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Structural Over-Determination of Education Reforms and Agency

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∞ 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

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☞ 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 Štrajnc (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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