preschool education programmes; assessing areas identified as predictors of later academic skills and life outcomes through comparisons of the children's results in the *IELS* with the results of other international comparative knowledge studies, such as *PISA*, *PIRLS* and *TIMSS*, leading to greater efficiency of the global market. Several researchers (e.g., Hočevar & Kovač Šebart, 2018; Moss et al., 2016; Moss & Urban, 2017; Urban, 2017) have responded critically to the standardised

assessment process of five-year-olds, as well as to the definition of early learning outcomes and their connection with the learning outcomes of *PISA*, which, in the authors' opinion, directly or indirectly leads to the identification of only one "real" teaching process in preschool (or one real teaching pedagogy), direct preparation of children for assessment of learning areas as defined in the *IELS* and in the direction of the scholarisation of preschool. Urban (2017) specifically points out that with the *IELS* study, the OECD deviated from the starting points and guidelines published in the publications *Starting Strong I* (OECD, 2001) and *Starting Strong II* (OECD, 2006), which highlight both the need to assess the quality of preschool education in conjunction with national curricula and the diversity in the definition of quality indicators and approaches for the self-evaluation of preschool institutions.

Once the *Curriculum for Preschool* was introduced in Slovenia, the conceptualisation of the quality of preschool education followed. Taking into account the concept of the Slovenian curriculum, Marjanovič Umek et al. (2002) formed a comprehensive model of the quality of preschool education in preschool institutions, which includes three levels of quality: structural (e.g., organisation of work and life in preschool), indirect (e.g., collaboration between employees) and process (e.g., direct educational work with children). The authors, who emphasised the importance of process quality in the model, also designed assessment aids for assessing indicators at this level (observation sheets, assessment scales, screening tests and partially structured interviews with children) (Marjanovič Umek et al., 2002; Marjanovič Umek et al., 2005). The solutions obtained in the project were later not recognised at the national level as systemic solutions or as a supplement to the curriculum (both possible solutions are recognised abroad, e.g., in England, Norway and Iceland); however, several other projects followed that conceptualised the quality of preschool education within the broader framework of identifying and ensuring the quality of the entire education system and to a large extent under the influence of the school environment and the assessment of pupil's knowledge standards. In the project *Kakovost v izobraževanju* (Quality in Education, 2019), which has taken place in Slovenia in recent years under the auspices of the National School of Leadership in Education, preschool institutions have again, at least partly, re-established recognition of and connection with the *Curriculum for Preschool*. As quality standards, the project defines results (outcomes) in the development and learning of children in the context of process quality in preschool; for example, children develop language competences; children develop emergent literacy.

In Slovenia, the concept of determining and ensuring the quality of preschool at the national level is still not integrated into systemic and substantive

solutions, and consequently lacks a basis for directing preschool education in preschool institutions, at the level of both structural and process quality. Since even the structural quality indicators – the size of preschool groups, the ratio between professional staff and toddlers/children in the group, and the education of professional staff in preschool, which were defined as universal in the comparative studies *Starting Strong I* (2001) – are not properly integrated into the overall concept of quality and the understanding of the relationship between structural and process quality in Slovenia (e.g., Kajonius & Kazeni, 2016), individual indicators have been the subject of political discussions and consequent attempts to reduce financial investment funds for preschool education in preschool institutions.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of international comparative analyses of preschool quality indicators and curricular documents, as well as Slovenian and foreign research on the short-term and long-term effects of preschool on children's development and learning, Slovenian preschool can be assessed as high quality. Nevertheless, some solutions – conceptual, systemic and substantive – are less appropriate and need to be supplemented or updated, while others are even missing and need to be included in legislation, regulations or curricular documents.

More than twenty years have passed since the adoption of the *Curriculum for Preschool*, so there is a need to review and update both the structure and content of the curriculum, particularly certain principles, preschool activity fields and specific objectives in activity fields. In addition to updating the objectives relating to the promotion of children's development and learning in various areas, the curriculum should also pursue long-term objectives, such as the development of an autonomous, responsible, critical and creative individual. As in its preparation in 1999, the updating of the curriculum should be based on an interdisciplinary approach that allows for a high level of professionalism in the preparation of objectives and activities in individual fields, while at the same time considering the target group of toddlers and children in early childhood. All proposed updates should also be examined by preschool educators, managers and counsellors.

The question of the increase in the percentage of school-age children not included in school in Slovenia over the past ten years also needs to be examined. If professional answers to this question cannot be provided, it may be that the renewal of the *Curriculum for Preschool* will lead to a greater adaptation of

preschool to school or more “schoolwork”, either in all preschool age groups or in the final year before children enter school (the reintroduction of the school preparation programme). Such starting points would mean a significant departure from the contemporary understanding of transitions between preschool and school, and a departure from understanding the characteristics of early development and learning in toddlers and children.

The question concerning the quality of preschool education also remains open, both on a conceptual and systemic level. As quality indicators are not unambiguously defined at the national level, there is no systemic (self-) evaluation of educational work in preschool practice. (Self-)evaluation with a relatively open curriculum is a necessary basis for maintaining and developing quality work with preschool children as an institution and in preschool groups.

Certain structural quality indicators, particularly the number of children in toddler groups and the ratio between the number of adults and children in all age groups, are some of the obstacles to better quality educational work with toddlers and children. This involves the connection of structural and process quality indicators, which is reflected, for example, in the frequency and quality of social interactions, and communication between adults and toddlers/ children, and consequently in providing a more-or-less safe and stimulating learning environment in preschool.

Given the many new insights into the early development and learning of children, which either directly or indirectly affect the quality of educators’ work with children, there is a need to include more content in the field of curricular theories in terms of in-service preschool teacher education, development and learning in preschool children, and process quality assessment of preschool groups.

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Compulsory Education Reform between the Profession and Policy in the Light of Justice and Equal Opportunities

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Following the adoption of the conceptual design proposed by the White Paper in 1995 and the legislation adopted on this basis, the reform of primary school transformed its overall image. In the present paper, we discuss only some of the solutions and consider the events and changes that have occurred in the last twenty years, devoting special attention to the systemic, programme and process levels. At the systemic level, where the starting point was primarily to ensure justice and equal opportunities, we have managed to maintain an adequate public network and programme structure, despite various attempts to implement the solutions indicated in the White Paper of 2011, and notwithstanding interventions in the system that were not in fact always well thought out. Nonetheless, more attention should have been paid to reducing inequalities related to sociocultural circumstances and different regions in Slovenia. On the programme level, a consensus needs to be reached on what quality general education means to us; this would alleviate conflicting demands placed on teachers, students and planners of programme solutions. On the process level, however, we find that there is a lack of adequate professional support and systematic evaluation studies, as the quality of school cannot be judged solely on the basis of results from international research. In order to take a step forward on the process level, there is need for quality school-linked school policy that is based on various professions and aimed at raising quality rather than at self-promotion and budget cutting in the field of education.

Keywords: compulsory education, systemic solutions, White Paper, general education, process solutions, programme reform, quality, reform processes

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Reforma osnovne šole med stroko in politiko v luči pravičnosti in enakih možnosti

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Reforma osnovne šole po sprejetju konceptualne zasnove v Beli knjigi leta 1995 in na tej podlagi sprejete zakonodaje je preoblikovala njeno celotno podobo. V tem prispevku obravnavamo le nekatere rešitve in tematiziramo dogajanje oziroma spremembe, ki so nastale v zadnjih dvajsetih letih. Posebej obravnavamo sistemski, programski in procesni sklop. Na sistemski ravni, na kateri je bilo izhodišče predvsem zagotavljanje pravičnosti in enakih možnosti, nam je kljub različnim poskusom uveljavljanja rešitev, ki so se nakazovale v Beli knjigi iz leta 2011, in tudi dejansko ne vedno dovolj premišljenih posegih v sistem uspelo ohraniti ustrezno javno mrežo in programsko sestavo. Ne glede na to pa bi morali več pozornosti nameniti zmanjševanju neenakosti, ki so vezane na socialno-kulturne okoliščine in različne regije v Sloveniji. Na programski ravni je treba doseči konsenz glede tega, kaj nam pomeni kakovostna splošna izobrazba; to bi omililo nasprotujoče si zahteve do učiteljev in učiteljic, učencev in učenek ter načrtovalcev in načrtovalk programskih rešitev. Za procesno raven pa ugotavljamo, da nimamo ustrezne strokovne opore niti sistematičnih evalvacijskih študij, saj kakovosti šole ni mogoče presojati le na podlagi rezultatov iz mednarodnih raziskav. Da bi na procesni ravni naredili korak naprej, potrebujemo kakovostni šoli zavezano šolsko politiko, ki se bo oprla na različne stroke in ji bo cilj dvig kakovosti, ne pa samopromocija in varčevanje s proračunskimi sredstvi za področje vzgoje in izobraževanja.

Ključne besede: osnovna šola, sistemske rešitve, Bela knjiga, splošna izobrazba, procesne rešitve, programska reforma, kakovost, reformni procesi

Introduction

In Slovenia in the early 1990s, there was a thorough expert review of the conceptual and systemic solutions that make up the Slovenian education system. This formed the basis for the preparation of legal and curricular or programme solutions, including solutions for compulsory education: a systematic process of monitoring schools was established, funds were provided for financing evaluation studies, and conceptual reflection was undertaken on determining and ensuring the quality of the education system. The legislation also opened the space for the professional autonomy of pedagogical workers on the procedural level (Krek, 1995; Pluško et al., 1999, 2001; Organisation and Financing of Education Act, 1996; Compulsory School Act, 1996).

In the present paper, we review some of the solutions from that time as well as the chronology of and reasons for their modification. We deal separately with systemic, programme or curricular, and procedural solutions, assuming that both *White Papers on Education in the Republic of Slovenia*, from 1995 (Krek, 1995) and 2011 (Krek & Metljak, 2011), respectively, provide a comprehensive expert design for systemic solutions for compulsory education. Those who subsequently prepared programme documents, especially national syllabi, then indicated what knowledge should be acquired by new generations of students in public compulsory education by establishing goals, standards of knowledge and proposed content. Evaluation studies, as well as monitoring undertaken by experts from the National Education Institute of Slovenia, should have systematically and comprehensively engaged with the process aspect, on the understanding that the quality of teaching, knowledge transfer and education in classrooms and schools cannot be judged only on the basis of the quantitative collection of opinions of various stakeholders in the educational process.

All of the solutions followed from the reflection that school is an institution that is closely integrated into the social environment, into a hierarchical social structure, and that it is significantly influenced by the circumstances and relationships of the particular society. It was assumed that the primary task of compulsory education is to impart knowledge, and that it is a case of transferring knowledge from generation to generation regardless of which knowledge-related epistemological and didactic paradigm we advocate, or which concept or strategy we have an affinity for in this reflection (Vidmar, 2011).

The first *White Paper* (Krek, 1995) after Slovenian independence placed the acquisition of a quality general education and the moral educational dimension of school based on human rights and tolerance among the most important goals of the education system. It was based on an understanding that

the demands that we place on students regarding knowledge are legitimate and necessary, and that these demands must be accompanied by high expectations of the state, school, teachers and parents. In this regard, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure all students conditions that enable them to meet these expectations and requirements, regardless of their personal circumstances (Kovač Šebart & Štefanc, 2017a, p. 128).

Systemic solutions of nine-year compulsory education

The *White Paper* (Krek, 1995), published on the conclusion of public debate in January 1995 (Kovač Šebart, 2002), presents the principles and theoretical starting points of the education system in the Republic of Slovenia: the points of departure are the principles of democracy, autonomy and equal opportunity (Ibid., p. 15; Kovač Šebart, 1998). According to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (2018, Art. 26), everyone must have the right to education, which is why at least compulsory education must be financed from public funds. Education must be oriented towards the complete development of the human personality and the consolidation of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Ibid.). In designing an education system, it is also necessary to take into account the specific social conditions and developmental aspirations associated with the requirements for quality and non-repressive school. At the same time, it is emphasised that the education system must enable the achievement of internationally comparable standards of knowledge (Bahovec Dolar et al., 1995). The same starting points or principles were confirmed sixteen years later in the new *White Paper* (Krek & Metljak, 2011).

The systemic solutions for compulsory education were designed, supplemented and substantiated at a number of expert meetings between 1992 and 1994 (Marjanovič Umek & Kovač Šebart, 1995) and formed the basis for the preparation of the new school legislation that was adopted in 1996. The key systemic solutions of nine-year compulsory school (Ibid.) were: entering school at the age of six, structuring compulsory education into three rounded educational periods, descriptive assessment of knowledge in the first educational period and simultaneous descriptive and numerical assessment of knowledge in the second educational period; greater differentiation, including the introduction of streaming within the framework of flexible differentiation from the 4th grade onwards and the introduction of partial external differentiation in the 8th and 9th grades (with well-considered and formally established safeguards against the concomitant drawbacks, cf. Kovač Šebart, 1999); selectivity or elective subjects were enabled in the third educational period; national external assessment of

knowledge at the end of each educational period; and systemic integration of children with special needs (Kovač Šebart, 2002). Justice and ensuring genuine opportunities for students to acquire knowledge and optimal personality formation were important starting points for finding systemic solutions, and the profession agreed virtually unanimously that Slovenia needs to retain a developed public network of schools and build upon its quality (Ibid.).

This was a time of successful endeavours of school policy, resulting in increased budget funding for the education system and a significant rise in teachers' salaries, as well as in the demand for the university education of teachers. Today, it cannot be reasonably disputed that during this period the already developed network of public kindergartens and schools managed to be retained in the new state and its development was facilitated, at least at a basic level. The scenario could have been completely different: the disintegration of the public network of kindergartens and schools; public programmes in the hands of private providers; competition that only apparently provides selectivity and equal opportunities, as children who do not live in larger cities would be nowhere near having equal conditions for inclusion in a quality kindergarten and compulsory school; social differentiation at the institutional level; marked differences in teachers' salaries, etc. We have been able to witness all of this in the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Jerončić, 2016; Inequality in Croatia, 2016; Poverty and inequality, 2015). However, we must not forget that we have had to deal with such tendencies in the school field throughout the post-independence period. They are significantly strengthened by the (also neoliberal) ideology of free choice and offer, the need for competition, etc. (Kovač Šebart, 2012, p. 3).

School legislation was prepared in accordance with the solutions of the *White Paper* (Krek, 1995). The experts who prepared the initial argumentation for the individual solutions were known to both the expert public and the general public, as their names were not concealed (Marjanovič Umek & Kovač Šebart, 1995, pp. 124–125), a practice that was no longer retained after 2004.

With the adoption of school legislation in 1996, the gradual systemic introduction of nine-year compulsory education got underway in Slovenia. The first interventions in the design, the legal solutions and the realisation of nine-year compulsory education occurred in 2001, when the solution for external testing or assessment of knowledge was changed. The ministerial team that prepared this solution failed to defend in public and in the profession the requirement that the grade obtained in the external assessment of knowledge should influence the successful completion of nine-year compulsory education. Soon after, the solution of the simultaneous descriptive and numerical assessment of knowledge in the second three-year period of compulsory education was also

changed. There were even more significant interventions in the systemic solutions of nine-year compulsory education between 2005 and 2007, when there were changes in the areas of external and internal assessment of knowledge, the partial external differentiation of students in the 8th and 9th grades, a reduction in the extent of selectivity, the abolition of general learning success, the introduction of the possibility of flexible organisation of the schedule, an attempt to introduce a second foreign language, etc. (Kovač Šebart, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Kovač Šebart & Štefanc, 2017a, p. 126). The changes in this period were no longer based on transparent, well-considered and substantiated conceptual reflection (Ibid.; Marjanovič Umek, 2008).

During this period, the National Assembly typically amended the Compulsory School Act by a shortened procedure, explaining that the interventions in the Act were less demanding, although the new solutions gradually changed the overall image and concept of nine-year compulsory education and the Act from 1996. Those responsible for school policy claimed that there was no need for a new *White Paper*, as the changes were minor and in line with the existing concept. However, that was not the case. The changes were conceptual and substantive in nature, and some were even in conflict with the principles and solutions of the first *White Paper* (Krek, 1995). Even the results of evaluation studies carried out until that time (e.g., Žagar et al., 2003), which were discussed by the Expert Council for General Education of the Republic of Slovenia (Kovač Šebart, 2007a, p. 16), did not support some of the subsequent legally established interventions in nine-year compulsory education. The proposals for change did not arise without the participation of the profession. An expert commission was established in 2005 to examine possible conceptual and organisational changes in compulsory education. Although the commission was made up of established experts, none of them, nor other experts in the field of education, publicly justified or defended the interventions and solutions, despite being subject to a great deal of criticism from the profession. It seems that the changes at that time were largely dictated by financial rationalisation, and were less due to research and evaluations of findings that would provide an answer as to whether appropriate goals had been established for compulsory education, and whether the systemic solutions and educational practice had enabled the achievement of these goals at all, and if so, how it had been enabled and whether this had taken place in all schools. The social-liberal orientation of school policy had been gradually replaced by a neoliberal orientation (Kovač Šebart, 2007b, p. 3; 2012, p. 3; Štefanc, 2012).

In 2009, at the beginning of the mandate of the then new government, there was prevailing agreement on the need for a new *White Paper*. A special

group of experts (National Expert Group) was therefore appointed and work on the new document was complete within two years. Published in 2011, the *White Paper* (Krek & Metljak, 2011) offered a renewed concept of compulsory education. It was understood that this would mark a break with the practice by which systemic solutions are subject to interventions that typically lack professional argumentation. School policy does not, however, seem to have been based on the new document, as even before the compulsory education solutions were discussed within the National Expert Group, the ministry responsible for education had already submitted a proposal for new compulsory education legislation for public discussion, that is, prior to the commencement of public debate on the proposal of the new *White Paper* (Kovač Šebart, 2011a, p. 3, 2011b, p. 3; Kovač Šebart & Štefanc, 2017a). We believe this is one of the reasons why this document – in terms of the weight of its affirmation in the professional sphere – did not reach the level of the *White Paper* from 1995. The question arises as to whether this was in fact the purpose of school policy at the time.

The period that followed was not marked by major changes by the then ministerial team, at least not as far as public compulsory education was concerned, even though it was clear that compulsory school in particular needed to reflect on systemic solutions in terms of equity and equal educational opportunities as well as non-discrimination. The economic crisis and austerity measures, which severely affected vulnerable groups, were sufficient indications that some of the systemic solutions had already fallen victim to time, or that they were in need of thorough expert examination (Kovač Šebart, 2014, p. 17, 2016, 2016a; Kovač Šebart & Štefanc, 2017b).

The subsequent ministerial team, too, failed to continue from the point where things had stalled in 2011. It wanted to prepare a new document, a new *White Paper*, but it was not in power long enough to adopt any of the important considerations and solutions. The most recent minister is in a more or less unfortunate position and lacks genuine support of the profession (with the possible exception of the medical profession). She is primarily contending with how to give the public the impression that there is nothing wrong with school in the time of COVID-19 (cf. Mlakar, 2020; Statement by Minister, 2020). In this regard, a number of studies have been conducted examining education during the period when schools were closed. The ministerial team has received numerous proposals as well as expert criticisms, to which it has not responded (for further information see Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy, 2020).

For years, we in Slovenia have failed to engage in a comprehensive expert treatment of systemic solutions from the point of view of ensuring justice, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as well as moral education for tolerance,

solidarity and human rights. We should have done, however, as schools face not only pedagogical problems, but increasingly serious social problems, which have intensified in Slovenia over the years and have recently become acute due in part to the objective circumstances of the pandemic. Distance learning and education have begun to gain ground, leading to less and less direct interaction between students and teachers, as well as between students themselves. This demands immediate reflection and systemic expert solutions regarding the formative aspect of teaching, teacher authority, the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, the assessment of knowledge, individualisation and differentiation, etc. We live in the time of a double social stratification event: some students in the 2019/2020 school year (and due to the lack of appropriate systemic solutions the situation will be similar in the 2020/2021 school year if we conduct distance learning and education) were not provided with the basic conditions required to work for distance schooling; differences in the process (non-)implementation of lessons arose both between schools and between teachers in individual schools. Some teachers had the knowledge and the will to attempt to actually execute *instruction* at a distance, while others avoided this and mostly sent materials and assignments to students in online classrooms or by email, expecting students to solve them on their own. This caused additional inequalities between students partly due to differences in the economic, social and cultural status of their families, differences in their numbers and the associated conditions for working at home, differences in parents' work schedules and their ability to help children to acquire knowledge, etc. In the 2019/2020 school year, we also had to deal with deviations from the requirements and expectations concerning the criteria for assessing knowledge; the Minister's instruction was that the assessment of knowledge should be "kind" (Kuralt, 2020). In the new circumstances, there is a logical consequence that was to be (and will continue to be) expected: families with greater cultural capital and higher expectations regarding their children's knowledge worked with their children more and insisted on the expectations that school had been forced to abandon. The spiral of inequality, which is like a parasite on the basic postulates of public education, has therefore deepened further. School policy did not respond to this with systemic reflections and solutions that would enable the acquisition of a quality general education for all students and provide all students with equal opportunities to access instruction and knowledge in the completely changed school circumstances. This would undoubtedly require additional budgetary inputs (especially staffing reinforcements enabling individualisation and internal differentiation in the quality execution of distance learning and additional work with students who cannot rely on the help, knowledge and skills of their parents).

Even in the years prior to the coronavirus, schools themselves had to accommodate the dissatisfaction of teachers and parents, and of the expert and general public, generated by the demands and hardships derived from the wider social environment (Kovač Šebart, 2016a) if they were to make any attempt to perform their two interrelated fundamental tasks, that is, knowledge transfer and the formation of an autonomous, critical and responsible personality. Although, for at least the last fifteen years, it has been declaratively accepted even on the EU level that a fair education system must ensure that educational outcomes are independent of socioeconomic background and other factors resulting in educational disadvantage (Biesta, 2010; Efficiency and equity, 2006; Gaber & Marjanovič Umek, 2009), school policy has not engaged with this systematically. However, it should have: in order to be able to take strategic action, we need to know how the spiral of social inequality has grown stronger from kindergarten onwards; we need to know who is progressing and who is being left behind in the system we have built and dismantled over the last 25 years, and, above all, why this has occurred (Kovač Šebart & Štefanc, 2017a, pp. 113–114; Kovač Šebart & Štefanc, 2017b). In this regard, the large differences between the best and worst students in schools, and between schools themselves in Slovenia, for instance, are unacceptable. In determining the causes of failure, there is a need to study the differences in performance by gender, social origin, educational level of parents, etc. Another dimension of study should focus on areas where differences emerge and address the so-called external context, which includes the issue of poverty, the expectations of parents and peers, differences in the length of schooling, quality of education, and the effects resulting from education: income, economic and social inequality, and social mobility (Gaber & Marjanovič Umek, 2009; Gaber et al., 2012). It is not enough to ensure merely formally equal access to educational resources in the education system (which is at least questionable for the poor in Slovenia today, if we also consider – limiting ourselves to compulsory education – access to textbooks and workbooks, as well as to food, open-air school, the offer and implementation of compulsory elective courses, etc.). Consideration of the basic categories of exclusion and their reproduction in the education system must result in systemic solutions concerning material conditions and other circumstances and behaviours that do not in their point of departure “accept” the differences between children and especially not their increase, but instead reflect on these differences and on this basis create conditions for their reduction (Kodelja, 2006).

It seems that the circumstances brought about by the viral epidemic may even suit school policy quite well, as under the pretext of crisis measures it can leave the public school more or less alone in dealing with real social problems

and social inequality (Kobal Tomc & Črnak-Meglič, 2016; Kovač Šebart, 2014, 2016a, 2016b; Kovač Šebart & Štefanc, 2017a, 2017b; Kovač Šebart, 2019), as there has been practically no response on the part of school policy to the justified warnings for years.

Compulsory education and its curricular solutions

In the second half of the 1990s, when the curricular reform of nine-year public compulsory education took place, Kroflič (1997) pointed out that the learning-goal and process orientation of national syllabi was a logical consequence of a watershed period during which the concept of the formal education framework changed: it began to be based on common values, with clear aspirations to respect the plurality of values in society and to establish a tolerant attitude towards this plurality.

In the curricular reforms, the schedule of subjects and national syllabi of compulsory education were prepared. They defined general and operational goals as well as standards of knowledge with examples of content through which teachers could achieve these learning goals and standards of knowledge (Kovač Šebart & Krek, 2009, pp. 50–70). The conceptual logic – which, in accordance with the instructions prepared by the National Curriculum Council in 1996 (Instructions for the work of the subject, 1996), followed the national compulsory education syllabi adopted in 1998 – was based on a clear distinction between general learning objectives and operational learning objectives, as well as the standards of knowledge derived from the latter. In the national syllabi, the standards of knowledge were typically defined on two levels: the basic standards of knowledge were described as the knowledge that should be achieved by most students included in the programme in each individual grade (in some subjects this was also defined at individual levels of difficulty), while there was also a separate definition of minimum standards of knowledge, which described the knowledge that a student must demonstrate in order to be assessed positively, regardless of his or her personal circumstances, or the class or compulsory education that he or she attends (Ibid.).

Between 2006 and 2008,³ without thorough professional consideration, a reconceptualisation of the national syllabi was carried out: in them, the standards of knowledge defined on the basis of operational learning objectives were replaced by the expected results derived from generally stated competencies

3 In accordance with Article 25 of the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (2007), the renewed national syllabi for compulsory education were determined by the Professional Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education at its 114th session on 12 June 2008.

supposedly based on key competences for lifelong learning. As Štefanc (2008, 2012) demonstrated, the changes reflected broader international processes closely related to aspirations for a comprehensive reconceptualisation of general education, which is becoming increasingly subjugated to demands and expectations for greater flexibility in the labour market. In this context, competencies serve as a conceptual tool to realise these expectations.

It should not be overlooked that on the arrival of virtually every new school ministerial team, the public receives the message that national compulsory education syllabi are too extensive, and that when the syllabi were created, as one minister said, “too little attention was paid to experts who could assess what a child is capable of at a certain age, for instance from the point of view of developmental psychology, or who could view the schedule of subjects as a whole” (Kovač Šebart, 2010). However, history shows that the facts are quite different: during the first post-independence national syllabi reform, the Compulsory Education Curricular Commission was headed by an internationally recognised expert in developmental psychology, who cannot be reasonably accused of failing to judge what a child is capable of at a certain age. Nor was she the only one on the commission. Moreover, we must not forget that the syllabi adopted in 1998 were reviewed in advance by teachers, who judged that the goals could be achieved and that the number of hours of the individual subjects allowed enough time to consolidate the material (New or renewed curricula, 1997).

We are not claiming that there is no need to review the syllabi of the time, as well as today's syllabi, in order to assess whether a reduction in the scope of learning goals is necessary. However, we will not be successful if, as a society, we address contradictory demands to those who prepare the syllabi, as well as to school, students and teachers. In the wider community, we must therefore first answer the question: What knowledge, and what kind of knowledge, is meaningful and necessary for our children? We therefore need a professional and political consensus on how we understand the quality general education of the younger generations (Kovač Šebart, 2016b). This is a problem that cannot be fully addressed by criticism of syllabi or teaching methods alone. The answer lies, at least in part, in a decision: Will we continue to understand general education in the community as a value in itself, as something we believe our young generations need because it fundamentally shapes and cultivates them, leading to an independence of reason that opposes prejudice, dogmatism, authoritarianism and arbitrariness? Will knowledge in itself therefore be a source of excellence worth striving for? Or, as a society, will we choose a different path whereby the knowledge with which we equip younger generations will become an increasingly functional, external factor, so that it is sufficient to merely learn

how to use this knowledge? In the latter scenario, knowledge is indispensable as a tool, but we do not understand it as something that fundamentally shapes our personality (Ibid.; Gauchet, 2011; Kovač Šebart & Kovač, 2018).

This decision will have consequences for the formation of young generations, as well as for the professional authority of teachers and for school as an institution that has traditionally opened the door to abstract knowledge. The two approaches and views lead to different formative effects on younger generations. Demands for students to see the sense of the knowledge they acquire in school, as well as its useful value or its applicability in understanding the world, are perfectly legitimate. The fact is, however, that an important part of general education is precisely in understanding the value of that which allows us to see beyond mere direct applicability, beyond knowledge that concerns everyday experience, to knowledge that opens our horizons and broadens our spirit. Knowledge that concerns general education is often “separate from the direct, local world of the learner” and requires “shifting interests away from the direct experience of the learner” (Oakeshott 1989 in Furedi 2016, p. 76).

It seems that in society today, we are already dealing with a prevailing, often unreflected view of knowledge: one the one hand, it must be relevant and directly applicable, while, on the other hand, there is no need for students to acquire it, as it is enough for them have it available at any time, at their fingertips (Gaber & Tašner, 2017; Gauchet, 2011; Kovač Šebart & Kovač, 2018). Moreover, at this point we cannot, without reflection, simply pass over the goal of “achieving international comparability of knowledge standards”. In practice, this has been reduced to comparing the achievements of the international PISA survey, which examines the ability of 15-year-olds to “face life’s challenges”, a phrase that can be translated as meaning especially being resourceful from the perspective of the needs of the labour market (Štefanc, 2008).

Unreflected and without safeguards from the point of view of the quality of compulsory education, we have followed the strategic documents of the European Commission, which state two priorities of EU member states: investing in young people and implementing the requirement for greater efficiency of the education system, both of which are primarily aimed at achieving economic and social goals as well as EU competitiveness (A Budget for Europe, 2011, p. 28; Europe 2020, 2010, pp. 13–19). Meanwhile, the OECD (2017a) builds upon research findings (e.g., PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) in order to enable countries to compare the knowledge, personality traits and skills of children and adolescents associated with lifelong learning and adult life outcomes on a global level, especially in the labour market (Ibid., p. 9). On this basis, countries are supposed to develop practical educational solutions that will facilitate the

formation of citizens with developed abilities of “adaptation, ingenuity, respect and cooperation with others as well as personal and community responsibility” (OECD, 2017b, p. 1). Some Slovenian experts (Gaber et al., 2012) have pointed out the dangers of inappropriate conceptualisations in PISA research for education policies in national contexts, but they have been largely ignored. In documents (e.g., *A Budget for Europe*, 2011; *Efficiency and equity*, 2006; *Europe*, 2010, 2020; OECD, 2016, 2019) we therefore find almost no messages aimed at the process quality of the education system, or requirements that would establish the education of an autonomous, critical and responsible person with a quality general education at the forefront; we instead find an intention that Furedi (2016) calls soft engineering of the labour force.

If, in addition, we reinforce the belief in society that learning should always be easy, fun and playful, that it should immediately evoke feelings of pleasure, we should not be surprised by students’ questions as to why they should learn content that is not directly useful, especially given the fact that the effort required by such learning is often experienced by students as an excessive burden (Kovač Šebart & Krek, 2009, pp. 25–29; Kovač Šebart, 2016b; Kovač Šebart & Kovač, 2018). We should therefore not be surprised that in today’s society, “there is a very strong symbolic investment in school and school success, but this investment is accompanied by a more or less general disqualification of all activities that are a condition for acquiring knowledge. If we summarise this phenomenon in one formula: people want children to acquire knowledge without having to learn” (Gauchet, 2011; Kovač Šebart & Kovač, 2018). Here we also see some of the reasons why pedagogical workers find it increasingly difficult to insist on demands that should be perfectly legitimate for school. School cannot solve this problem without the support of policy and the wider community, which will also address parents.

The process level of the quality of compulsory education

For decades, Slovenia has had neither adequate professional support nor systematic evaluation studies that would comprehensively answer questions about the process quality of compulsory education. As we have shown, school policies do not even reflect (or are not interested in) the fact that the formative process and effect of education are different if: (1) instruction follows and realises the goal of forming an individual capable of critical judgment and behaviour, with regard to which the knowledge acquired in school is understood as a value in itself, without always having a direct useful value, instead being a condition for the individual’s understanding of the world and for his or her freedom and

autonomy; or (2) we accept the concept of knowledge as a tool, we follow the conceptualisation of “learning to learn”, and general education primarily serves the function of achieving the established economic and social goals and successfully adapting the individual to the labour market (Egan, 2009; Gauchet, 2011; Furedi, 2009).

In considering the process quality of compulsory education, it is important that with the post-independence curricular reform, we made the transition from syllabi based on learning content to syllabi based on learning goals. The professional autonomy of teachers was formally defined and the requirement for objectivity, criticality and pluralism was enshrined in legislation (Compulsory School Act, 2005; Organisation and Financing of Education Act, 1996). However, in the continuation in practice, from a procedural point of view, it seems that we have failed on several levels. This thesis is, of course, in need of verification: (1) national syllabi today are still often understood and read as if they were content-based; (2) instead of implementing the principles of criticality, objectivity and pluralism, the principle of common sense and judgment is asserted, which is based in part on the particular value judgments of individuals or the majority; and (3) professional autonomy is often just a phrase, as it requires taking responsibility for content planning of instruction that is linked to goals and standards of knowledge, that is critical towards untruths, beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices, and that builds on a plurality of arguments. It is foreign to professional autonomy to base teaching only on teaching aids prepared by textbook authors or colleagues, so that students learn only that which is written in textbooks, or to avoid addressing so-called controversial topics in the classroom and not be able to explain that the right of parents to raise their children in accordance with their beliefs does not mean that they can demand that certain content is not addressed at school; parents do, however, have every right to appeal if the instruction is indoctrinated, if it does not therefore adhere to the principles of criticality, objectivity and plurality. Also foreign to professional autonomy is the absence of reflection on how to achieve the fundamental goal of compulsory school education, which is the responsible, critical and autonomous individual (Kovač Šebart & Krek, 2009; Kovač Šebart, 2017, 2019).

The process aspect of the quality of instruction does, of course, include much of that which fundamentally characterises school and requires systematic professional treatment and work with students, teachers and parents: from the expectations that students have when they enter school, to the expectations that teachers and parents have of students; from the establishment of teacher authority – which should not be confused with the authority associated with the place that the teacher occupies within the institution and with the power with

which the teacher is endowed by the means of power at his or her disposal – to alliance with parents, whose demands must not interfere with the professional autonomy of the teacher, while the latter must not confuse authority with professional arbitrariness. In a democratic school, a parent or student can question the teacher when they do not know something or fail to understand something; this should even be desirable. The teacher must answer such questions professionally, as they fall within the domain of professional autonomy. The process aspect also includes reflection on how to enforce the rules and to ensure that students respect them, including the rules for which we prepare specific pedagogical strategies in schools. For the process dimension, it is also important to deal with the assessment of knowledge, which today already has an air of negativity: when we say that the student must learn for knowledge, not for grades, we ignore the fact that grades can be a means to an end, which is knowledge. The type and quality of the knowledge that students acquire largely depends on the criteria for assessing knowledge (Ibid.; Štefanc & Kovač Šebart, 2020).

The process aspect of quality assurance in compulsory education has lacked adequate professional support at the systemic level for years. The first post-independence efforts in this regard established a framework for the evaluation of process quality (Pluško et al., 1999, 2001), but the policy efforts of that time focused primarily on the systemic solutions of nine-year compulsory education and their implementation, and there was insufficient time for content and process questions. There was no interest in this in the following years, either. The preparation of models for identifying and ensuring quality in the education system, which took place through projects (Design and introduction of a system, 2008; Establishment, supplementation, 2016), was for some time more focused on efficiency, that is, on student achievement in international research, as dictated by international financial organisations. Dealing with process quality is therefore completely left to schools and teachers, as it is assumed that it concerns professional autonomy. This is, of course, primarily an excuse so that the line ministry does not have to deal with it: to commission research to obtain feedback on the quality of teaching, learning and student knowledge, to seek and fund solutions.

Recently, the National Education Institute of Slovenia as well as some private institutions have been offering support to schools with projects of so-called formative monitoring (Štefanc & Kovač Šebart, 2020, p. 16). Even in this case, however, considerations that would provide answers to questions regarding the quality of general education and the role of knowledge in the formation of the personality are not in the foreground.

In principle, we do not have any problems with goal-oriented instruction, but we are aware that one of its weaknesses can be a lack of interest in the

process dimension of instruction. We are not saying that it does not make sense to set goals, but that it is important what these goals are and what role they play in processes of curricular planning, implementation and evaluation (Ibid.). Egelandsdal and Riese (2020), for instance, focus their criticisms of formative monitoring on its explicitly *operational* goal orientation: on the one hand, they report that it is simply not possible to transform all teaching objectives (especially formative, moral educational objectives) into objectively measurable effects of teaching and learning; on the other hand, they take issue with the specific and increasingly established notion of goals as *learning outcomes* in the function of educational efficiency. They draw attention to the danger of reducing formative monitoring to a mechanism for ensuring the effectiveness of education, and thus to activity driven more by striving to adapt the individual to the needs of the labour market than by the quality of knowledge.

In the Slovenian space, Peršolja (2020), for example, unlike Egelandsdal and Riese, even uses the argument of efficiency precisely to affirm formative monitoring: among other things, the author refers to a study of the cost-effectiveness of 22 approaches to learning (Yeh, 2011; Ibid.), which is supposed to demonstrate that the introduction of formative monitoring is the most cost-effective approach in the long run, even in comparison with comprehensive school reform (Peršolja, 2020; for more on this, see Štefanc & Kovač Šebart, 2020). The author expresses the value of formative monitoring “in economic terms” (Furedi, 2016, p. 45), and as such these terms certainly do not inhibit aspirations that lead to the devaluation of the meaning of knowledge as a value in itself. The question is therefore whether procedural efforts in the field of “formative monitoring” actually even support instruction and learning that establishes as its key goal the formation of an autonomous and free personality with an acquired general education that makes the individual capable of abstract critical reflection and behaviour (Štefanc & Kovač Šebart, 2020), or whether these efforts actually support instruction that focuses primarily on facing life’s “challenges” and on “self-regulation,” due to which there is a significant risk that the process is focused primarily on “appropriate” – that is, efficient – skills of the “adapting and responding” of students “to new circumstances” (Ibid., p. 49). For further reflection, it is also important that within this logic we no longer speak about the assessment of knowledge; instead, aspirations are at work to assess the learning and “teaching” of education. As described by Biesta (2005, 2010, 2013) in several works, the teaching of education is reflected in “the rise of the concept of ‘learning’ and consequently the decline of the concept of ‘education.’ Teaching has thus become a support or promotion of learning, while education is increasingly described as providing opportunities for (experiential) learning”

(Biesta, 2005, p. 55). This process takes issue with the transfer of knowledge that has arisen throughout human history and that should be acquired by generations of students. Knowledge is no longer understood as something that also needs to be transmitted, acquired and assimilated, as it must arise in a process of individual construction. Issue is therefore taken with the role of the teacher as someone who imparts knowledge and is responsible for the students' acquisition of knowledge, while "learning" is understood as the central point of all education and instruction. It therefore becomes important how students learn: whether they learn according to "contemporary" theoretical psychological notions of learning (e.g., learning to learn), or whether they also understand their learning and are able to "self-regulate" it, etc. (cf. also Biesta, 2010, 2013). "When we say that teachers should promote learning – which is a phrase that is not foreign to school policy literature – we are actually saying very little, if anything, as long as we do not define what students should learn and what the purpose of learning is" (Biesta, 2005, pp. 18–19). As Liessmann (2006) notes, such a requirement is, in substance and meaning, very close to the suggestion to start cooking without ingredients (Ibid., p. 35). A framework is established within which it is possible to ask more or less only "technical questions, that is, questions about the efficiency and success of the educational process. It is practically impossible to ask more important questions about the content and purposes of education" (Biesta, 2005, p. 59). This is an ideological constellation to which we have been constantly drawing attention in the present text and which, as we have already shown, enables instruction and learning in compulsory schooling to become a mechanism of the realisation of economic interests and to be formed according to the principles of the free market: the student becomes a (potential) consumer, who therefore has certain needs that the teacher or educational institution adequately meet (Ibid., p. 58).

Concluding remarks

At a time when the responsibility for distance education and children's schoolwork is largely shifted to parents, requiring them to make an effort that they did not feel (or to a significantly lesser extent) when the child attended compulsory instruction and that now represents a burden that many parents cannot manage, or can manage only with difficulty, parents are much quicker to ask themselves certain questions: Why does a child have to learn something? Why is there so much that is useless, so much ballast? If parents have become experts in teaching and learning with children overnight, and if this is perfectly acceptable and self-evident for policy, it is clear that parents will also

take making judgments about what their child should know and what should be learned as a legitimate right. This is also true in terms of what parents are willing to take responsibility for on the level of the expectations that their child must meet with regard to schoolwork. Since parents are not experts on either of these matters, they are guided by messages from politicians and the public about useful knowledge, about the adequacy of a child in school learning to learn and implementing this when necessary. Not even school policy reflects on what constitutes quality in general education and what the consequences are for the formation of the individual if school opens its doors to spaces and dimensions that are not accessible and understandable to him or her in everyday life and through everyday experience. Should anyone therefore be surprised that parents and students are primarily interested in grades and certificates, and in the associated belief they bring regarding the wellbeing of the child's future?

With this, compulsory public school does, of course, lose the important role it has played in society; namely, to open the door to abstract knowledge for new generations. In school today, the interest of the learner is increasingly focused on the direct experience of the local world, causing us to reflect less and less, as Berger and Luckmann (1988) pointed out decades ago, that such experience contains "countless prescientific and quasi-scientific explanations of the everyday reality that is [for the individual] self-evident" (Ibid., p. 28). The knowledge acquired by new generations in compulsory education should be based on the intellectual legacy of humanity as a whole, and the fact is that this content often cannot be directly related to issues of interest to the child and student on a daily basis (Furedi, 2016, p. 173; Gauchet, 2011; Kovač Šebart & Kovač, 2018; Kovač et al., 2020). We should always keep in mind the fact that there is no critical personality without critical thought, which is always argumentative thought: without understanding scientific knowledge and the functioning of social mechanisms, without assimilating the accumulated fruits of the human mind. Without knowledge that is acquired not only through experience, we are as a rule left only with thought based on negative criticism, that is, with people who act as dictated by the crowd or by a leader they trust, even though a critical appraisal would clearly indicate that there is no basis for this. At least in terms of formally established goals, school should still lead young generations in the direction of critical thinking. If we renounce this, we should not be surprised by hatred, exclusion and a lack of solidarity in society, which are among the range of prejudicial and stereotypical behaviours. These behaviours can only be opposed by internalised knowledge, the ability to make argumentative judgments, and formation on the basis of common values that students must acquire on the level of knowledge, feelings and actions.

The paradox of the so-called knowledge society based on the logic of learning to learn, on a belief in the rapid obsolescence of the entire body of knowledge, and on the requirement that school focus on developing the ability to adapt to labour market requirements is that it is precisely broadly educated people possessing knowledge that has been accumulated throughout history who know how to respond well to the changes taking place in society and the labour market. They are capable of critical thinking that follows the general rules of argumentation and is strongly connected with an understanding of abstractness and abstract knowledge. It is true that these are typically not people with an unreflective and subservient flexibility at any cost; they are capable of responding to and resisting unacceptable demands placed on them by, for instance, employers and politicians. This is the price that society has to pay if school is to actually follow the aforementioned goal (Hočvar & Kovač Šebart, 2018, pp. 15–16). In short, adaptation and success in the labour market in adulthood are not a problem at all if we follow the goal of quality general education, the acquisition of knowledge that does not only concern our interest, that does not always have immediate direct useful value, and if we form critical and autonomous personalities. As stated above, this can, however, be a problem for the bearers of social power if they expect conformism and obedience from people.

Only a critical analysis of the societal integration of the systemic solutions of compulsory education enables the demystification of some basic ideological formulas that repeatedly hegemonise the school ideological apparatus, as well as reflection on what these solutions serve, how they have developed, “what dangers and opportunities are associated with them, and what development it is reasonable to expect” (Pulliam & van Paten, 1996, p. 2). The point of pedagogical theory is thus to clarify the place where the teacher and the student stand in a certain period (to use a metaphor) (cf. Močnik, 1985). If we do not explain the circumstances that determine this place, ideology works through us in such a way as to obscure the position that we could resolve. Its success is, of course, greatest when, through declaratively established goals, we insist on positions that objectively reproduce completely the opposite effects from those that are desired, and in so doing fail to notice, or perhaps even do not want to notice, that this is the case (Kovač Šebart, 2002, p. 234).

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From a National University to a National Higher Education System

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∞ The article analyses the conceptualisations and gradual transformation of higher education in Slovenia from the 1980s to the early 1990s, i.e., during the period of profound social and political changes leading to the proclamation of the independent Republic of Slovenia in 1991. The broad public debate on the future of education in general was an important part of the awakening of civil society in the 1980s. In the specific field of higher education, intensive discussions led to the demand for a new and comprehensive development strategy. Given the profound transformation of higher education that took place during this period, this subject has been unjustifiably poorly researched. The article therefore tries to contribute to partially filling the gap, and at the same time to stimulating further research. Based on the study of archive material, the present analysis concludes that the most important innovation of this period can be defined as a gradual conceptual and then normative shift from a national university to a national higher education system.

Keywords: higher education system, history, Slovenia, transition, university

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Od nacionalne univerze do nacionalnega visokošolskega sistema

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☞ Članek analizira konceptualizacije in postopno preobrazbo visokega šolstva v Sloveniji od osemdesetih do začetka devetdesetih let, torej v obdobju globokih družbenih in političnih sprememb, ki so leta 1991 pripeljale do razglasitve samostojne Republike Slovenije. Široka javna razprava o prihodnosti izobraževanja je bila v osemdesetih letih pomemben del prebujanja civilne družbe. Na specifičnem področju visokega šolstva so intenzivne razprave pripeljale do potrebe po novi in celoviti razvojni strategiji. Če upoštevamo, da je prišlo v tem obdobju do temeljite preobrazbe visokega šolstva, je bila ta tema do zdaj neupravičeno slabo raziskana. Članek zato skuša prispevati k delnemu zapolnjevanju vrzeli in hkrati spodbuditi nadaljnje raziskave. Na podlagi preučevanja arhivskega gradiva ta analiza ugotavlja, da je najpomembnejšo novost tega obdobja mogoče opredeliti kot postopen konceptualni in nato normativni prehod z nacionalne univerze na nacionalni visokošolski sistem.

Ključne besede: Slovenija, tranzicija, univerza, visokošolski sistem, zgodovina

A brief history of higher education in Slovenia and the situation in the 1980s

In 1919, Slovenia gained its first university, the University of Ljubljana, and in 1975 the second one, the University of Maribor, began to emerge. However, only after 1990 can one speak of the creation of a higher education (HE) system with several institutions. The conceptual conditions for this shift are related to the discussions of the 1980s. Given the profound changes that took place in HE during the period of so-called political transition, this subject has been unjustifiably poorly researched. The present article is therefore intended to partially fill the gap and to stimulate further research. The analysis is based on various sources, both published and accessible archival material. As a participant in these processes, I have also drawn on my own memories and old notes. Since this period of time is already half a century away, the contemporary reader, especially the foreign reader, requires an insight into the wider context.² This remains somewhat incomplete within the limited scope of this article, but it is supplemented by references to historians and by footnotes.

Slovenia only gained its second university in 1975. At least until then, the word *university* was used as a singular noun in everyday language,³ i.e., *the University of Ljubljana*. The latter was founded in the newly established Kingdom of Yugoslavia in a ground-breaking period after the end of WWI (1919), but was in fact the result of decades of efforts by Slovenians to establish their own university within the former Habsburg Empire. It was thus born as the *national university par excellence*. For almost half a century, it was the only institution of its kind, so it was not necessary to regulate relations with other *universities*, but only with its 'members', the *faculties*. In the first decades, its existence was threatened several times, especially during WWII, but in the post-war period, it developed rapidly due to the need to 'rebuild the destroyed country and establish socialism'. New faculties and colleges⁴ were created, initially outside the university, but gradually integrated within it. In the 1960s, when the period of *renovation* turned into *modernisation*, another university began to emerge: individual independent faculties, colleges and universities merged into the

2 Given the simplifications in many sources, it should be noted that the political system of Yugoslav socialist self-management was very different from, and in essential elements also opposite to, that for which the term (Soviet) *communism* is usually used after 1990. These peculiarities have created a specific political terminology that is probably incomprehensible to the average reader today (e.g. 'united work', 'pluralism of self-managerial interests', etc.). These specific terms are written in single quotation marks so that they can be distinguished from quotations from the sources used.

3 Slovenian language has the grammatical category of the dual; therefore, one could say that *two universities* are not yet the plural that would make up *the system*.

4 The 'high schools' (*visoke šole*) ran four-year programmes and the 'higher schools' (*višje šole*) two-year programmes. In the translation we use the term 'colleges'.

University of Maribor (UM). This institution took on almost all of the essential structural elements that had previously developed at the University of Ljubljana (UL), against the background of the European continental academic tradition. One of the prominent features in the post-war period was the *fragmentation* of the institutions: the emphasis was on relationships between independent faculties, with the rectorate⁵ only having the role of coordinator of the ‘higher education institutions’⁶ (HEIs). The question of a coherent national system was neglected.⁷

We cannot go into the many legislative changes here, but it should be mentioned that in the Slovenian Higher Education Acts of 1965 and 1969, the term university was already used in the plural, despite the fact that there was only one such institution. The 1969 law defined it as an “obligatory community of faculties” and a “legal person” (just as the faculties had been before), but also allowed colleges to “merge into associations of higher education institutions” (Official Gazette SRS, 1969, par. 3). It was on this basis – with the amended law of 1975 (Official Gazette SRS, 1975) – that the request for the establishment of the UM was formulated and implemented.

The second Slovenian university was founded in fundamentally different times than the first. In the mid-1970s, the so-called ‘liberal’ period (1965–1974) ended and the ‘leaden’ period (1974–1986) in the history of socialist Yugoslavia began. The conflict between the ‘hard’ and the ‘soft’ line, which gradually became articulated in the post-war period after the split with the Soviet Union (1947), turned noticeably in favour of the ‘soft’ line from the mid-1960s onwards. In the foreign political context, this change was reinforced by the 1968 attack on Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact, which Yugoslavia openly condemned. “It was a time of ‘relaxation and search’, which manifested itself in different ways in the Yugoslav republics” (Čepič, 2010, p. 9). The ‘liberal forces’ became stronger especially in Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia. In Slovenia, the *liberalism* of the time meant “more political pluralism between and within the existing political organizations” (Repe, 1994, pp. 53–54).⁸ Economic policies focused on a combination of the recognition of market economy principles and intervention by the socialist state; domestic politics was characterised by decentralisation

5 In everyday language, the term *university* was often understood in the narrow sense of the *rectorate*.

6 The legislation of that time defined HEIs as *faculties*, *art academies*, *high and higher schools*, while a university was a *community (association) of faculties*.

7 Until the early 1960s, the field was regulated by the federal *General Law on Universities* (1954), and new HEIs were established by special laws.

8 The League of Communists (LC; Communist Party until 1952) was the ‘leading socio-political organisation’ according to the Constitution, but it was not the only one; the others (represented in the Federal and Republic Assemblies) were the Socialist League of Working People, the Union of Trade Unions, the Union of Youth, and the Union of Combatants. The Republics were federal units with a high degree of autonomy.

and greater independence (and responsibility) of the republics; foreign policy was characterised by the *non-aligned movement* (with the countries of the Third World)⁹ and cooperation with both the West and the East, while cultural policy allowed somewhat greater freedom of thought and artistic and scientific creation. Such 'liberalism' turned away radically from the classic Soviet concept of socialism and promoted modernisation, especially in the more dynamic sectors of the economy, which required a better-educated workforce.

The period of 'liberalism' did not eliminate the existing domestic political rivalries in Yugoslavia, but it did strongly shape life until the political showdown with 'liberal deviation' (Repe, 1994, p. 55), which was followed by a new *Constitution* (1974). It brought a kind of compromise between the political currents in the Federation. It seemed that a new concept of political balance had been achieved, as it had been in its infancy since the 1960s: "Yugoslavia became a union of states instead of a federal state, yet with control mechanisms guaranteeing the dominance of the centre" (Repe 1994, p. 53). Among historians, it is still debated whether the conflict of the time was really overcome, or whether it was only a milestone from which the way led straight to the dissolution of the Federation (Čepič, 2010, p. 12).

An integral part of these processes was the *student movement*, which unexpectedly erupted in June 1968 and then became more articulate (albeit in very different ways) at the universities of Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana. In Slovenia, the sympathies of professors and students tended towards the 'liberals', but not without critical reflection and the avoidance of radicalism and open conflict. Probably the most important achievement – and at the same time the biggest difference with organisation of students in the rest of the Federation – was the dissolution of the official *Student Union of Slovenia* (as an integral part of the Yugoslav Student Union) and the creation of a new organisation called the *Student Community* (1968). This new organisation was characterised by a commitment to political pluralism and organisational autonomy. The movement introduced important new topics into domestic debates on areas such as freedom of speech, minority rights, feminism, multiculturalism, student communes, environmental protection, etc. (see Pivec in Čepič, 2010, pp. 295–304). It was also associated with related movements in Western Europe. After the 'showdown with liberalism' (1972), the Student Community was abolished and the students were drowned by political coercion in a new organisation, the *Union of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia* (1974) as a union of its republican organisations. Paradoxically, in Slovenia in the 1980s, this organisation was one of the cores of the so-called 'new social movements' (see Vurnik in Čepič, 2010, pp.

9 This attracted a considerable number of foreign students to Yugoslav universities from the 1960s.

347–364), in which ‘alternative’ themes inaugurated by the student movement of 1968–1972 flared up again, thus contributing to the conceptualisation of the political turn around 1990.

What was the general situation in HE after the period of ‘liberalism’? As mentioned above, after 1975, there were two universities in Slovenia, which functioned as ‘associations’ of faculties and colleges. One might therefore expect that this would improve the conditions for new growth, but the data show exactly the opposite. Table 1 presents the trends in the number of students, graduates and staff over the three decades.¹⁰

Table 1

Number of students, graduates and teaching staff (1970–2000)

Ac. year	Students			Year	Diplomas	Teachers, assistants
	UL	UM	Other			
1970/71	15,384	6,248	-	1971	2,304	...
1975/76	19,477	8,605	-	1975	4,845	...
1980/81	18,464	7,743	-	1981	6,494	2,582
1985/86	20,378	9,223	-	1985	5,634	2,657
1990/91	22,824	10,741	-	1991	5,439	2,568
1995/96	32,577	12,888	486	1995	7,724	3,091
2000/01	44,011	20,298	4,118	2000	10,447	4,800

Note. Adapted from SURS and Zgaga, 2004.

The period of ‘liberalism’ coincided with growth in the number of both students and graduates: between 1970 and 1975, this number increased by almost a third. The proportion of part-time students was quite high, especially at the UM (at times representing almost half of the student body). The data show that this increase soon halted: between 1975 and 1980, enrolment actually fell by about 10%. In the 1980s, all major indicators point to stagnation: both the number of diplomas and the number of staff decreased. For this reason, I have called this period the “relatively lost years” (Zgaga 2004, p. 133). The lack of education that occurred during this period was acutely reflected in the working population in the 1990s. By that time, however, a belated but exponential increase in the number of students and graduates had already begun.

¹⁰ Full-time and part-time undergraduates are included. Courses for part-time students (employees: ‘students through work’) were held on weekends at 50% of full-time contact hours. About 40% of the teaching staff worked part-time.

The 1980s were perceived as crisis years by both the public and the HE sector. They were summarised in 1989 in an interview with the Rector of the University of Ljubljana, Professor Peklenik: “The [study] programmes expanded to almost unreasonable limits due to the method of financing. This had a rather negative effect on the quality and duration of the studies. [...] The current drop-out rate is between 40 and 50 percent. [...] This is also related to the pointless system of distribution of funds, when deans [...] have to negotiate individually with officials from the Slovenian Educational Community [Agency] and the government about the share that should belong to them” (Supplement, 1989, p. 28).¹¹

The ‘lead-in’ period was marked by a major federal reform of the education system, i.e., the reform of *career-oriented education* (COE). Yugoslavia was not a strictly centralised state and in many areas decentralisation was gradually increasing. After the 1963 constitutional changes, the federal Ministry of Education was abolished and universities became the responsibility of the republics. With the constitutional amendment of 1974, the trend towards decentralisation intensified, but with noticeable signs of inter-republican friction (see Žagar in Čepič, 2010, pp. 231–256). This was also reflected in the field of education policy.

The decentralised regulation of education was also conditioned by different cultural traditions and languages of instruction. This was opposed by centralist forces, both political and cultural, especially after they had re-articulated themselves in the early 1980s, after Tito’s death. These forces prepared the ground for the implementation of the policy that was later embodied by Slobodan Milošević. It was in this context that the provocative idea of *common programme cores of education* was born in 1983,¹² which was to apply to the entire Federation: In education programmes, e.g., in the curricula of literature, history, etc., each of the ‘Yugoslav nations’ was to receive a share corresponding to its share in the total population. In Slovenia, the proposal immediately met with strong resistance and further intensified criticism of the ideologically dictated concept of COE. We will therefore explain this concept in more detail below.

Reform of career-oriented education and its critique

The reform of COE began to be prepared in the mid-1970s after the elimination of the ‘liberals’. The political starting point was established at the congresses of the LC (1974). The planned reform (cf. Lusa in Čepič, 2010, pp. 335–338) was primarily aimed at improving the educational structure of the

11 The Rector was not involved in the budget negotiations.

12 See, e.g., <https://www.muzej-nz.si/si/izobrazevanje/1402>.

population. In HE, however, the politically motivated, preventive action against the student movement and the diverse critical circles of intellectuals could not be ignored.

There was a rush for the reform initiative everywhere, but not in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (SRS). At the end of 1975, the expert study *The Concept of Career-Oriented Education* was published, but the *Career-Oriented Education Act* (COEA) was not adopted by the SRS Assembly until five years later (1980) (Official Gazette SRS, 1980). The concept included the abolition of the *gimnazija* (grammar school), the traditional preparatory space for university studies, which was accused of being elitist in character. The new upper secondary education was to provide five 'career-orientations' (e.g., 'natural-mathematical', 'socio-economic', 'physical education – defence', etc.). HE would upgrade secondary education to the 'most demanding qualifications' according to the 'career-orientation verticals'. A certificate of completed secondary school would be sufficient for enrolment; there would be no *matura*, the traditional 'maturity exam'. All of this greatly fuelled the controversy about university. At the universities, this controversy was further intensified by the abolition of the special *Higher Education Act* (HEA): between 1980 and 1993, HE was regulated by the COEA itself.

The political decision regarding COE triggered a surprisingly large public response (Zgaga, 2007, p. 69), as well as endless debates, both in political bodies and in the awakening civil society (Vurnik in Čepič, 2010, pp. 347–364.). The issue of the education system occupied a prominent place in public debates. Criticism was directed mainly against the abolition of the *gimnazija* and the *matura*, as well as against the idea of 'common programme cores'. This opened a front of a 'cultural war' in which many academics participated. Academics also contributed to the conceptual critique of the ideological concept of a 'comprehensively developed personality', on which the definition of the basic purpose of COE was based (Zgaga, 2016).

Critical voices were also reinforced by restrictions that became more widely and concretely experienced in the 1980s. The difficult economic situation brought with it a range of problems, from shortages of daily necessities to cuts in the education budget. Conscriptation was moved from university graduation to the end of secondary school. Enrolment in a number of degree programmes was restricted. In the second half of the 1980s, there was a shortage of advertised university places, partly because of the growing educational ambitions in society and partly because of the deteriorating employment opportunities. Thus, COE was implemented restrictively.

In 1982, an open letter to the leadership of the SRS was published in a then widely read weekly newspaper for intellectuals (Open Letter, 1982). The

political leadership as well as the public were particularly shocked that it was signed by no less than 671 ‘public workers’, mostly from the UL. The letter addressed the problem of developing the “intellectual potentials of our society” in a constructive tone, but sharply criticised the “artificial dismantling of existing or emerging quality pedagogical teams” (in *gimnazija*) and expressed “concerns over the unrealistic handling of the opportunities for optimal intellectual development of the most gifted section of the youth”. In addition, it assessed “the irresponsible behaviour towards this part of the youth” as “at the same time irresponsible and extremely short-sighted also towards society as a whole and in particular towards our science”. The letter concludes: “The success of the entire reform also depends on whether we succeed in raising the educational level of the lower level programmes, especially the former vocational schools, without lowering the educational level already achieved in the more demanding [secondary] schools”.

‘Oriented’ programmes were adopted late. The first students enrolled in the new HE programmes in the 1985/86 academic year, when criticism of the conceptual justification and strategic purpose of COE was already widespread. Preparation of the postgraduate programmes was also delayed, but with the consolation that it would be another four to five years before the first graduates enrolled in them. Almost none of the stakeholders were satisfied with the ‘renovation of HE’. Reports from this period mention many problems: pressure from HEIs to extend programmes by a semester or two (in the hope of increasing funding); fears among academic staff that ‘oriented’ candidates would bring too little general knowledge; problems with the relevant ‘verticals’ between secondary and tertiary education; the ‘narrow-mindedness’ of HEIs in relation to the educational interests of young people, etc. New programmes were created in isolation within individual faculties and colleges, and work was uncoordinated and did not promote interdisciplinary integration, as the organisational structure of the university was fragmented.¹³ The call for a critical analysis of the situation as a basis for planning meaningful reform intensified both in academia and among the public.

The critique of COE thus gradually established a space in which a profound discussion could take place about *what kind of education is needed for the future*. Under the influence of this criticism, as well as in the atmosphere of the new political liberalisation that took place in Slovenia in the second half of the 1980s (Repe, 2005, pp. 107–108), the *reform of the COE reform* gradually began.

¹³ *The United Work Act* (1976), another peculiarity of Yugoslav socialist self-management, deepened the fragmentation of HE: some faculties already functioning as legal entities were further subdivided into so-called ‘basic organisations of united work in HE’ (VTOZD) as legal entities.

With amendments to the COEA, it was allowed first to complete secondary education with a *final examination* (1983), which was a step towards the legal redefinition of the *matura* (1989). These and other changes were related to the widespread belief at the time that society was in crisis and that Slovenia needed a clear strategy for *long-term development*. The crisis of the 1980s did not lead to lethargy, but offered an opportunity. This was also convincingly demonstrated in HE.

Long-term development of higher education in Slovenia

Significant shifts occurred in 1986. There were far-reaching personnel changes on the political horizon: in the Slovenian LC, the previous ‘hard’ line was replaced by a ‘soft’ one (Milan Kučan); at the same time, Slobodan Milošević became the head of the Serbian LC. The paths of further political development in the Federation diverged completely, and the conflicts began to deepen. The changes in the political forums in Slovenia were accompanied by a spontaneous process of democratisation, accelerated by the so-called ‘new social movements’ (Vurnik in Čepič, 2010, pp. 347–364). A fundamental shift was also taking place in education policy: The new Minister of Education gave the green light to the ‘reform of the reform’.

The implementation of COE was accompanied by evaluation studies, on the basis of which the Ministry prepared the *Report on the Transformation of Education* (Assembly Reporter, 1986, pp. 1–13) and submitted it to the SRS Assembly. The report chose “the role of education in the social development of Slovenia” as its starting point (Ibid., p. 1). In its general section, there is a “sharp rejection” of the concept of common programme cores as “a kind of supranational curriculum that would cover the competence of the Republic in an area as important for the development of the nation as the mother tongue” (Ibid., p. 10). HE was dealt with in a separate chapter, while the idea of introducing a “final and advanced [*nadaljevalni*] examination”, which would be a ticket to HE (the term *matura* was not yet used) stands out in the general section.

The chapter on HE (Ibid., pp. 10–13) begins with an analysis of the innovations in curricula. The main point highlighted is that “even in the new structure, there are no interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programmes, [which] indicates the absolute dominance of the institutional [i.e., faculty] and disciplinary divisions”, while “the number of subjects has increased beyond the critical limit”. On the positive side, the report notes that “the process of constituting special professions in Slovenia (design, transportation, preschool education, computer science and informatics, some process technologies, etc.) has begun”, but points to the extremely complex process of approving new programmes in

the then system of 'self-managerial communities of interest'. The report further states that "the partial aspect and monopoly of the school over the university prevailed in our legislation and in the practice of higher education", and then supports the emerging "development strategy of Slovenian higher education".

What "development strategy" was meant? In 1984, the universities and the Chamber of Commerce organised a consultation that concluded, among other things, "that a thorough study of the position and role of the university in the long-term development of Slovenia should be carried out" (DRVŠ, 1986, p. 3). The following year, a proposal for the multi-year research project *Long-Term Development of Higher Education in SR Slovenia* (DRVŠ) was prepared within the framework of the then Centre for University Development (CRU).¹⁴ Discussions related to this project are today the main source for the analysis of the conceptual design and shifts of that 'transitional' period.

The project deals with the treatment of Slovenian HE from the perspective of the global "university crisis", which is the result of "rapid changes in development" and "complex and fatal contradictions" (DRVŠ, 1986, pp. 11–12) that occur in modern societies. In these contradictions, processes in broader society are linked to those within the university. The design of the project attests to the fact that the authors were well acquainted with the analytical literature of the time on HE development. One of the neuralgic points of the "university crisis" was identified as the transition from elite to mass higher education, which had been a prominent topic of international discussion since the 1970s (Trow, 1973). "The rapid opening of existing universities was not enough to meet the 'needs for higher education'; "educational work was not based on the scientific research work of professors"; "universities actually became 'schools' resembling other [secondary schools]" (DRVŠ, 1986, p. 15), etc.

As we have seen above, the trend of HE massification started in Slovenia around 1970, but was stopped early. In the liberalised political atmosphere of the mid-1980s, the draft DRVŠ noted that "the effort to reduce the number of graduates [...] meets resistance outside the university and within it" (p. 15): "democratic forces fighting for social equality" cannot agree "to the criteria of employment, 'efficiency', etc., emphasized by capital and the state in the new situation" as the only criteria; the role of university education must be seen as "broader than pragmatic interests" (Ibid., p. 16), etc.

The authors of the project were aware that "views on the university and its further development are not uniform", partly due to the fact that projections on the development of the university were "not objective and scientifically

14 The CRU was established in 1970 and played an important role as the UL's research, development, information and advisory unit; unfortunately, it was abolished by the UL leadership in 1995.

research-based". The differences are partly due to "recent reform interventions in educational programmes", which have shown that "preparations for the transformation of the university have been inadequately planned". All of this "points to the need for a different approach, for thorough, in-depth analyses" (Ibid., p. 17). This is the task the project set out to accomplish.

From the consideration of a national university to the conceptualisation of a system

The implementation of the DRVŠ project began in the second half of 1986. The work relied on external collaborators, almost exclusively university staff, "who, because of their [...] experience [...] are familiar not only with the problems of our university, but also (though often only partially) with the work of other universities, especially European and American" (DRVŠ, 1987, p. 8). The work was organised into seven groups, and 135 researchers were involved (Ibid., p. 10). This was both a strength and a weakness of the project. The first research report states that "most of the researchers were confronted for the first time with the problem of systematic study of the university" (Ibid., p. 10), and that problems arose "due to the lack of specialists who systematically study the modern university" (Ibid., p. 15). The staff of the CRU, which was supposed to be the institutional bearer of the project, was involved only to a limited extent, and even these staff members were assigned mostly administrative tasks. Despite the late start of the project, the initial results were promising: in six months, 42 papers (1400 pages) were produced on a range of topics, from university autonomy and organisation, to teaching, research and support services. "We have never had so much useful information on the developmental problems of our university on paper" (Ibid., p. 13).

In the Slovenian library information system COBISS, there are 28 bibliographic units, mostly research reports, documenting the progress of the project (1986–1991); unfortunately, not all of them are available in public libraries today. Judging from this database, the project peaked in 1988 (12 units) and 1989 (10 units). Initially, the project attracted a large number of collaborators; later, according to COBISS, their numbers declined sharply. However, an already un-systematic review of the Slovenian professional press of the time¹⁵ shows that the intensity of the public debate on HE increased significantly in the late 1980s. DRVŠ was not able to realise some of its academic ambitions (e.g., it did not lead to the constitution of HE studies as a new field of research in Slovenia), but it had a great social and political impact: it strongly stimulated discussions

15 For example, the journals *Sodobnost* and *Teorija in praksa*; the newspaper *Naši razgledi*.

about HE and thus contributed significantly to the starting point for a new HE system in the early 1990s.

A resounding national conference was organised in November 1987, which can be considered the culmination of the project. The working material entitled *Basic Positions and Alternatives for the Long-Term Development of the University and Higher Education in Slovenia* was prepared by the project group (DRVŠ, 1988, pp. 69–115). The material emphasises that it does not bring “full agreement” on open questions: since agreement “could not always be achieved” (Ibid., p. 71), the material also contains “variant proposals” discussed by academic staff and (rarely) students, as well as some prominent Slovenian politicians, but only a few entrepreneurs.

The introductory speeches reflect, on the one hand, the political and strategic frictions in the Federation at the time and, on the other hand, the emphasis on the organisation of the university as well as on institutional autonomy, a concept that did not exist in the official documents. Deputy Prime Minister Boris Frlec pointed out the “paradox of the whole construction of the school as an enterprise” (Ibid., p. 34), which was a direct criticism of the basic conception of COE. He went on to emphasise that the university is not an “enterprise”, that it is “always also something ‘other’, and it is the latter that gives it its characteristic trait” (p. 38), concluding that this was something that needed to be discussed. What a university is and what it should be in the future thus became one of the guiding questions of the debate. In a given political atmosphere, the need for a reformulation of the relationship between (another) state and (another) university was dictated: “The university outside the political relationship is [...] a pure illusion, and with it the notion of higher education autonomy as a distance from a social environment, however structured” (Ibid.). For Andrej Marinc of the Presidium of the SRS, it was crucial under the given circumstances “to promote the creative freedom of individuals and groups and thus also the responsibility for their own and common development” (Ibid., p. 45). “Despite the aggravations and conflicts [in Yugoslavia], the path must lead to progress, and it is in this sense that I understand the need for the mutual influence of society on the development of the university and of the university on the development of society” (Ibid., p. 46). Such accents would not have been possible before 1986.

The President of the Project Council, Professor Fabinc,¹⁶ summarised the major strategic issues. The renewal of HE “takes place in the historical period of transition of our society from an extensive to an intensive economy” (Ibid., p. 47). How does one find the right path of transition? “There is no universal

16 Rector of the UL (1981–1985) and member of the SRS Presidency from 1986.

model of universities. A true university is the result of a long creative process of its social environment” (Ibid., p. 49). The reduction of the university to an educational function and the neglect of its research function “pushed the university into the profile and operating conditions of a secondary school” (Ibid., p. 50). At a time when science was becoming a key factor in the “race in the world economy”, in Slovenia “the interests of the university and other important research units are in conflict” (Ibid., pp. 51–52). This raised questions of organisation. “The only possible basis for self-organization and for regulating the position of the university in society” must not be based on “the closure and renewal of outdated monopoly tendencies, but above all on the basis of openness and acquired quality of work” (Ibid., p. 54). The reform must take into account, on the one hand, the “strengthening of the faculties’ professional responsibility for their integrated educational and research programmes”, and, on the other hand, the decision-making of “new central university bodies which take over part of the professional responsibility hitherto borne by non-university [i.e., political] institutions” (Ibid.).

The discussion at the conference did not produce any significant new conceptual emphases. There were, however, some differences, mainly related to the environment from which the speaker came: from a faculty, college or academy of arts; from the field of natural, technical or social sciences or humanities; from Ljubljana or Maribor. A great deal of attention was paid to the future organisation of HE and the principle of university autonomy, i.e., the abolition of the regulation that “deprives the university of its role as a subject of decision-making” (Ibid., p. 74). The changes must go “in the direction of greater interconnection of university units in terms of basic activities and in the direction of creating a university as an entity” (Ibid., p. 109). A consensus was reached on this issue, but it also became apparent that “several possible theoretical alternatives [...] can be identified in resolving the relationship between ‘faculty’, ‘high’ and ‘higher school’ education” (Ibid., p. 86). The existing relations of ‘university members’ proved to be the biggest obstacle in conceptualising the elimination of university fragmentation and the transition to an ‘integrated university’; this obstacle persisted until the late 1990s (Zgaga, 2007, pp. 77–79; Zgaga & Miklavič, 2011, pp. 17–18).

The decision on this obstacle was expedited by the political processes and bodies of the time, although not overnight. In May 1988, six months after the national conference of the DRVŠ project, the SRS Assembly discussed a proposal for a thorough intervention in the COEA, as well as the initiative of both universities to restore a special HEA. The position was taken that “with any significant changes it is necessary to wait for the results of the research

projects in the field of higher, secondary and adult education” and “not to interfere with the basic conception of the act”; however, those “issues on which we agreed earlier and unified based on the results of the evaluation research can be solved” (Assembly Reporter, 1988, p. 44). In particular, this was a return of the *matura* to the education system, as well as some changes in the role and tasks of universities.

The legislative process took a year and the amendments were adopted by the Assembly in June 1989. As early as February 1989, a group of experts was formed to prepare a new concept for the *matura*. After intensive work, its final report (Pedagogical Worker, 1989a, 1989b). proposed quite detailed outlines of an externally assessed examination. The report contained the main arguments for its reintroduction into the system and also contributed to the somewhat later return of the *gimnazija*.¹⁷ The system of COE began to disintegrate.

Concurrent with the submission of a government proposal to amend the COEA to the SRS Assembly, the two universities submitted a request for a new law on HE, “recalling the need for specific and comprehensive legislation on higher education”. The Assembly adopted the request, adding “that a special law [...] would regulate the [HE] system more comprehensively and remedy the deficiencies of the present legislation [...] when the research results of the [DRVŠ] project were incorporated into that law”. It suggested “that the universities, as the proposers for the enactment of the [HE] law, shall prepare all the conceptual bases for the proposal [...] in cooperation with the [government], which should be the proposer for the law”. (Assembly Reporter, 1988, p. 44).

The ball was now in the universities’ court; however, the process going forward was anything but straightforward. To the reasons already outlined, one must add the increasingly turbulent political situation that led to the independence of the Republic of Slovenia (RS) and the brief war with the Yugoslav Army (June 1991) after the first multiparty and democratic elections (April 1990). The university preparation of the starting points for the HE law was clearly summarised by Albin Igličar (1992, pp. 1197–1198):

“Following the decision to regulate higher education outside the Career-Oriented Education Act, the first comprehensive theses of the law on the university were prepared in October 1989.” Before the text prepared by the representatives of the two universities was submitted to the political authorities, “a discussion took place at the universities at the end of 1989. Due to the great heterogeneity – especially of the University of Ljubljana – the theses did not find

¹⁷ They were reintroduced in January 1990; in two, the International Baccalaureate (IBO) was experimentally introduced in September. The national *matura* was conducted on a trial basis in 1994, and frontally in 1995, as stipulated by the 1989 amendments.

general consensus in university circles. Therefore, the drafting of a new law was temporarily suspended. In the following year, the new leadership of the University of Ljubljana tried to reach compromise solutions by making numerous changes to the original theses, but they destroyed the consistency of the original draft law. Later, a new working group of the government and the universities was formed, which prepared the most general starting points for the new university law, but none of these texts got beyond the ministry line or were discussed in a government or assembly session.” Igličar concluded: “It seems that the main reason why the university itself finds it very difficult to formulate generally accepted theses of higher education law lies in its extraordinary heterogeneity, in the ‘digging in’ of each faculty, college and academy of arts in their own interests and acquired rights. In such a situation, the effort to find compromise solutions becomes a ‘rotten compromise’, which then satisfies no one.”

Conclusion: Adoption of the HEA (1993)

In the heated atmosphere of the late 1980s, the debate stimulated by the DRVŠ project contributed to the critique of the existing regime, to the confrontation of different analyses, and to attempts at a new conceptualisation of HE. Such confrontation had a significant impact on the gradual establishment of a new regulation of the education system in the newly born RS. Of course, this path was not straightforward.

Slovenia’s independence would not have been possible without the great commitment of civil society, in which students and professors were often at the forefront. This was also reflected in the composition of the SRS Assembly after the first multiparty elections. Now critiques and analyses had to be ‘translated’ into normative form. The new basic norm for HE was introduced in December 1991 by the *Constitution of the RS* (1993), Article 58: “State universities and other institutions of higher education shall be autonomous. The funding of these institutions shall be regulated by statute.” With this short definition, the debate about what autonomy means had just begun, and the road to regulating the funding of institutions was long and arduous (Zgaga, 2007, pp. 77–82).

In the DRVŠ project materials and in various discussions from the late 1980s, there is a great deal of criticism: of the concept of COE and its negative impact on HE, and of existing practices within HE. These critiques were justified in many ways and contributed to the gradual formation of new concepts, but one cannot overlook the moments in which their particular, separate point of view is expressed, their ‘blind spot’: the *lack of self-critical introspection*, such as, for example, Bourdieu (1984) offered to the international debate exactly in

those years: the academic space is not only a space of dialogue and the search for truth, but also a space of power, fuelled by academic reputations and careers.

The ‘blind spot’ reinforced a persisting fragmentation of HE. Fragmentation prevented both the synthesis of different discussion outcomes and the transition from research to policy making. Particular academic interests resisted both systematic, unbiased, critical research on HE and a unified approach to negotiations with political authorities. Each was intent on its own gain. Thus, the question of the relationship between independent faculties and colleges was foregrounded, while the question of the national HE system was ignored. Self-critical self-reflection, which remained marginal during this period, would demand more: the zeitgeist demanded not only a *different state*, but also a *different university*. This was not possible, however, without at least a relative reordering of the balance of power in academia.

For a long time after WWII, the university was a ‘community’ of HEIs, not a sui generis institution (which was the case when the UL was founded in 1919). Even after 1975, when the word university was no longer used in the singular, no need was seen “to introduce a strictly institutionalized coordinating body between the two universities” (DRVŠ, 1989, p. 53). With the reorganisation of HEIs (VTOZD; see note 16), COE further increased their organisational and academic fragmentation. The conceptual change from the (otherwise obligatory) ‘community’ of HEIs to the university was one of the central conditions for further development, but it was also a condition for the conceptual change from the *national university* to the national HE system.

After the collapse of the first government coalition and the formation of a new government in the spring of 1992, the coordination of the starting points for the new law intensified from mid-1992. As early as December 1992, the government submitted a harmonised *Proposal for the Higher Education Act with Theses* (Assembly Reporter, 1992, pp. 65–77) to the Assembly. The explanatory memorandum referred to the European and international trends of the time: the new law “comes into being at a time when European integration processes dictate the convergence and unification of higher education, which faces new development tasks in each national environment”. However, European traditions have “shaped diverse systems, none of which can be considered the sole model”. International cooperation “is today conditioned above all by the mobility of students and the approximation of the qualities of graduates, that is, by the comparability of degrees”, which “cannot be achieved by administrative means alone” (Ibid., p. 66). The proposal underlines the importance of academic mobility.¹⁸ The Erasmus programme was already known at the time; Slovenia only

18 The idea of a “European student” was discussed in the DRVŠ (1988, p. 93) project.

joined it in 1999, but had been integrated into the Tempus programme since the early 1990s. Besides the concepts that emerged mainly from the strategic ideas of the then European Community, others are also recognisable in the proposal, e.g., those promoted by the *Magna Charta Universitatum* (1988), which was also signed by Slovenian universities. In short, the new law was to “enter the field of European systems and diversity”. Seven years later, Slovenia was in the first group of countries to sign the *Bologna Declaration* (1999).

Key concepts emphasised in the bill (see *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67) include “securing the autonomy of universities and colleges” and “reorganizing the university from the previous loose community into a traditionally understood university”. Related to this is the principle of deregulation: “delimitation of state competences from academic self-management and the formation of a body of experts” to deal with strategic issues (Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia).¹⁹ Among the issues discussed at length in recent years are the definition of the *matura* as an entrance ticket to HE, the integration of teaching “with compulsory scientific research”, and the “differentiation of university and higher professional education” (i.e., bifurcation, which should allow broader access to studies and better-qualified graduates). The proposal includes the hitherto non-existent right to “one year of in-depth training [...] every six years” (sabbatical), but also mentions “the possibility of multiplying and pluralising higher education centres in the future”, which would expand study opportunities as well as introducing “competitiveness into higher education”.

The HEA was passed by the Assembly in three phases in December 1993. In June 1992, I replaced my previous work at the UL's Faculty of Education with work as the State Secretary at the Ministry of Education and accepted responsibility for coordinating and adopting this Act. Therefore, the *research paper* must shift to *les memoirs* at this point.

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¹⁹ This body also held the role of an accreditation body for more than ten years.

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Paid Work alongside Higher Education Studies as an Investment in Human Capital

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∞ In this study, using a database of higher education student surveys, we analyse the motivations behind paid work through cluster analysis and reveal which variables influence them. We hypothesise that working while studying is also an investment in human capital. We research to what extent students are motivated to work alongside their studies by the possibility of acquiring work experience and future financial return. Furthermore, we examine whether Bourdieuan capital conversion is characteristic of students. We found that acquiring work experience was a more important motive behind paid work than acquiring cultural and social capital and the possibility of capital conversion. We also found that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are primarily motivated to seek employment by the prospect of short-term income. It is a significant finding that even if the students' jobs are not related to their studies, they still have the goal of gaining professional experience and increasing their capital, which implies that they consider many of these jobs to be an investment in human capital (even if it does not yield a return in the future; see the theoretical section). According to our policy recommendation, higher education institutions should offer students more study-related employment opportunities in the examined Central European region, while employers should also attribute a greater value to the professional experience acquired alongside higher education studies.

Keywords: working while studying, higher education students, human capital investment, capital conversion, quantitative research

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Plačano delo ob študiju kot naložba v človeški kapital

HAJNALKA FÉNYES

☞ V raziskavi s pomočjo baze podatkov, pridobljenih iz anket visokošolskih študentov, s skupinsko analizo ugotavljamo njihovo motivacijo za opravljanje plačanega dela in prikažemo spremenljivke, ki vplivajo nanjo. Predpostavljamo, da je delo ob študiju prav tako naložba v človeški kapital, in skušamo ugotoviti, v kolikšni meri so študentje motivirani zanj z namenom pridobivanja delovnih izkušenj in finančnih koristi v prihodnosti. Poleg tega preučujemo, ali Bourdiejeva pretvorba kapitala velja tudi za študente. Ugotovili smo, da je pridobivanje delovnih izkušenj pomembnejši motiv za plačano delo od pridobitve kulturnega in socialnega kapitala ter možnosti pretvorbe kapitala ter da so študentje iz deprivilegiranih okolij motivirani za iskanje zaposlitve predvsem zaradi kratkoročnih dohodkov. Prav tako je pomembna ugotovitev, da sta cilja študentov pridobivanje delovnih izkušenj in povečanje kapitala, tudi če njihovo delo ni v povezavi z njihovo študijsko usmeritvijo, iz česar sledi, da je po njihovem mnenju veliko tovrstnih del naložba v človeški kapital (tudi če se v prihodnosti ne bo obrestoval; glejte teoretični del). Po našem splošnem priporočilu bi morale visokošolske ustanove v obravnavani srednjeevropski regiji ponuditi študentom več zaposlitvenih možnosti v povezavi z njihovim študijem, delodajalci pa bi morali bolj ceniti poklicne izkušnje, pridobljene ob univerzitetnem študiju.

Ključne besede: delo ob študiju, visokošolski študentje, naložbe v človeški kapital, pretvorba kapitala, kvantitativne raziskave

Theoretical background and research questions

According to human capital theory, the return on an investment, such as higher education (which includes the costs and sacrifices associated with studying), is materialised in higher wages in the future (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1971). Mincer (1958) argues that working alongside tertiary studies, especially in a related field, also constitutes an investment in human capital, which increases an individual's future productivity.

In this study, we consider, in addition to the human capital model, Bourdieu's theory (1986) about the different forms of capital. Bourdieu differentiates between economic, cultural, and social capital, while he also describes the convertibility of capital forms. According to his theory of cultural and social reproduction (see Bourdieu, 1977), the education system reproduces social inequalities, mostly because cultural capital is unevenly distributed among students, which the education system is unable to compensate. Bourdieu (1986) highlights the impact of differences in institutionalised cultural capital (e.g., the parents' level of education), objectified cultural capital (the quantity of books, music records, encyclopaedias, etc.), as well as incorporated cultural capital (e.g., language skills and cultural competencies). The internalisation of incorporated cultural capital begins at early infancy, and the school rewards knowledge and abilities brought from home, which is why it is so difficult for underprivileged children to catch up to their peers.

Cultural capital may be converted into economic capital (and/or higher status) through its institutionalisation (i.e., obtaining a qualification), the mechanism through which social inequalities are reproduced. In addition, Bourdieu argues that social capital could play a similar role. The extent of the social network, the economic and cultural resources available through one's relationships, and the quality (strength) of relationships may also be decisive. In a manner similar to cultural resources, acquired relationships could also be converted into economic capital. In essence, cultural and social capital may be converted into economic capital, while economic capital could provide a solid foundation for the other two capital forms at the same time. Nevertheless, Bourdieu highlights that economic capital in itself is insufficient to increase cultural and social capital, while cultural and social capital can not be merely converted into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

A possible example of capital conversion could be paid student employment. Szócs and Hamvas (2014) argue that student employment, partly independent from the field of study, increases three forms of capital: economic capital (through the salary), cultural capital (e.g., labour market skills are

improved), and social capital (through useful relationships). Additionally, students may convert the cultural and social capital into economic capital by taking better jobs in the future. Pusztai (2014, 2015, 2018) emphasises the positive influence that students' social resources have on their academic progress and future labour market performance. Consequently, social capital that is gained through work alongside tertiary studies could offer similar benefits.

It is important to highlight that the human capital model considers primarily financial return, whereas in Bourdieu's model, cultural or social capital can be converted into economic capital and might result in higher social status (power and prestige) at the same time; in other words, sociological considerations may prevail in addition to economic consequences. Furthermore, the definition of cultural capital is broader because it includes more than just knowledge and abilities, as human capital does². All in all, since Bourdieu's works and human capital theory do not share the same concept of capital and employ different methodologies, their predictions are not easily comparable.

Engler (2012, 2013) considers so-called fields of return in her analysis of mothers' choices to take part in higher education, which reveals that further studies have various aims in addition to future financial returns. For instance, the cultural capital accumulated by women in higher education yields a return in their family relationships (with their children and spouse). Furthermore, relationships that are formed during higher education studies also offer a benefit to one's private life. The same could be true for cultural and social capital acquired through working while studying.

In this study, our research question about student employment asks whether students are motivated by the immediate or future financial return to their investment, or possibly both. In addition, we ask whether students, alongside gaining professional experience, also wish to acquire cultural and social capital, which offer the potential for return in the future, as well. We only investigate whether students take into account the predictions of human capital theory and capital conversion (based on Bourdieu's model) in their decisions; we do not quantify the actual return. We explore, however, which variables influence the motivation (and its various types) to work while studying.

2 Student employment improves professional competencies and labour market skills, which can be clearly interpreted as rising incorporated cultural capital according to Bourdieu's model. We shall return to the skill improving effect of student employment in relation to Teichler's employability concept.

Additional Theoretical Approaches about the Effects of Student Employment

According to Riggert et al. (2006), there is no uniform theory on the effects of student employment. In addition to the human capital theory (economic approach) and the capital conversion model (sociological aspect), which are dominant in the present study, other higher education theories that consider the effects of student employment also exist. Now we briefly present three models with the effect of student employment in primary focus: the student engagement model (Tinto, Pascarella, Astin, Kuh), the non-traditional student concept (Bean, Metzner), and, finally, employability theory (Teichler).

Tinto (1993) and Pascarella et al. (1991) put the principal emphasis on examining institutional effects on academic performance and persistence in higher education. The key elements of their theory are students' institutional commitment and integration, which can expand students' efficiency. In revised versions of the theory (Carini et al., 2006; Kuh et al., 2008; Kuh, 2009), however, the role of institutional effects is deemed less significant, for instance, in reducing attrition, while individual characteristics are considered to be at least as important. It is also highlighted that student engagement is only one of many factors affecting success and the effect of other unexamined characteristics of institutions may also prove significant. Finally, complex indicators of academic efficiency are proposed (by contrast, Tinto's model only contains grades and persistence). To provide an example, Kuh and Umbach (2004) claim that student efficiency, broadly defined, may include the propensity for employment and work attitudes. The improvement of certain competencies could also become an indicator of success. Astin's (1993) definition of persistence comprises the commitment to graduate as well as the intensity of academic efforts (e.g., to do extra work).

Student employment is also related to student engagement theory. Whether an individual works alongside their studies constitutes one of the indicators for student engagement. The theory suggests that students can become more integrated through extracurricular or other study-related activities (e.g., working while studying), which might result in better academic performance. It is important to ask, however, whether the work is related to the field of study, whether it is on-campus or off-campus employment, and whether it is done part-time or full-time (Riggert et al., 2006). Blackwell et al. (2001) claim that the effect of employment on academic efficiency is contradictory. On the one hand, those who seek employment alongside their studies tend to be better motivated, deem their career more important, and study better (pull factor). On

the other, employment takes away time from studying, which might result in poor academic performance or even attrition (push factor).

According to another theory, those who work alongside their studies can be regarded as non-traditional students. Bean and Metzner (1985) supposed that students who work are at greater risk of attrition as they are less integrated into campus life. It is not institutional effects that their theory considers primarily but individual characteristics. Student employment is an external environmental factor that affects students.

Finally, the theory of student engagement takes into account both individual and institutional effects, albeit mainly concerning academic performance and not labour market outcomes, while the “employability concept” places in focus the institutional effects on labour market success. Empirical applications of human capital theory concentrate on the supply-side effects on the labour market, although the demand side should also be considered. According to the approach that emphasises the demand side, education policy should adjust to the demand to improve economic growth and technological development. Furthermore, education should contribute to reducing social inequalities and creating equal opportunities (social function), that is to say, the doors to higher education should be opened as wide as possible. It is necessary to observe, however, that actual social mobility can only occur if a higher education degree results in favourable employment opportunities. In this case, a high social status can be achieved for the individual.

The employability concept introduced by Ulrich Teichler offers a complex approach towards the usefulness of human capital. Employability is a sort of higher education efficiency marker and can be measured by the rate of immediate employment after graduation, avoiding unemployment, a low ratio of non-regular employment, professional advancement and success, the extent of the fit between studies and degree level, and, finally, the adequate use of skills acquired in higher education. These can be influenced by individual characteristics as well as institutional ones.

Nowadays, universities must monitor labour market needs; besides updating curricula and introducing new methods of instruction, they should also prepare students for life-long learning, career building, and personal development. In the short term, higher education institutions should assist students in finding immediate employment after graduation supporting them in achieving high performance in their first job and, in the long-term, in obtaining the skills essential for subsequent employment (e.g., labour market and entrepreneurship skills, personality competencies, social abilities). Teichler claims that student employment is a learning process, whereby students can improve their

skills while simultaneously gaining professional experience. In addition, it is also considered a crucial tool for the mobilisation and use of human capital, through which students' employability increases. (Teichler, 1999, 2011)

Empirical Findings on the Effect of Student Employment

The effect of student employment on subsequent labour market outcomes is indirect since it influences academic achievement (grades and attrition probability), which has an impact on labour market prospects and future wage levels. Acquired work experience also has a direct effect on future job prospects. In the empirical section of this study, we will not examine the effect of student employment on academic efficiency, skill development, and subsequent labour market outcomes; in the following, we summarise the related empirical findings and evaluate the extent to which the predictions of the above theories are empirically valid. Most studies in the literature measure the short-term effect of student employment (on academic efficiency), but few discuss the effect on labour market outcomes. Furthermore, many analyses only take into account the effect of a few other background variables, which might bias the results.

According to Tinto (1993), employment has a negative effect on one's studies as it takes up considerable time and reduces student embeddedness (students are less integrated into campus life, attend fewer classes), which raises the possibility of attrition. However, Pascarella et al. (1994) and Stern and Nakata (1991) argue that working while studying has little impact on academic performance and attrition, and that whether the relationship is positive or not is also debatable. Astin (1993) finds that off-campus employment exerts a negative effect, regardless of whether it is done part-time or full-time, but so-called on-campus work increases student involvement. Kuh's (2009) more recent findings indicate that involvement in educationally purposeful activities (i.e., voluntary activities and community service, but paid work was not examined) increase students' academic achievement, persistence, and satisfaction.

Curtis and Shani's (2002) qualitative research findings reveal indirect effects of student employment, namely that it improves labour market skills, elevates students' confidence, makes them more familiar with work, increases their cultural capital, all of which positively affect academic performance as well as subsequent employment opportunities. Beerkens et al. (2011) and Hunt (2010) claim, however, that student employment has a negative impact on studies and may not prove overly useful, especially if it is done full-time. Hall (2010) points out that the more students work, the stronger the negative effect on their academic results is.

In their investigation on the labour market return to working while studying in six Central and Eastern European countries, Róbert and Saar (2012) find no labour market return to student employment, which is unrelated to the field of study, but show that labour market entry is easier with field-related professional experience. Carnevale et al. (2015) also find that student employment has a positive effect on labour market entry, especially if the experience is related to the studies. According to Häkkinen's (2006) analysis of data from Finland, student employment results in higher wages one year after graduation but exerts no effect later. In their multivariate analysis, Baert et al. (2016) find that working while studying has neither a positive nor negative impact on labour market success.

Employability theory implies that students' employability increases with employment alongside the studies. Empirical findings show that students' skills indeed improve if they work while studying. Furthermore, acquired social capital is crucial to mobilising human capital and to subsequent labour market success. Empirical findings also suggest that paid student employment in the field of study increases the potential for vertical and horizontal matches, specifically the extent to which the job corresponds to the level and field of study (Allen & Van der Velden, 2011).

Teichler (2011) argues that subsequent labour market success is augmented by other study-related activities during higher education studies, such as internships, paid or unpaid employment, especially if it is related to the field of study or future career plans. According to another finding, student employment increases the probability of being employed five years after graduation, even if the employment is not related to the field of study (Allen & Van der Velden, 2011).

Concerning skill improvement (i.e., competencies relevant for labour market success, e.g., performing well under pressure, efficient time management, cooperation, coordination of tasks, etc.), both paid and voluntary work in the field of study could have a positive effect. The impact of a prescribed professional internship materialises directly after graduation in that it assists job-seeking but leaves earnings and the listed skills unaffected. It can be shown, however, that voluntary work exerts a stronger effect on the development of competencies than paid work does (Allen & Van der Velden, 2011).

To summarise, the empirical findings seem to be contradictory. The effect of student employment on academic performance and labour market success is ambiguous even if only study-related work is considered.

Hypotheses

In short, paid work has the purpose of earning money (increasing economic capital) as well as enhancing cultural and social capital. According to a qualitative study of interviews exploring the motivations behind student employment, those who work alongside their studies do so to gain work experience, build professional relationships, become independent from their parents, earn money for a specific purpose, improve their curriculum vitae, and develop language skills and leadership competencies (Hall, 2010). In another qualitative study, Szócs (2014) finds that students take jobs to earn money for a specific purpose (for leisure activities, holidays, entertainment, etc.), secure their living conditions, become independent from their parents, gain professional experience, form relationships, and expand their knowledge. We suppose in our analysis that the motivations behind paid work depend on students' gender, age and social background, as well as on the field and form of financing of the studies and the country of the institution.

- H1: As the survey,³ we differentiate between six motivations for paid student employment. Based on Mincer (1958) and Bourdieu (1986), we hypothesise that students are motivated by acquiring work experience and by acquiring cultural and social capital besides short-term earnings in accordance with the human capital theory and the capital conversion model.
- H2: Our second hypothesis implies, however, that jobs that are not related to the field of study are mainly taken due to short-term financial motives (based on Mincer (1958) and the empirical findings on the effects of students' paid employment, see the theoretical part).
- H3: Bocsi (2012) finds that male students are more likely to have an instrumental and money-oriented work attitude than females. Based on this, we hypothesise that financial considerations are more important for men than women also with respect to student employment.
- H4: Gáti and Róbert (2013) argue that the effect of parental qualification on doing study-related or not study-related paid work is not straightforward. Based on this, our first hypothesis (H4A) is that the goal of earning money in the short run is more characteristic of students from less favourable backgrounds, while students of higher status believe that gaining experience is their main goal. According to our second, alternative hypothesis

3 The survey did not contain questions about the funding of studies as motivation, as the overwhelming majority of students at the time took part in a state-funded study programme. Furthermore, respondents could not mark as distinct motivation the improvement of their curriculum vitae or the development of their language skills and leadership competencies.

(H4B), students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more motivated to obtain higher status through their degree, so gathering professional experience during their studies is also an important aim for them.

- H5: With respect to age, we hypothesise that younger students are likelier to be motivated by earning money in the short term, while the motivation to gain work experience is more common among older students, who are closer to graduation.
- H6: Concerning the field of study, we hypothesise that high-prestige degree programmes with elevated earnings potential (e.g., economics or business-related fields), for which students' social background is relatively favourable, the motivation to acquire professional experience is more common, whereas those who study in low-prestige programmes with modest income potential in the future are likelier to be motivated by short-term earnings.
- H7: Since self-funded students were uncommon at the time the survey was conducted, we suppose that no observable differences can be shown based on whether it is the state or the student who pays the tuition.
- H8: As regards differences between countries, we hypothesise that students of Hungarian higher education institutions in the sample are less motivated by short-term earnings than Hungarian minority students in the other three countries, since Hungary enjoys slightly more favourable economic conditions, and students' social background is also demonstrably better there (see Pusztai & Márkus, 2019).

Method

Our research method is quantitative. Using SPSS software ((PAWS Statistics 18 version), we conduct cross-tabulation, analysis of variance and cluster analysis. Our data are based on the IESA survey (Institutional Effect on Students' Achievement in Higher Education), realised in the framework of the SZAKTÁRNET project (TÁMOP-4.1.2.B.2-13/1-2013-0009). The survey, conducted in 2014 in a Central and Eastern European region, contains 1792 responses from bachelor's students in their second year and master's students in their first year. Responses were gathered with the intention of representativity in terms of discipline and faculty, in a randomly selected seminar group at each faculty in the form of group data gathering.

The database included only full-time students, and the proportion of students in bachelor's programmes was 68.7%, with the remainder studying in master's programmes or undivided programmes which offer a master's degree.

In the sample, about 15.4% of students were tuition-paying (12.2% in Hungary, 24% in Romania, 26% in Ukraine, and 3.2% in Serbia), while the rest were state-funded. If we examine the field of study (based on the faculty at which the degree programme is offered), we find that 658 people took part in a humanities degree programme (paedagogy, philology, social sciences, theology), 119 studied health sciences, 68 studied law, 260 people studied at economics or business faculties, and, 572 people studied some branch of science (computer science, agricultural science, and faculties of engineering and natural sciences).

The scope of the research extends from universities in Eastern Hungary (University of Debrecen, number of students in the sample = 1062; Debrecen Reformed Theological University $N = 23$; University of Nyíregyháza $N = 136$) to higher education institutions with Hungarian-language instruction in three other Central European countries (Romania $N = 284$, Ukraine $N = 212$, Serbia $N = 63$)⁴.

About three million Hungarians live outside Hungary. In Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia, and Serbia, most Hungarians live in areas where they are in the majority (a total of about two million Hungarians reside in these four countries). The level of qualification of the Hungarian minority is lower than that of the majority population, and higher education opportunities are also limited in Hungarian, their mother tongue. Pusztai and Márkus (2019) show that in the four listed countries, on average, Hungarian minority students' parents have a lower level of qualification than it is the case with those students' parents who study in Eastern Hungary. They also indicated that students' social status is somewhat more favourable in Slovakia and Serbia, where the Hungarian minority is more assimilated, than in Romania and Ukraine.

Empirical results

In short, 44% of surveyed students had paid work during either holidays or the academic year. As explored in the theoretical section, whether student employment is related to the field of study is an important aspect of human capital investment, as we presume that the motive for work which is not related to the field of study is to earn money in the short term. We find that about two-thirds of paid work is unrelated to the field of study, which is quite high and, based on this, we expect that paid employment is motivated mostly by the prospect of

4 Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of Babeş-Bolyai University, Off-site Faculty of Babeş-Bolyai University in Satu Mare, Off-site Faculty of Babeş-Bolyai University in Odorheiu Secuies, Partium Christian University, University of Oradea, and Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania from Romania; Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute and the Uzhhorod National University from Ukraine; Teachers' Training Faculty in Subotica of the University of Novi Sad from Serbia.

earning short-term money instead of professional development. In an analysis of the same database, Markos (2018) has shown that paid work is more characteristic of men, older students, and those whose fathers have low levels of education. Student employment is unaffected by the family's financial situation.

First, we investigate the order of importance of motivations behind student employment (Table 1).

Table 1

Order of importance of motivations behind paid work (the fraction of student workers who marked each motive)

Becoming independent from parents	44.7%
Acquiring professional experience	35.1%
I need money for leisure activities	32.0%
I need money for basic expenditure	28.8%
Gaining new knowledge, learning new information	22.8%
Getting to know people, building relationships	15.4%

Note. Why have you done paid work? (multiple answers were allowed).

According to the data, the most important motivations include gaining professional experience as well as earning short-term money, while increasing cultural and social capital is deemed less crucial, which suggests that professional experience in itself is more instrumental to students than the various capital forms that they acquire through their work.

Second, clusters have been formed based on the six motives. The four clusters contain 89 to 527 students who have done paid work (Table 2).

Table 2

Clusters of students who have done paid work based on motivations behind paid work

	1	2	3	4
I need money for basic expenditure	.09	.35	.29	.38
I need money for leisure activities	.24	.24	1.00*	.33
Becoming independent from parents	.10	.38	1.00*	.92*
Getting to know people, building relationships	.17	.04	.12	.55*
Acquiring professional experience	.85*	.00	.35	.82*
Gaining new knowledge, learning new information	.39	.01	.04	.86*
N	234	527	89	146

Note. N = 996. K-means cluster analysis with 100 iterations; missing data have been treated by a pairwise method. * = cluster centers above 0.5.

The clusters are named the following:

1. Solely work experience-oriented
2. Short term money-oriented
3. Leisure- and independence-centred
4. Capital increasing (economic, cultural, and social)

As established, whether paid work is related to the field of study is a key aspect. Employment is most related to the field of study in the work experience-oriented motivational cluster (for 45% of respondents in the cluster) and the least related among those who are leisure- and independence-centred (16%), which is in accordance with expectations. Interestingly, only 35% of the economic, cultural, and social capital increasing cluster have sought employment that is related to their discipline, which implies that they acquire capital mostly outside of their profession.

We also analyse the gender composition of motivational clusters. Quite surprisingly, motives for student employment are independent of gender, contrary to previous studies, which have shown a male dominance in the financial motivations. Furthermore, we explore motivations behind paid work by place of residence at the age of 14. There seems to be no relationship since students from towns and villages are not different in their motives.

We also investigate the presence of financial difficulties in each cluster and find significant differences ($p = .003$). As expected, solely work experience-oriented motivation (where student employment is most often related to the field of study) is characteristic of students from well-off families, who hardly ever (only 7% of them) experience financial hardships. Students who have experienced financial difficulties are overrepresented in the short term money-oriented cluster (16.8% of them have such difficulties).

Table 3

Means of certain demographic and social background variables by motivational clusters

Clusters	Age	Father's years of education	Mother's years of education	Objective financial situation index	Subjective financial situation
Solely work experience-oriented	21.62	12.87	13.51	6.35	5.38
Short-term money-oriented	21.29	12.26	12.68	5.72	4.89
Leisure- and independence-centred	21.86	12.37	12.58	6.06	4.93
Capital increasing (economic, cultural, and social)	22.00	12.39	12.74	5.77	4.91
Significance of Anova-test	.018	.021	.000	.000	.000

Table 3 shows significant differences between the means of age, the father's and mother's years of education, objective (index created based on the possession of durable consumption goods, 1-10) and subjective (1-10 ranking compared to an average family in the country) indices of financial situation by motivational clusters. The short-term money-oriented cluster consists of younger people who have more time before they enter the labour market and need money for basic expenditures and independence. The work experience-oriented motivation is more common among students whose parents (mother and father) have a high level of qualification. Furthermore, students from both subjectively and objectively well-off families are more overrepresented in the work experience-oriented motivational cluster.

The distribution by field of study reveals that students from economics and business faculties are overrepresented in the solely work experience-oriented cluster, while those who study health sciences are underrepresented, although the relationship is not significant. Furthermore, whether a student or the state pays for the tuition does not influence the motivations behind paid work presumably because 85% of students in the sample took part in a state-funded programme.

There are significant differences ($p = .013$) in the motivation to do paid work across countries. Students from Ukraine are overrepresented in the short-term money-oriented cluster, while those who study at Hungarian institutions are underrepresented, which could be explained by the less favourable economic situation in Ukraine relative to Hungary. The solely work experience-oriented and capital increasing clusters do not exhibit significant differences by country.⁵

Discussion

Student employment has been on the rise recently, which is reflected in the data from the cross-border area of four Central and Eastern European countries. Our research has posed the question as to what motivates students to do paid work alongside their studies and which variables influence this.

The relationship between higher education and employment is investigated by various disciplines. The approach of economics primarily considers human capital theory as well as the sorting and signalling model.⁶ By contrast,

5 Students of Serbian institutions are overrepresented in the leisure- and independence-centred cluster, while students from Ukraine and Romania are underrepresented, but the number of occurrences is very low (only 19 of the 89 students in the cluster are not from Hungary).

6 According to the sorting and signalling model, educational qualifications provide information and have a screening role by indicating to employers how applicants' productivity and development potential compares to their peers. Besides enhancing productivity, education may also serve as a screening device. The model could also be applied to student employment, as the acquired professional experience and the received references may prove to be an appreciated signal to employers (Kun, 2009).

sociological theories also focus on the return on human capital in terms of status and highlight the reproduction of social inequalities in education. The aspect of education sciences emphasises the effect of educational institutions on the improvement of skills which are useful in the labour market, and studies the possibilities of higher education institutions, among others, to integrate students into the labour market in a better way. Finally, the psychological approach examines the personality traits which enable career-building. In this study, we focus primarily on the economic and sociological aspects but also reflect on other approaches.

Concerning the order of motives for student employment, we found that work experience nested between short-term money-oriented motivations, while the opportunity for capital conversion, that is, social and cultural capital acquisition is of secondary importance. Based on motivations, the largest cluster is short term money-oriented, followed by the solely work experience-oriented and capital-increasing cluster (economic, cultural, and social). The smallest cluster is leisure- and independence-centred. Student employment to earn short-term money is more frequent among younger students, in accordance with expectations. This is because labour market entry is still distant, and career-building motives are not considered as thoroughly. With respect to social background, as expected, those who have the goal of gaining professional experience have the best economic and cultural position, whereas students from disadvantaged backgrounds are mostly motivated by short-term money. Our alternative hypothesis, which states that experience-oriented motivation is more common among disadvantaged students, cannot be observed.

It is an significant finding that less than half of those who are driven only by the opportunity to gain work experience seek employment in the field of their studies; moreover, only a third of the capital-increasing cluster do so. As a consequence, we may reject the hypothesis that paid work is only motivated by short-term money if it is not related to the field of study. Even if students' jobs are not related to their studies, they still have the goal of gaining professional experience and increasing their capital, which implies that they consider many of these jobs as human capital investment (even if it does not yield a return in the future, see the theoretical section).

There are no apparent gender differences in the motivation behind paid work, which is partly contrary to previous findings, which suggest that financial considerations are more important for males than females.

Analysing the field of study has revealed that economics and business students are likelier to exhibit solely work experience-oriented motivation than those who study medicine or a related discipline, presumably due to the higher

prestige of the programme. According to another finding, motivational clusters are uncorrelated with the funding form of the studies, possibly because the majority of the sample consisted of state-funded students. As for differences across countries, the short-term money-oriented motivation behind paid work is less common among students in Hungary than it is in, for example, Ukraine, ostensibly due to the better economic situation in Hungary and students' more favourable social background.

It is a possible direction for future analysis to investigate the actual return to paid work during higher education studies through multivariate methods among those who graduated recently or a few years ago but, unfortunately, our database is not suitable to do this. The examination of the motivations behind voluntary work in the same database could prove to be also a worthwhile topic for future research, possibly in a subsequent paper.

Policy recommendations

In conclusion, the investigated Central and Eastern European region has a less stable economy than Western European countries do, although students in Hungary are in a somewhat more favourable situation than their peers in the other three countries of the sample. Unlike Western Europe, however, most students in the sample took part in a state-funded programme, which is why earning the necessary sum for tuition is not a primary motive for paid work.

The relative scarcity of paid or voluntary employment opportunities that are related to the field of study is also characteristic of the region. Furthermore, employers place relatively little importance on previously acquired professional experience in the application process. Taking out a student loan could be a viable alternative to employment that is unrelated to the field of study, but only a handful of students choose this option.

It is a significant result that students from disadvantaged backgrounds do not seek employment primarily to gain work experience and obtain a better job in the future; instead, they work to earn money in the short term. As a result, talented students of disadvantaged backgrounds should be educated on the future importance of work experience gained alongside higher education studies (in a related field) as early as secondary school. In addition, the findings reveal that students are not conscious of the capital-converting opportunity with respect to working alongside their studies, even though many studies indicate that skills and relationships could later become highly useful in the labour market.

Student engagement theory implies that higher education institutions should provide more on-campus work opportunities to increase students'

involvement, commitment, and integration, which could result in better academic performance. Engaging in educationally productive activities (see Kuh (2009), who examined voluntary work but not paid employment, however) could induce an improvement in skills, higher commitment, and personality development. Blackwell et al. (2001) argue, however, that student employment may simultaneously constitute a push and pull factor, and its effect on academic efficiency is contradictory.

Teichler's employability concept has institutional effects in relation to employability in its main focus. It highlights that study-related work opportunities offered by higher education institutions increase students' employability. However, individual effects that increase employability also exist, such as students' conscious career planning, additional academic efforts, and extracurricular activities. To do (paid or voluntary) work while studying is a possible example of an activity that could improve students' skills. By contrast, employment in an area unrelated to the field of study does not affect competencies; it only elevates the likelihood of employment in the future.

We reiterate the recommendation provided by Allen and Van der Velden (2011), that students should prefer a student loan to jobs that are not study-related so they better can concentrate on their academic performance. Furthermore, governments and higher education institutions should offer students a larger number of study-related employment opportunities, while employers should also attribute a greater value to the professional experience acquired alongside higher education studies. Higher education institutions could even provide credits for student employment and incorporate it into the curriculum (which has already occurred with respect to service-learning, a phenomenon that is not yet widespread in Central and Eastern Europe).

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Biographical note

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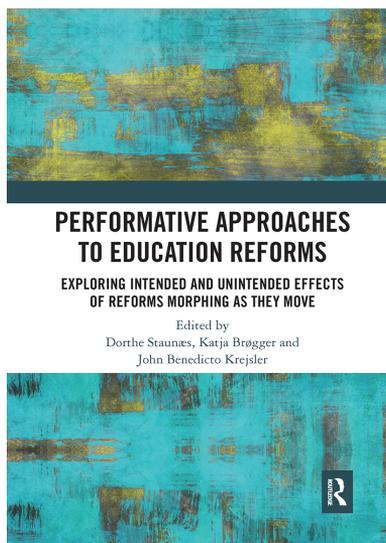
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Dorthe Staunæs, Katja Brøgger, and John Benedicto Krejsler (Eds.), *Performative Approaches to Education Reforms: Exploring Intended and Unintended Effects of Reforms Morphing as they Move*, Routledge: 2019; 114 pp.: ISBN: 13:978-0-367-24645-7

Reviewed by NIKA ŠUŠTERIČ¹

In recent decades, the institutions of the welfare state, including education, have been the target of continuous criticism related to their many functions and practices. Despite efforts at education reform, criticism remains vociferous, coming from parents, teachers, politicians, or business leaders – education has failed to reduce inequalities, achieve higher results at national or international evaluations, higher ‘employability’ or children’s happiness, and similar. The constant flow of criticism in education creates a sense of perpetual crisis that begs for more reform, leading to new evaluations and a new round of criticism. Although education reforms are, as a rule, well-intentioned, we are found surprised or even shocked each time they seem to fail to deliver on their promises, which raises a very simple question – why don’t they work?

At first glance, the reviewed book aims to offer an insight into this very question and its answers. However, due to its specific approach to the matter at hand, the book actually ‘brings attention to the “how” – and not “why” – reforms are enacted the ways that they are’ (p. 2). The introduction and especially the first paper in the collection thus explicate the reasons and ways in which this question can be posed and answered within a performative approach to education reforms. While performativity is typically associated with Judith



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Butler and their² work on gender, the authors of the collection mostly complement their approach with works of contemporary authors associated with new materialism (e.g., Karen Barad) and affect theory (e.g., Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant). The collected articles thus (mostly) share some crucial premises that can be traced back to current theoretical shifts in social theory more broadly, namely, and most importantly, as the authors of the introduction emphasise, the discursive, affective, and material turn. At the centre of performative approaches to education reforms, building on the above-mentioned theoretical shifts, is an effort to 'nuance the idea of causality and linearity in the implementation of education reforms' (p. 1). This necessitates shifting the analysis away from questions of congruity between representations and reality towards questions of the various interactions, or in the words of new materialism, *intra-actions* that call reality into being. This can then provide us with different insights into the mismatch between the good intentions of reforms that usually represent a hallmark of all policy papers and the actual results or realities that take form as they are implemented. In a sense, then, performativity approaches attempt to 'do away with the king's head', to paraphrase Foucault: since power relations are not linear relations of force that can demand a reality into being, they should also not be analysed as such. What we should focus on are the many ways in which relations between both human and non-human agencies produce the reality that science aims to know and understand.

The conceptual framework determines both the phenomena analysed and the methodology and analytical emphases, which is clearly evident in the collection. Many articles in the collection thus focus on what could be otherwise considered minute elements of reforms and their movements. Katja Brøgger opens the collection with their paper on data visualisations as an instrument of government. In this case, data visualisations related to the Bologna Process's monitoring mechanisms are not something outside of reforms, a neutral visual representation of a pre-existing reality, which the reform demands to be evaluated, but are rather a constitutive element in the constitution of this reality. Data visualisations create a reality of ranking and classifying the education system that is not alien to the reform but is its integral element. When we thus speak of reform, we must not only take account of its text. We must examine and approach it as a whole mechanism, encompassing the text and the tools, instruments and practices implemented at various moments in the life of its implementation. However, data visualisations are not reserved for presenting big, national data but also play an increasingly important role in classroom practices. Dorte Staunæs analyses their uses in motivating students to learn. As they explain in

2 To avoid presupposing gender, we will use the same 'they/them' pronouns for all authors.

the paper, students visualise their learning (e.g., by adding stickers that form a graph over time), making their own learning visible both to themselves and to others, which fundamentally makes them governable and incites them into governing themselves in particular ways. As Staunæs explains, '[v]isuals staged as data walls and scorecards make exposure and transparency possible. They simultaneously constitute a space for sharing knowledge and norms and also a space for comparing results, for ordering and ranking' (p. 72). There is however a common mechanism to data visualisations, whether about big data or data at an individual level, that both Brøgger and Staunæs emphasise: affect, understood both as the ability or potential of impacting and being impacted and as the *emotional* dimension of these processes. Affect in this double sense, then, is a crucial mechanism in the workings of data visualisations in as much as they (in the case of nation state) generate emotions such as fear and shame that can compel them to reform their education systems. In the case of individuals, visualisations also induce and create affects through the same basic principle of comparison: pupils view their scorecards and can feel proud, happy, ashamed, angry, or envious, which in turn carries the potential to either motivate or discourage them in their work. While Staunæs especially recognises the transformative potential of affects, specifically envy, in its ability to pose a critique of the current systems of education, the affects and the actions taken in response to them usually call for further monitoring that can again be visualised, compared, and measured, ready to become a new evidence-base which can be drawn upon to achieve change, creating a somewhat ceaseless loop of evaluation.

However, there are also other ways in which education reforms in the context of modern forms of governance generate or harness affects. Sellar and Lingard, as well as Krejsler, focus on how affects, in their cases fear and/or anxiety, play into reforming education. Sellar and Lingard focus primarily on the affective consequences of large-scale international assessments, particularly PISA. They show how research and data can create affects that provoke or demand change and reform while simultaneously questioning the functions that data play in our contemporary societies. Torn between the increasingly prevalent trend in education towards evidence-based education on one side and the post-truth society we otherwise inhabit on the other, data become not so much the evidence behind our practices, but catalysts. As 'data culture meets populist politics that rides on waves of affect and desire in a post-truth context' (p. 25), the discussion around PISA, and the frequent shocks nation-states go through as their pupils' performance in PISA drops, is thus, as the authors demonstrate, not so much a discussion about the results, as it is a discussion that aims 'to create public moods that can be used by politicians and other actors to

legitimise reform agendas' (p. 34). The primary instruments of these legitimisations are affective: from inducing shock with regards to the dropping results to anxiety over our future (the children's future, the future of society), the affective economy culminates in a fear of falling behind. It is precisely this fear of falling behind that is the central focus of Krejsler's paper. In their study of education reforms in Texas and California, Krejsler delineates a genealogy of the 'fear of falling behind' phenomena in the USA. The fear of falling behind was related not to particular states, but to the fact that the entire federation and education was seen as the crucial mechanism for maintaining the USA's position as the leading global power. While it motivated a comprehensive educational agenda at the federal level, it has had varying performative effects in different states. Krejsler thus emphasises the morphing of reforms as they move from the federal to the state level. This raises important doubts with regard to various contemporary governmental techniques, especially techniques such as 'best-practices', which frequently presuppose that a single practice can easily and successfully be implemented across varying contexts, disregarding their specificities.

The remaining papers focus less on the affective side of education reforms while still staying within the basic framework of performativity. Steiner-Khamsi critically explores the premises of the Education Market Model and shows how the systems of public and private provision of education interact in a way that changes and shapes not only public education, which is the usual focus of research on the impact of educational privatisation. Steiner-Khamsi thus shows that private provision also changes in the same process to remain comparable to public provision in terms of the qualifications provided and their recognition, which further standardises education. They thus conclude that the public and private provision of education 'as a result of their interaction, converge to a hybrid model that reflects similar business strategies [...] as well as a similar public talk on the quality of education, the common good, and on education as a human right' (p. 46). Vaaben discusses the ways in which the new teachers' working hours legislation in Denmark has affected significant, unintended, and undesired consequences such as drastically redefining teachers' work, professional identities, and self-perceptions. The different working hour count radically changed the internal micromanagement of schools: while it strived for greater flexibility in managing teachers' hours – which can at least partly be understood as doing more work in less time – it actually achieved the opposite with many teachers refusing the new count or refusing the new rules by following them so literally that they became absurd.

The final paper in the collection turns its gaze towards research production on reforms, particularly on the ways in which different research approaches

construct different objects and phenomena, even if the signifier remains the same. The paper by Juelskjær, Falkenberg and Larsen thus focuses on the ways in which the student voice is constructed in research and how these various constructions provide us with different knowledge, different aspects of what both the voice and its message are.

The collection of contributions covers various topics that share a common set of parameters, dictated by the adopted framework of performative approaches to education reforms. The papers shed new light and offer new insights into many topics that have become a standard part of discussions in the field of education (e.g., marketisation of education, large scale international assessments, student motivation etc.) and thus surely achieve the main goal of nuancing education reform research and knowledge production. The specificity of the approach and its introduction in the book – specifically, its distancing from other approaches and the recent contemporary shifts that support it – can also open up a further discussion, one of the theoretical approach itself and theoretical approaches more generally. The study of education has been approached in various ways since the beginnings of formal, comprehensive education and its study: statistics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and many other disciplines and approaches have all focused on and contributed to research on education. The fragmentation of disciplines that has been at work for the past few decades has only increased the number of disciplines and approaches that have a strong interest in education. This can be seen as an absolute advantage from a perspective that prioritises the *problem* and not the approach, but it can become an issue in the current context of ‘epistemological botany’ in the academy, as Bernstein (2000, p. 92) called the tendencies to persistently classify and distinguish various approaches.

To put it differently, the ever-new approaches that emerge in theory might do well to place their emphasis on communicating with other approaches about their common problems while focusing less on the ways in which they are radically different from other or older approaches and on their newness. The burden of scientific innovation, which characterises academia today, can make us forget that some problems have characterised education since its beginnings, while it also risks over-simplifying the works of other authors. To give just one example – the concern with discourses producing material consequences is not only a concern of ‘recent thinkers’ as Brøgger (p. 11) points out but can be found, for example, in the works of Foucault and his analysis of power. We could also go further back in history and find traces of the same concern in Durkheim and his work on religion in society, where he quite explicitly states the importance of the material *and* the representational. Our efforts to

delineate our approaches as much as possible from others risk rendering a great amount of knowledge obscure as we – the good botanists – classify it as functionalist, structuralist, post-structuralist, performative and a great many things. By extension, they also risk obscuring many important insights about education itself, contributing to the obfuscation of the field we are ultimately trying to understand and clarify.

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