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Citizenship and educational policies in defeating social inequalities

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the contemporary goals and situation of citizenship in the Slovene school system. It explores policies designed to support certain basic rights for students and to promote increased active participation and greater school autonomy. The paper explores how social inequalities in educational attainment are maintained by practices which ensure that taken-for granted ideas about the social distribution of “participation of and for all” prevail. Finally, the paper argues the need to build a consensus for further action in the new post-modern Slovene society in order to advance active learning about citizenship principles, concepts and values which should characterise the Slovene democratic order. It advocates learning about the origins of post-modern forms of social life, developing tolerance for different cultural, religious and value systems, as well as rational problem solving for personal and social conflicts.

Key words: *citizenship, educational policy, social inequalities, curriculum.*

Introduction

In Slovene society the economic, cultural, social and political changes went (and still go) together in coherent patterns that have and are still changing the Slovene society in unpredictable ways, setting it on trajectories that have been both attractive and controversial. Globalization and transition processes also have a negative side; many Slovenes have been hurt by it without being supported by a social safety net with many of them marginalized in the labour market. We critically establish, that even though successive governments (mostly in coalition) tried to establish a liberal political culture by passing numerous fundamental laws to carry out a social and economic transition into a social market economy with private initiative, they did not manage to prevent excessive social stratification, and consequently, social differentiation. Yet it cannot be denied that increasing unemployment is debilitating the social state, which is mostly cooperative but powerless without weapons to counter it.

Inequality in Slovene Society

For us one thing is clear: Slovenes were placing too much trust in “new democratic politics” at the beginning of the '90s. There is a set of expectations that have not been realized by far: better living standard and living conditions for all; preventing social exclusion; economic and tax reforms; intense foreign investments; greater role of small and medium sized companies; equal availability and free choice for all those entitled; and of particular concern to us, the unreliable situation of the young, etc. Especially the

gradual increase in age at which young people leave school, enter the labour market, find a steady job, leave the home of their parents, establish a stable, affectionate relationship and establish their own home, has triggered a whole series of interdependent mechanisms underlying life courses.

But, of all the changes that cause Slovenes distress today, the most important continue to be changes in everyday life: partnerships, relations, family life, and parenthood. The most distressing consequences of post-socialism in Slovenia was the collapse of the labour market and resulting mass unemployment, inequality of income as well as, after five decades, new forms of poverty. Another consequence was the renaissance of neo-liberal understandings of the market's role in which the stress is placed on individual initiative, self-trust, and a more pronounced feeling of responsibility for one's own life. At the same time, radical social changes also have implications for intimate and family worlds. Today it is difficult to speak of the family within a traditional framework of reference. People in Slovenia are confronted with new challenges and risks: they are growing up in a country that appears to be relatively successful and stable, at least within the East European context, and in which an individualized social and cultural climate has been gaining ground, i.e. one which opens new options but also related risks. It is no longer possible to lean on the past resources of security and reliance (values, referential areas, systems of social security). Young people and their parents are compelled to make earlier and better informed choices. This involves a shift back of responsibility for one's own life almost to the period of childhood. Individualization of risks in contemporary Slovene society means that the situations that once called for collective or political action are now interpreted as "unlucky stories" of this or that person that can be solved only by that particular person and through individual action. The individualization of risks goes hand in glove with the individualization of responsibilities and achievements. Both are values incessantly reaffirmed by the media, the educational system, the entertainment industry, educational system and attentive parents. The combination of the pressure to accept individual responsibility (which is a mechanism of disciplining), and the realistic experience of helplessness, produce strong feelings that risks and dangers are omnipresent. Uncertainty and doubts have pervaded all aspects of life; self-identities have become fluid and subject to continual reinterpretations. Life has become a "reflexive project" exacting incessant modifications of personal biographies in accordance with ever changing possibilities and risks.

It has become clear that the standard economic indicators no longer explain as much as they once did, in the realm of political behaviour. Slovene public evaluate their political leaders by different, and more demanding, standards than those twenty years ago. The erosion of political authority can be traced to factors like:

- the public has become fed up with waste, corruption and ineffectiveness of Government in struggle with social inequality, growing poverty and unemployment, as well as
- un-realized expectations of economic progress.

But, as the erosion of trust does not apply to all institutions: it is specifically a withdrawal of confidence from authoritarian institutions, the environmental

protection movements rose from obscurity to attain remarkably high levels of public confidence. What is happening is more differentiated than expected!

All orientations linked with post-materialist values should become more widespread. Pervasive changes are taking place in political, as well as social and religious values. Most of the religious norms show a strong correlation with making traditional values progressively, even if the Slovene mass media tend to convey exactly the opposite impression. Church attendance in Slovenia is one indicator of the priority which Slovenes accord to religion, but we estimate that it measures external behaviour that might be motivated by sociability, habit or even conformism, rather than genuine religious feeling. In time, in which Slovenia is undergoing economic decay and political upheaval, the Slovenes shift toward greater emphasis on religion. This involves a shift back of responsibility for one's own life. However, insecurity is pervasive and is added to by instability in the political regime and decline in real per capita income in recent years.

The role of Slovene educational system in combating the social inequalities

Slovene Educational system has therefore a particular role to play in the maintenance of culture. Slovene teachers are "professionalized agents of cultural transmission". The Slovene educational system institutionalizes Slovene culture: the schooling process and the curriculum define not only what is, but even more, what will and should be the culture of the coming generation. The teachers as educators determine how the next generation will behave: they are, as it were, super-cultural transmitters. This is a highly politically charged activity, because what they are doing is not neutral nor is it static: Slovene society is changing rapidly, and we are in the thick of the debate about what should be conserved and what should be different about tomorrow's Slovene Society. Ideas of Slovene Identity, citizenship and culture are at the very heart of this controversy within the European identity. We argue that the latter needs to be more clearly labelled and identified, with more confidence: and, that the Union needs to be transformed to become more transparent and with greater opportunities for real participation, including for Slovenes.

The school system in Slovenia is integrated into Europe and into the global interconnected world

Analysis of the school system in the Republic of Slovenia design the arising goal from the fact that Slovenia is an integral part of the European Union and the Council of Europe (such as the modern democratic state, the social and political systems are founded on the values of human rights, rule of law, pluralistic democracy, tolerance and solidarity. Majority legitimacy of these values is indisputable. Economically and politically, the country is included in the current increasingly globally connected world in which existence and further development of advanced knowledge-based companies and the creation of new knowledge is of greatest importance. In public kindergartens and schools, which are part of Slovene society, the process of upbringing and education of young generations, is based on these common values and train children for independent

living, for working together and for participation in political life. It is increasingly apparent that the dominant patterns of production and consumption of modern companies, while creating their wealth are also causing environmental degradation. Education, which will train the young generation to live independently and to meet the challenges of the modern world, must therefore not only include a willingness to develop necessary skills to change the settled national and global solutions in ethics, economics and politics, but also with respect to relationships to nature and to oneself, that will follow the principles of sustainable designed development.

The entire reform of the public school system in Slovenia was based on the common European heritage of political, cultural with manifested values and human rights, a state governed by the rule of law, pluralistic democracy, tolerance and solidarity. It was composed of the following three key changes and stages: legislation educational, curriculum reform, and implementation and evaluation. All three steps of the educational reform importantly contributed to the increased efforts and the field of securing special support for active participation of children and schools and the society as well as and introducing citizenship education and the national curriculum. Human rights include the individual and collective rights, the foundation of freedom and equality of individuals and groups. Human rights are always at the same time duties as the rights of others impose respect for and exercise the rights in the form of duties to others in upholding the dignity of each individual and to respect the plurality of cultures and thus to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, races, religious and other groups. Respect for the rights impose an obligation on non-discrimination in practice, and needs to be highlighted in particular non-discrimination of people and children from culturally and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, immigrants, non-discrimination in the difference between equality and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities. These rights do not exclude positive discrimination, which in essence is that it differs in order to eliminate unfair disparities and create equal opportunities for all, gender bound to the basic principle of ensuring equal opportunities in education, and to promote freedom and choice. Promoting respect for human rights requires the provision of quality education system at all levels. The state must provide education free of charge at least a period of pre-university education and provide opportunities for lifelong education.

Concept of 'responsible citizenship'

There is no definition of National "Responsible Citizenship". The Glossary of the Slovene language defines the terms Citizenship and Citizenship Education as follows: "Citizenship" as legal affiliation in a particular state and "Citizenship education" as education aimed as the promotion of good and loyal Citizens.

Main educational orientations of new policy

The starting points for curriculum reform which is forming one of the most important documents of the educational reform of the Slovene public education system, emphasized that the aims of the educational system are:

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

One of the most important changes introduced and the National Curriculum with the educational reforms, which took place between 1996 and 1999 is the increasing importance placed on education for democratic citizenship, participation of enrolled and their active involvement and the school community, as well as developing critical and independent thinking, which is a precondition for participating and the local community and society, democratic processes and educational institutions alike. The proposition of the new (in the process of acceptance) "White Book of Education" contains establishment of an independent, reflective and responsible individual who relies on the quality of the knowledge and social and other skills in combating the social inequalities. The fundamental goal of education must therefore follow the principles of objectivity, criticism and pluralism. Autonomy includes the professional autonomy of teachers and other professionals in education and the autonomy of institutions of the educational system. Autonomy in relation to the State, local authorities and parents must be assured by the method of financing, the provision of professional autonomy of teachers and teaching method of recruitment, professional and administrative staff. The condition of institutional autonomy, which promotes monitoring and ensuring the quality of school work are clear and objective criteria for their operation and control of the public, while autonomy implies ownership. Public education should have autonomy in relation to the State and power structures and in relation to everyday knowledge and beliefs. The requirement for institutions associated with the separation of state and religious communities. Secularism of public education and the ideological neutrality of public institutions is guaranteed by law and regulations. Functioning of the education system must be subject to analysis and reflection of the ideological mechanisms.

Equity in education is an essential element of social justice and is closely linked to gender. Therefore, equity in education is understood as equality of educational opportunity, as a necessary condition to have in modern society based on liberal and democratic principles, all their citizens' equal opportunities to succeed in life. As equal opportunities are highly dependent on its potential for education, the country in pursuit of a society, through various measures (implementation of the policy of positive discrimination for children from disadvantaged social and cultural backgrounds, is providing everyone the same amount of free education, allowing individualization of the school system as the school is providing every student an optimal opportunity to acquire quality education and the formation of the autonomous individual, inclusion and integration of children with special needs in cases where this is beneficial for them than it would be like to be educated in special schools, etc..) initially provided anyone the same educational opportunities.

Everyone - children, adolescents and adults - have the right for quality education, which is one of the important principles of quality preschool or school, which educates and

determines the autonomous individuals. The basic building blocks of quality school system are covered under the general objectives of education, which is defined below. Even if the "old" White Paper on Education" (1996) and the following "Educational legislation" (1996) set systemic, legislative and normative frameworks for the entire educational system, new aims for the public educational system should stress and take into account:

- ensuring quality of educational work in educational institutions, the autonomy of educational institutions, professional autonomy, quality trained professionals in education as professional workers, pluralism and equality of all scientific disciplines;
- equal opportunities for education and training for every individual (regardless of gender, social and cultural background, religion, nationality, membership of a philosophical and physical and mental constitution), and adequate support and incentives to individuals or groups of immigrants who come from socially and culturally less stimulating environment, with special needs who have a decision on the direction;
- adequate space requirements and financial support, the complementation of public educational institutions with the network of the private at all levels of the educational system, developing skills for lifelong learning and continuing personal and professional development;
- developing the ability to learn and acquire knowledge, communication skills, in Slovenian and ethnically mixed areas (as the Italian and Hungarian) and foreign languages, work habits and responsibilities, the responsibility for their health, environmental conservation and his own involvement in ensuring sustainable based society;
- encouraging everyone to continue their education (formal and informal) and providing the conditions for achieving excellence in individuals who are talented in various fields;
- ensuring cooperation between educational institutions and the wider environment;
- enriching educational activities offers with participation of organizations (cultural, sports...), associations and individuals from the wider environment;
- achieving consensus (between professional workers in education, pupils, parents, wider society and politics) for the main objectives in educational work and process.

The pursuit of these objectives

Developing the ability to live in a democratic society is realizable in: respecting children's and human rights and fundamental freedoms, developing awareness of their rights and responsibilities as human beings and developing awareness of the individual's rights and responsibilities as a citizen of the Republic of Slovenia, developing awareness of national identity and integration into the international space and in understanding and acceptance of diversity, respecting diversity and cooperation with others; educating for mutual tolerance and solidarity for peaceful coexistence and respecting other people; - developing awareness of gender equality and advancement of equal opportunities for

both; developing a responsible, autonomous and critical individual for the process to achieve consciousness of Citizenship and national identity, knowledge about Slovene history and culture; educating general for originate and the European tradition cultural and civilizational values; for mutual tolerance, respect for differences in cooperating with others, respect for Human rights and basic Liberties, thus developing abilities required for living and a democratic society (Elementary School Act, art. 2).

The organization and financing of Education Act sets the goals on which active Citizenship in all aspects of elementary, lower and upper secondary education is based, as education is developing consciousness of Gender equality, respect for differences, co-operation, for Children's and Human Rights and basic liberties, equal opportunities for sexes, equal educational opportunities securing for the special areas with development problems. (The Organization and Financing of Education Act, Article 2).

Through the citizenship curriculum

One of the most important changes introduced in the “National Curriculum” during the reform of the public school system in Slovenia is the provision of two school subjects and the curriculum in the Lower Secondary School which deals with Citizenship education: The compulsory subject “Civic Education and Ethics” (7th-8th grade of compulsory education, ISCED 2), and The compulsory curriculum option “Civic Culture” (9th grade of compulsory education). At the level of primary education, themes on Citizenship education can be included in the school curriculum by integrating them with other civic-related subjects (mother tongue, etc.). The Civic education and ethics as school subject is an integral part of the curriculum and the field of Social Sciences and Humanities at the level of lower secondary education. It is placed and the 7th and 8th grade of Lower secondary school with a total number of 70 lessons (35 lessons per annum à 45 minutes). The Civic Education and ethics syllabus determines the subject's basic units, attainment targets for knowledge, skills and competences and goals for teaching lessons and units. The themes within the program of study are joined into mandatory units (Life in the community: nation, country, family, models and authorities, mass media and information, generations and cultures, religions and beliefs, Christianity), and optional units (eg. relationships between the sexes, cultures and distant places, leisure, forms of sociability, European union, terrorism and peace and the world). During the first year, the mandatory part of the syllabus is implemented. During the second year there is a selection of themes concern on individuals' judgments on particular ethic problems of the wider community. The second, optional part of the syllabus, provides teachers and enrolled with a range of opportunities to creatively shape the lessons' contents.

The optional subject Civic Culture, which is part of the social sciences and the Humanities syllabus, is offered in the last (9th) year of the Elementary school. It is taught for one hour a week (32 teaching hours). The subject is connected with The Civic education and ethics. It represents an extension and deepening of knowledge, skills and understanding pertaining to this subject. At the level of upper secondary general education, the gymnasium, Citizenship education is a mandatory part of the core curricula option including a total of 15 teaching hours per school year. The curriculum of Citizenship and high school allows Citizenship to be delivered through a planned

program provision combining with separate curriculum time, through explicit opportunities activities that address alongside understanding citizenship in other areas of the mandatory curriculum (links with other school subjects, e.g. philosophy, religion, history, geography, mother tongue), whole-school activities, and a range of opportunities for students through their participation, in school life and the local community. Out of five main curriculum units, which are part of the Civic culture syllabi in the high school (constitutional order of the Republic of Slovenia; State, Individual, Society and the State, Political Systems, Economic System of the Republic of Slovenia), three units must be carried out within the 15 hours of provision.

The concept of lifelong learning is consistent with the concept of knowledge society, which stems from the desire to live in financially well provided for society. This objective, if you do not understand the narrow of functionalism, may be consistent with the principle of individual autonomy and providing meaningful choices in life, as well as the idea of critical citizen who is the main vehicle for pluralism in democratic processes.

Aims and content

The aim of the Curriculum provision of Citizenship Education and the National Curriculum at primary level is to gain knowledge about the most important issues necessary for the formation of the common identity of citizenship, enrolled learning about human rights and plurality of values. Particular attention is also dedicated to the integration of enrolled in the school community. The most important aims of the Civic education and ethics school subject are:

- primarily gaining knowledge on society which enable enrolled to develop independent answers related to social and ethical questions (acquiring key data, basic concepts and conceptual networks, cognitive procedures, techniques and methods);
- developing ethical attitudes and skills which are necessary for an independent, free and responsible social functioning; this develops social and communicative skills;
- developing a tolerant communicational culture; a sense of responsibility for their peers and members of their community;
- developing reflexive and active relationship with one's own individual, national, religious and cultural identity;
- developing abilities to recognize stereotypes and prejudices; positive attitude towards the principles of equity, equality, freedom, solidarity and
- developing the ability for critical analysis of media messages and the understanding of the significance of the media and society.

The program of study for the optional subject Civic culture derives from the basic knowledge, competences and skills. The program of study requirements for the subject Civic culture consists of three core group of units: Democracy, Political Order and Institutions, Children's and Human Rights, Equality and diversity. It combines studying the fundamental documents and events, connected with the concept of humane and children's rights, social, intercultural, political and general civilizational themes, as well

as discussing contemporary events (at home and abroad) and their presentation and the media. The Civic Culture is based on subject the understanding of one's own national and cultural tradition. At the very time, it enrolled familiarizes with other cultures and social orders by intercultural comparisons and educates themes for mutual respect and tolerance for differences. It enables learning about the most important national and international social and political institutions, at the very time enrolled in developing 'willingness and responsibly for a democratic society, and the school and local community. One of the basic characteristics of Civic culture is linking enrolled 'experiences with the knowledge they gather and their social environment. And the social inequalities in Slovene society are one of the most urgent problems.

The Place and Contribution of Citizenship education aims concerning the social inequality has become one of the central points of discussion and debate and education policy and terms of theory, research, policy and practice. Effective policy-making of Citizenship Education at the level of primary, lower and upper secondary education and its successful implementation in schools depends on the provision of support and the professional development of teachers of Citizenship education and of civic-related subjects and the provision of appropriate organizational development of the school environment. For example, a new pilot project with a group of Elementary schools (under the Cooperation among the Educational Research Institute, the National School for Leadership and Education, the Slovene Ministry of Education, Science and Sports and the British Council) on Citizenship education as a whole-school activity (aiming also increasing democratic participation and the learning process). The project is thought to provide a "frame of reference" for the future dissemination of the project's results and all areas of the planning of the school curriculum (dissemination, networking, etc..). Its main aim is to develop a program of Professional development for combating the unequal situations of all enrolled (especially teachers, school management team, school leaders et.) since the introduction of combined units (linking Citizenship with other civic-related subjects) at all education levels is of particular importance for strengthening the process of co-operation between all involved: head teachers, subject teachers, pupils, parents and local government leaders.

Conclusion

On the whole changes in educational system are part of a general transition to a post-modern Slovene society underlined by intense processes of globalisation and individualization. Some are also definitely related to circumstances that transcend national borders, e.g. the restructuring of the labour market as characterized by a demand for a new, specialized, flexible and educated workforce, and measures arising from social policies which nearly everywhere prolong the period of young people's dependence on their families of origin. Yet it should be stressed that part of these changes occurring in Europe have a particular effect on the post-modern Slovene society.

In addition to the transition to post-modernity, Slovenia also embarked on the process of transition from a planned society to one based on the values and movements of the market. The centrally planned society had been disintegrating for several decades, even

before the fall of the socialist system in 1991. This disintegration created room for a market-based social order that is still indeed problematic and complex and, actually a far cry from any real order desired. The most distressing consequences of post-socialism are still the collapse of the labour market and resulting mass unemployment, inequality of income as well as new forms of poverty. An other consequence is the renaissance of neo-liberal understandings of the market's role in which the stress is placed on individual initiative, self-trust, and a more pronounced feeling of responsibility for one's own life. The changes that are otherwise characteristic of transition processes also inevitably induce changes in the structure of private and family lives in Slovenia.

The influence of factors of social inequality (social inclusion/exclusion) has thus been shifting away from interclass inequality towards intra-class differentiation. While this does not mean that class differences are losing their significance, it does mean that the factors underlying differentiation within classes, particularly with regard to family support, have been reinforced. Increased competitiveness and selection determining admittance to (prestigious) schools and access to (suitable) jobs accorded to family's emotional support and family social networks play decisive roles in this.

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