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**Homeschooling: Between Croatian aspirations and Slovenian reality**

Abstract:

In this article we describe a short history of homeschooling in Europe with special emphasis on Slovenia and Croatia. We describe the legal frameworks of both countries, whereby we focus more on Slovenia, because homeschooling is legal there while in Croatia it is not. To find out how parents think about homeschooling and especially their thoughts about homeschooling legislation we conducted interviews with 5 Slovene families who are already homeschooling their children and 5 Croatian families who aspire to do so, with an intention to gain a clearer insight in the concrete reality of homeschooling in both countries. We address both legislation and experiences because we wanted to examine to what extent the Slovene example could be a basis for the creation of an authentic Croatian to allow homeschooling model.

Key words: Homeschooling, children, parents, education, pedagogical pluralism

**1. Introduction**

Homeschooling as we know it today in the democratic countries of the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia is a relatively recent phenomenon and even though in the past there were laws that allowed home education, it has so far been a poorly researched subject in both countries. Croatia and Slovenia, both belonged to the Habsburg dominions, ruled by the House of Habsburg, and later they were joined in Yugoslavia. Therefore, for the most part of the last 250 years, they shared the same government and legislation. Yet homeschooling is legal in Slovenia and illegal in Croatia. For about fifty years, in former Yugoslavia just like in other countries of Southeast Europe there existed uniformity regarding pedagogy and schools. At the same time when in many Western European countries pedagogical pluralism was on the increase and home education was practiced to a limited degree in certain countries, in Yugoslavia there was only "state" pedagogy and pedagogic pluralism was not regarded as desirable. During almost half a century, there was no reformist pedagogy concept neither in Yugoslavia nor in most of the former Eastern Bloc countries that could provide an alternative to the monolithic, uniform school and pedagogy. After Yugoslavia broke apart and democracy was established in the newly formed states, there was a growing interest in alternative pedagogical concepts and their practical application. During the economic and socio-political transition processes both countries went through, there were many changes. Today, homeschooling is gaining legitimacy due to the increasingly pluralistic nature of educational politics. In Slovenia it is legal for parents to homeschool their children and among Slovene parents the interest in homeschooling has been steadily growing. In Croatia however, homeschooling is not legal but there are efforts to legalize it which requires a serious revision of the existing law.

One goal of this article is to introduce homeschooling to the Croatian scientific pedagogical community, for this topic is totally neglected in Croatia, whereby we will describe the situation of homeschooling in Slovenia. There are parents in Croatia who wish to educate their children at home. The interviews we conducted, clearly indicate this fact. If we would succeed to convince a few pedagogues to tackle this topic, the result might have an influence on educational policy might create a more positive media environment.

First, we will give a brief overview of the history of homeschooling in Europe and then we will describe its development within Slovenia and Croatia. To elucidate the situation of homeschooling in Slovenia we tried to provide answers to the following questions: When was homeschooling legalized and why? How many children are being homeschooled? What are the experiences of Slovene parents with homeschooling their children?

To elucidate the situation of homeschooling in Croatia we tried to find answers to the following questions: Why is it illegal? Who wants to legalize homeschooling? How could Slovenia be a constructive example and how can Slovene experiences help with a future authentic Croatian homeschooling model?

**2. Short history of homeschooling in Europe**

In our modern times we send our children to school without questioning this universal practice. However, the all-pervasiveness of this practice conceals the fact that compulsory schooling was implemented only approximately 250 years ago (Fischer 2006, p. 11). And the idea that education can take place only in institutions (schools), under the patronage of the state, as it is the case in Slovenia and Croatia, is even younger. But children were not always educated in schools. During the whole history, children were educated also within their home environment. Fischer (2006) writes, that home education is actually an original form of education that took place in all historical periods in many different forms. In some places and social classes, it was practised until the 20th century.

In the pre-industrial societies all-pervasive school system didn’t exist. Children acquired all the necessary knowledge within the family circle through practical work. In the medieval Europe learning and skill development took place in such a way that the son learned a craft from his father and eventually took over the family business. Boys could learn a certain craft also from a craftsman, in whose place they also stayed. In the countryside the sons of the farmers learned skills necessary for farming and later took over the family farm. Girls learned from their mothers all the skills necessary to become good wives, mothers and housewives. (Ladenthin 2006, p. 285). The children of noblemen were brought up and educated by stewards who also managed their lord’s castle (Fertig 1979, p. 3).

In the early 18th and 19th century the bourgeoisie was eager to copy the lifestyle of the aristocracy, therefore they started to educate their children at home, and for this purpose they hired home tutors (Fischer 2006, p. 19). However, in the course of the 19th century, parallel to its emancipation, the bourgeoisie distanced itself from this feudal habit of teaching the children at home with the help of a home tutor and started to send them to school (Ibid.). Home education remained fairly common amongst aristocracy until the early 20th century, when it slowly disappeared (Fischer, 2006). At the same time the public-school system was becoming more and more consolidated.

 **3. The laws that gradually implemented compulsory schooling in the territories of Slovenia and Croatia**

In Slovenia it is generally assumed that compulsory schooling was implemented already in the 18th century. Gabrič (2009, p.15) writes, that compulsory schooling was implemented in 1774, when Maria Theresa, sovereign of Habsburg territories, among which were also the territories of modern day Slovenia and modern-day Croatia, signed the General School Ordinance. However, it seems that this ordinance didn’t implement compulsory schooling, but it demanded that children must either go to school or they must be educated at home. Article 13 of the General School Ordinance states the following: “Therefore we order, that all the parents or caretakers must send their children, who are of school age, to school or they must educate them at home….” (Allgemeine schulordnung 1774, article 13). As already mentioned, it seems that the General School Ordinance didn’t implement compulsory schooling. Instead we could say that it implemented compulsory education (Unterrichstpflicht), which indeed can also take place outside schools. Compulsory education (Unterrichstpflicht) is still part of the Austrian Education Act (Östrerreicher Schulpflichtgesetz) and homeschooling is in Austria indeed legal. In the Slovene language however, no distinction is made between compulsory education or ‘Unterrichtspflicht’ in German and compulsory schooling or ‘Schulpflicht’, there is only an expression for compulsory schooling. This might have given rise to a historical ambiguity regarding explanation of article 13 in Slovenia which might have helped to form the general sentiment regarding homeschooling in Slovenia which is not positive; it being regarded as a curious phenomenon, strange and not done. The most visible Slovene experts in the field of education and psychology are not in favour of homeschooling. However as result of the democratisation process that took place in during the nineteen nineties, the Ministry of education, science and sport endorses it.

Home education was thus legal within the Habsburg Monarchy and was also practised after the year 1774. In 1867 Habsburg Monarchy was divided in two parts: the Austrian Empire, which included the territories of modern day Slovenia, and the Hungarian Kingdom, which included the territories of modern day Croatia. Both states had their own parliament and government, only common affairs were governed by the joint ministries of finance, the military and foreign affairs. They thus had a separate school legislation, but their contents were very similar. In 1869 a new Education Act for the Austrian Empire was issued. Article 20 states: “Parents and caretakers of their own children or those children, entrusted into their care, must not leave them without the education prescribed for public folk school.” Article 23 of the same law states the following: “The exceptions from the obligation to attend school are: boys who attend a higher school, children who are, because of mental or physical defects, incapable of reaching the learning goals and finally, children who are being educated at home or through some other private arrangement.” Homeschooling thus remained legal. Many Slovene writers were earning their livings by serving as home tutors of children from wealthy families.

In 1874 in the Hungarian Kingdom, wherein the territories of modern day Croatia were included, an Education Act was issued, that allowed home education as well as the Education Act from 1869 in Austrian Empire. Its article 50 states: “Parents or their substitutes can freely decide to educate their children at home, or to enrol them either in private or public institution or in one of the existing folk schools….” Its 51th article demands: “Children who are being educated at home have to take the exams at one of the existing public schools.”

It is evident that both most important Education Acts from 1774 and 1869 issued in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which implemented compulsory education, allowed home education as one of the possibilities that parents could choose to educate their children. However, Schmidt (1988) writes that Maria Theresa allowed home education as a concession to the aristocracy, so that the aristocratic children didn’t have to sit in the same room, next to the children from the lower classes.

In Slovenia, as well as in Croatia, strict compulsory schooling was implemented only in 1929, with the formation of the kingdom of Yugoslavia. Children were obliged to attend school for eight years. Article 2 of the Education Act from 1929 states: “Schooling in national schools is universal and compulsory throughout the whole Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Based on the provisions of this law every child, whose parents reside in the territory of Kingdom of Yugoslavia must be educated according to its capabilities, whether in a regular national school or in a special state institution. The state’s government will force parents or caretakers, who neglect to provide education for their children or for those children entrusted to their care, to attend to their duties. The state also has the right to take away the children from their parents or caretakers, who are (because of different reasons, illness or negligence) incapable of attending to their obligations and put those children to other families or in state institutions.”

After the second world war the Communist Party took over the power in Yugoslavia, and the kingdom was abolished. Since 1945 the new political elite tried to subjugate the school system to its own ideological and political interests. In 1953 the Federal Assembly formed a Commission for school reform (Gabrič, 2006), and a new General Education Act was issued in 1958, wherein a universal compulsory schooling was prescribed. Article 6 states: “All the citizens, aged 7 to 15 have to attend school. Compulsory schooling lasts 8 years.”

In socialist countries, thus also in Yugoslavia, the state played a decisive role in upbringing and education of children. This tendency to control education was of course also present in the time of the Monarchy. However, in the time of socialism, the state was regarded as the main driving force of the socialistic progress and development. At the same time the state was also seen as the main driving force of the development of the individual. As reflection of this kind of mentality, state pedagogy was created. To enforce socialistic socioeconomic relations, state pedagogy sought to bring up and educate children into socialistic citizens. The monopoly in the field of education that state pedagogy held, made any criticism of its educational approaches and goals impossible. Educational goal of state pedagogy was thus to educate children into socialistic citizens, who willingly subjugate their personal interests to the interests of the state (Schmidt, 1982).

The socialistic state was not in favour of the bourgeois nucleus family. Within the state pedagogy two ideas existed. The first claimed that the upbringing and education within the modern family is the remnant of the bourgeois education and is as such incompatible with the socialist relations. It had to be replaced with an education in state institutions as soon as possible. This idea, however, was not widely accepted in Yugoslavia (Schmidt, 1982). The second idea within state pedagogy with respect to the family was milder. For those who supported it, the upbringing and education within the family was valid, since in their view the family played a crucial role in child’s development into a healthy and content person. This was considered as an integral part of one’s personality - the goal of a socialist upbringing and education. But it is important to note that the upbringing within the family had to be in accordance with socialistic educational goals. In other words, the upbringing in the family had to be a kind of prolonged hand of the state pedagogy. This second idea regarding the role of the nucleus family in upbringing was taken up by Yugoslavia (Schmidt, 1982). In view of the educational goals of socialist pedagogy, the role of the state in education and the attitude of the authorities towards the family and its role in the educational process, we can conclude that it is perfectly understandable that home education in Yugoslavia was not allowed.

4. Homeschooling in Slovenia

In 1996 homeschooling was put into Slovene school legislation as a parental right to choose education for their children. Article 5 of the Elementary School Act states: “The parents have the right to choose elementary education for their children. They can either send them to a public or to a private school or they can educate them at home.” (ZOsn, 2006, article 5) According to Slavko Gaber, who was the Minister of Education and Sport at that time, the government of Slovenia believed that Slovene parents should be given the choice of how to educate their children and thus increase their decision-making power about their own way of life. At the same time the government wanted to ensure that children who would be educated at home, would acquire the same basic standards of academic knowledge and that the parents could prove, that under their guidance their children would be capable of acquiring the basic standards of academic knowledge, that they would otherwise acquire in schools.[[1]](#footnote-0) This step of Slovene government could be seen as one of the results of the transition process from socialism to capitalism, which denotes the process of democratization of the society after the collapse of Yugoslavia.

When we speak about the transition process, we usually speak about economic and political changes. However, there were also changes within the less tangible dimensions of life, those which relate to man’s psychological nature which come to expression in his attitude towards education and social life. The Slovene psychologist Janez Svetina wrote about this topic, in relation to schools and teaching, just after the collapse of Yugoslavia. Svetina (1992) writes that after the changes of the political system from a totalitarian regime to democracy, schools and teachers should not indoctrinate children anymore, neither with Marxist ideology nor with any other ideology. In these new conditions school must help children to get accustomed to the democratic way of thinking and acting, that is, to teach them to live and act, as harmoniously as possible, in a society wherein many ways of thinking and desiring, many different views, orientations and practices exist, and to teach them to live with these differences (Ibid.). The diversity of different views, orientations and practices, which need to be recognized by a democratic society because of the nature of democracy itself, also includes different pedagogical approaches, methods of teaching that are being used in different schools, whether private or under the state patronage. This diversity of different educational approaches also includes homeschooling.

*4.1. School legislation in Slovenia*

As already mentioned, article 5 of the Elementary School Act (Elementary School Act 2006) defines homeschooling as a parental right. However, the law obliges parents, who decide to educate their children at home, to enrol their children in one of the public or private schools. At the end of every school year homeschooled children must take exams at the school they’re enrolled in, whereby teachers check if the child has acquired the basic standards of knowledge, prescribed for every separate grade of the elementary school. The examination commission evaluates the performance of the child (Rules on verification and assessment of knowledge and promotion of pupils in elementary school 2008, article 6). If the child doesn’t pass the exams it has the right to take the exams one more time before a new school year begins (Elementary School Act 2006, article 90; Rules on verification and assessment of knowledge and promotion of pupils in elementary school 2008, article 20). If the child doesn’t pass the exams also for the second time, it must attend public or private school during the next school year (Ibid.). At the end of the school year the school issues a school certificate (Elementary School Act 2006, article 92). Children with special needs also have the right to be homeschooled (The Act on the direction of children with special needs 2012, article 21). The commission, responsible for evaluation of the situation of the individual child with special needs can, on the initiative of the child’s parents, determine, that it is in the child’s best interest to be educated at home. However, this decision must be based on grounded reasons. Furthermore, certain requirements, determined by the Rules on Primary Home Education for Students with Special Needs, must be met (Ibid.).

Despite a relatively early inclusion of homeschooling in Slovene school legislation, the first homeschoolers appeared almost a decade later, in the school year 2004/05. During this year 4 children were homeschooled and during the school year 2008/09, already 25 children were homeschooled. Their number steadily grew and during the school year 2016/17 there were 279 homeschooled children. This indicates that the interest for homeschooling among Slovene parents is growing. The total number of all primary school pupils enrolled in the regular program in the school year 2016/17 was 177,000 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia). The number of homeschooled children in Slovenia is thus still very low, representing only 0,2% of all primary school pupils. In fact, the percentage of homeschoolers in the true sense is still lower as the officially registered number of homeschooling children also includes children who attend one of the alternative private schools whose program is not accredited by the state. These children are officially registered as homeschoolers, and as such, they must take the exams at the end of the school year, even though they attend one of the officially unrecognized private schools. The number of these children is not known, because the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport doesn’t collect this information.

**5. Homeschooling in Croatia**

Croatia, together with Macedonia is the only country in the region of ex-Yugoslavia, where homeschooling is illegal even though in the past, homeschooling was legal and later in 1929 the possibility to educate one’s children at home, was abolished, as described above.

Within Croatian pedagogical science, the subject of homeschooling is new and Croatian scientific literature on this theme is limited. There are only two articles on homeschooling (Bjelan, 2011; Dadić, 2010), which both express a dismissive attitude towards homeschooling. In particular, they address the parents’ role as teacher. The author of the first article suggests that parents who take up the role of teacher of their own children should meet the requirements of the ISSA pedagogical standards. It is thus argued that they should possess certain teaching skills and knowledge (Bjelan, 2011). The second article focuses on the analysis of the initiative to legalize homeschooling, which the Croatian Christian Coalition submitted to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports with the goal to amend and supplement the Primary and Secondary Education Act. The analysis presented in this second article points out three important elements: Croatia should get its own authentic model of homeschooling, parents should first give proof of their teaching skills and the acquired knowledge of the children should be tested (Dadić, 2010). The problem with these two articles is that they don’t delve into the exploration of homeschooling itself but suggest its regulation without knowing the phenomenon.

It is important to note that Croatian media are not really interested in the topic of homeschooling about which only a few articles were written. However, the activities of the three civil initiatives - the Croatian Christian Coalition, the association called ‘Education in another way’ and the association called ‘In the name of the family’- within the Croatian public domain clearly indicate that there are advocates of pedagogical pluralism in Croatia. Pedagogical pluralism should have been developed, along with the development of political pluralism, during the process of democratization after the fall of Yugoslavia. This means that, not only the state should be allowed to establish and finance schools, but individual citizens, civil and teachers’ associations, religious associations and other legal entities should be in a position to do the same (Matijević, 2009; 2011). Homeschooling should certainly be a part of the pedagogical pluralism.

**5. Resources and methodology**

Our research is qualitative in nature. For its purpose we conducted interwievs with homeschooling parents - five from Slovenia and five from Croatia. Through the interwievs we examined the motivations of Slovene parents to homeschool their children and why the interviewed Croatian parents want to homeschool their children. Furthermore, we wanted to get an insight into parents’ thoughts on the advantages and challenges of homeschooling and in what way the Slovenian law determines how homeschooling is put into practice. As already said, we choose the method of standardized interviews with both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questions themselves and their order were determined in advance. All the participants in the interviews were asked questions in the same order. This enabled the comparison of answers of Slovene and Croatian families. At the beginning of the interviews we explained to the participants the purpose of the interview and how we were going to record and process the answers. While analysing the answers we focused on 4 themes dealt with under the chapter Results.

We conducted the interviews - 5 with Slovene and 5 with Croatian parents - in a parallel manner. We met Slovene as well as Croatian parents via a referral, social media and personal acquaintance. Croatian interviewees are not members of any of the existing Croatian associations advocating Homeschooling; Slovene parents are also not members of any association in relation to homeschooling, since no such association exists.

**6. Results**

From the interview conducted with parents in Slovenia and Croatia we came to the following insights.

*Parental motivation for homeschooling*

The answers of the Slovene parents who were interviewed for the purposes of our research roughly show three main motivations. Most of them chose to homeschool their children because of the freedom regarding teaching and learning processes and freedom regarding family life that this form of education certainly offers (S2, S4, S5). S2 said the following: “The most important reason for homeschooling was the freedom to travel during the year and to broaden the horizons of thinking.” S5 said: “Homeschooling makes possible that we can be together as a family. And at the same time my child can learn wherever we are, at any time and in any way.”

These two motivations are followed by the wish to transmit values which are important to parents (S1, S5), and better contact with the child (S1, S3). S1 described both reasons as follows: "The idea that a child spends most of its time outside the home and is practically raised by other adults during this time who at the same time has to bring up an entire class of other children, made me feel uncomfortable. It seemed so unnatural to me. When I delved into this topic a little bit deeper, I realized that many studies on the subject that I read confirmed my own feelings. The second reason was the school system as it is now. The values that children acquire in schools are not the values that I perceive as constructive (competitiveness, emphasis on grades etc.). Furthermore, schools should encourage the development of child’s skills, but in my opinion, that does not happen well enough. "

In the third place is the desire of the parents to transmit their knowledge to their child (S1). S1 writes: "I really do not want to miss the most part of my child's life by sending it to school, I want to be with it, lead it and transmit to it my experience and knowledge ... for me it would be regrettable to let someone else do it, someone whom I even don’t know very well, someone who has a different perception of the world than me and people who are close to me”.

Two of the Croatian parents (R1, R2) wrote, that they would homeschool their children if they could do so, because of their dissatisfaction with the existing school system. One parent (R3) said that she considers homeschooling the best form of education for her child. One parent (R4) would like to see the implementation of flexy schools, meaning that the child would attend school one or two days and the rest of the week it would learn at home. One parent (R5) wrote, that they would choose homeschooling, because they want to transmit the religious values they adhere to.

*Advantages of homeschooling*

We also asked the Slovene parents about advantages of homeschooling according to them. Most parents (S1, S3, S4) mentioned better socialization as one of the benefits of homeschooling. S1 said: "The child has the time and space to bond with the family members in a healthy way. In my opinion socialization in the true sense of the word takes place when parents and other adults of different ages and peers of different ages are involved in child’s socialization process. The child does not spend most of its energy adapting to the requirements of the system (school curriculum) and to the opinions of peers." S4 writes:" Homeschooling enables us to bring up and educate our children in such a way that they will become aware of the need to positively and actively contribute to the improvement of their environment, the society and their country." S3, however, believes that home-based education enables the child to avoid many negative influences of the school.

Two of the parents (S1, S2) wrote that the greatest advantage of this kind of education is an individual approach to learning and teaching. S1 says: "The biggest advantage in my opinion is that the child has time and space for individual development. It has time for activities that it likes and is interested in and for creativity ". S2 is of a similar opinion: "The great advantage of home education is that schooling can easily be adapted to the child's and the family’s needs and the child can learn through experience as much as possible. My children do now have the time to further develop their talents, which they did not have when they were still at school ".

The answers of Slovene parents indicate that some of them decide to homeschool their children precisely because of their advantages. S3 thus writes that she decided to homeschool her child because it enables her to bond with her child more deeply, and at the same time better bonding is for her also one of the advantages of homeschooling.

We asked Croatian parents the same question. Their answers were not as elaborate as the answers of Slovene parents, which can be attributed to the fact that they don’t have any practical experiences with homeschooling. However, all the parents answered that according to them one of the advantages of homeschooling is better opportunity to really bond with the child.

*The challenges of homeschooling*

When asked about the challenges of home education, most parents (S1, S2, S3, S4) answered that the challenge is motivating the child to learn. Lack of motivation to learn could be related to the fact that Slovene homeschooled children – rather than to follow their interest - are obliged to follow the school curriculum precisely to achieve the required standards of knowledge and get through the tests at the end of the school year. S1 for example writes: "It is difficult to follow the curriculum. The lack of child’s motivation to learn makes things even more difficult." Similarly, S2 reports: "The challenge is to encourage the child to be motivated for learning on its own, independently, as well as raising enthusiasm for learning." S4's answer is similar: “The required learning material, with which children must work, and the manner in which they have to learn is boring for them. However, because of school legislation we have to follow the curriculum”.

The second most common challenge for homeschooling parents is the combination and coordination of family and work responsibilities. This challenge was mentioned by three parents (S1, S3, S5). S5 writes as follows: "It is certainly challenging to coordinate all obligations the homeschooling parent carries." Another challenge mentioned by two parents was that homeschools children may take the exams only at the end of the school year (S2, S4). S2 writes: "We should have the possibility to take exams throughout the entire year". Furthermore, S4 believes that being allowed to take exams only at the end of the school year is too stressful, both for children and for parents.

One parent (S3) mentioned the following challenge: to prepare the child for the specific type of task and the expectations from teachers that it will encounter during the test at the end of the school year, in order to be able to pass. For example in math there are often more ways to come to a correct answer; at school, children usually learn one method to tackle certain math question and homeschooled children are expected to follow that same method, so their own curiosity and initiative to find a way is curtailed and clever alternatives to the standard way of solving a problems are not allowed.

All parents who participated in our research were asked if their homeschooled children - when they had been tested - reached the required standard and learning objectives. All answered that the test results had been positive.

Again, the answers of Croatian parents were not as elaborate as the answers of Slovene parents. However, all the parents answered that their challenge would probably be the organization of the child’s learning process and the creation of appropriate learning environment.

*What do parents think about the regulation of homeschooling in Slovenia*

First, we asked the Slovene participating parents what they liked about the regulation of home education. All parents answered that they liked that homeschooling in Slovenia is permitted by law. Only two parents (S1, S2) also pointed out another positive thing about the regulation of homeschooling in Slovenia. S1 writes: "I like the fact that the child doesn’t have to take test in all the subjects taught in school.” And S2 writes: “I like that the test of most subjects in the last three grades is done in the form of an oral exam. In an oral exam the child has more space to really show his or her knowledge”.

We then asked them what they did not like about the regulation of homeschooling. All parents reported that they did not like the limited timeframe of the examination period when schools check if homeschooled children have reached the required levels. S1 believes that the examination period is too short. It is very stressful for a child to take several exams within a month and a half. S2 is of a similar opinion: "Exams are too close together. If they are not willing to allow taking the exams during the entire school year, then the examination period should at least be prolonged. "S5 reports:" When the child attends the first three grades, there are only two exams. Then it is not that stressful to take the exams at the end of the school year. In higher grades however, the number of subjects which are being tested is much higher and it is not easy for the child to take 9 exams within a short period of one and a half months. "

S1 mentions two more negative aspects of the regulation of homeschooling in Slovenia. She is not satisfied with the fact that the child’s knowledge must be evaluated every year. She would rather see that the child’s knowledge would be evaluated after having completed three grades, that is in 3rd, 6th and 9th grade. S3 mentions two more negative aspects of homeschooling regulation. These are: the fact that the law does not stipulate that the schools should or should not allow homeschooled children to attend the various activities they organize. Decisions about this are left to schools which allows room for arbitrariness. Besides the law does not stipulate that parents, who are homeschooling their children, receive any financial assistance, whereby it may be noted that the school where the child is registered does receive money from the state for that child.

Finally, we asked the parents how to change the legal regulation of homeschooling in Slovenia. As was expected, parents would like to see change of the regulation in that part of the law that determines knowledge evaluation. Their suggestions are somewhat different. S1 and S3 wish that knowledge evaluation could be done throughout the entire year. S2 is of the same opinion but if this is not possible, it should at least be possible that the exams in the last 3 years of elementary school could be taken over the entire period of the 2nd semester. S4 writes as follows: "The school should offer the possibility of regular evaluation of the child’s progress during the entire year or at the end of the school year, if the parents ask for it." S5 would change the knowledge evaluation system as follows: "I would implement a greater flexibility in determining the timeframe for the examination period in the last 6 grades."

S4 adds the following: "In my opinion, the assessment should be based on tests that other children wrote during the school year. The tests should not be more extensive or difficult."

**4. Conclusion**

Both for Slovenia and Croatia it could be said that having educational pluralism is not a foregone conclusion, which can be attributed to the political history of the second half of the last century. Although in Slovenia the democratisation process has since the nineteen nineties led to a few private school initiatives and the legalization of homeschooling, for Croatia it must be concluded that, after fifty years of school and pedagogical uniformity, it is difficult to develop pedagogical and school pluralism (Matijević, 2009). The situation in Croatia as it is now, certainly does not facilitate the development of school and pedagogical pluralism.

We wanted to make a comparison of the homeschooling situation in Slovenia and in Croatia in the hope that it would provide answers on how to create an authentic homeschooling model for Croatia. Legalization of homeschooling in Croatia would certainly be an important step in the further development of pedagogical pluralism and pedagogical individualism and would be in consideration of the standards of European school democracies which imply the possibility for parents to choose a pedagogical concept or pedagogy according to which they wish to educate their children, including the right to choose not to enrol children in one of the public schools but to raise and educate children in a private arrangement. Indeed, answers of Croatian aspiring homeschooling parents indicate dissatisfaction with the existing school system.

We do think that experiences of Slovene homeschooling parents could be helpful in creating an authentic Croatian model of homeschooling. Firstly, Croatian people can see, based on the Slovene example, that homeschooling can work; that it can be trusted as a form of education since Slovene homeschooled children are successful at reaching the required learning goals. One of the reasons for this is that homeschooling offers a more individual tailor-made approach to learning.

However, the answers from Slovene parents also indicate that the homeschooling regulation has an aspect which causes stress and diminishes motivation to learn. Hereby we must note, that the law regulating homeschooling should aim at the child’s development into a heathy and mature human being. Learning could make a big contribution to that process. The child should then however be at the centre of its learning process and not the learning goals in the curriculum.

The answers of Slovene parents showed that strictly following the curriculum instead of the child’s interest impairs motivation to learn. Also, development of certain skills at fixed moments in time is unconstructive, because children are developing in different tempos. Another big challenge for both children and parents is the stress due to exams at the end of the year. The state must secure the quality of the education for the child, because it is a child’s right and we understand that testing is important for the state; especially for a state with a socialistic past where the state was regarded as the main driving force of the development of the individual. Testing however need not necessarily have its current child-unfriendly form. Flexibility in scheduling exams or showing progress in the form of yearly presentations of a portfolio might be two ways way to tackle this issue in the future in Slovenia and at the same time they could be a suggestion for a Croatian model of homeschooling. These suggestions could be shown to a Croatian team of experts in charge of an educational reform when hopefully homeschooling will get a legal place in the Croatian educational landscape.

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1. Source: Personal corespondence with Slavko Gaber. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)