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'Education in an Era of Risk - the Role of Educational Research for the Future

## THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL SYSTEM IN THE INTEGRATION PROCESS OF MIGRANT CHILDREN

### The Case Study of SLOVENIA

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# I. THE AIM OF THE PRESENTATION

## General objective:

To present and analyse existing situation in the *educational community in Slovenia in relation to migrant children and their integration.*

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## Specific objectives:

- Explore perceptions of linguistic, cultural and religious pluralism; how they live it daily
- Evaluate integration systems and approaches toward cultural and religious plurality and integration
- Asses challenges, obstacles, limitations, problems
- Examine strengths and weaknesses of the policies and (best) practices



## II. THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Slovenia is (linguistically, culturally, religiously) relatively homogenous country with less than 2 million population
- Approximately 88% of its inhabitants ethnic Slovenes.

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### The ethnic pluralism of Slovenia and migration trends

- Existence of Italian, Hungarian and Roma native/autochthonous minorities
- Nations from the republics of once common state Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosna and Hercegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Vojvodina) migrating in Slovenia 1960-1980 due to economic reasons (intrastate migrations).
- Migrations from Ex-Yugoslav states, mostly Bosna and Hercegovina in 1990s (Balkan wars).
- In the last 10 years economic migrations from Ex-Yugoslav states (mostly from: Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosna and Hercegovina)
- Low numbers of migrants from other EU and non-EU states and other intercontinental migrations (Russia, Ukraine, China, Thailand etc.)
- Very few migrants from the last migration movement: Afghanistan, Syria etc.

## II. THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- The ethnic pluralism in Slovenia is to a big extent dominated by presence of the nations of once common state Yugoslavia.
- Duality: on the one hand the existence of nationalism and prejudice towards the nations of former Yugoslavia, on the other hand, they are not perceived as a “real/proper” migrants.
- Missing data about overall number and ethnic composition of children enrolled in Slovenian educational system; no systematic collection of (personal) data related to children ethnic, linguistic or religious background.
- The schools/teachers get only the information about the new-commers who do not speak Slovenian language and need some adaptation and language courses; after the data related to ethnic and language is no more monitored, collected or archived.

# III. METHODOLOGY

The following paper is based on:

- preliminary results of ongoing **MiCreate project**.
- more concretely, it presents perceptions, attitudes and opinions of the school representatives (primary and secondary schools) collected through
- the face-to-face interviews in the period May - August 2019. 12 schools (6 primary and 6 secondary schools)
- the results of previous research projects: e.g. *Children Voices: Interethnic Violence in the School Environment*, *On the wings of fairy tales around the world* etc.

## VI. THE CASE STUDY OF SLOVENIA

- **Missing systemic approach**
- **Duality**
- **Good will and self-initiative**



## 4.1 Missing systemic approach

- The holistic systemic approach to integration of the migrant children in the school environment is completely missing.
- A lot was done in the last years regarding the integration of migrant children through the educational system (*public and professional sensibilization, national & international scientific projects, some initiatives and funding of pilot projects by the Ministry of education, self-initiative actions of individual schools and teachers etc.*)

## 4.1 Missing systemic approach

- The integration of migrant children is reduced on the language issue solely.
- The state provides obligatory language course for newly arrived migrant children at the beginning of the school year. All schools and teachers expose insufficiency of such amount of language course.
- The language course starts with the beginning of the school year.
- There are no other instructions or directives how to face and manage cultural plurality or integration process. There are no protocols, omnipresent good practices at the state level....
- All the rest is left to individual school, teachers and their ingenuity and good will.

## 4.2. Duality

- Differences among the schools and approaches to management of cultural and lingual plurality and integration processes.

## 4.2 Duality

### 1) Schools

- Located in the multicultural areas, close to the border and vicinity of Italy, Croatia, Austria or Hungary, with the presence of Italian, Hungarian or Roma/Sinti native minorities; economically more developed areas or urban areas which are more attractive for migrants (capital Ljubljana, coastal areas)) which has long tradition of culturally plural educational environment.
- The educational communities has higher affinity to the issues of multiculturalism and management of cultural diversity, has a high level of awareness of the specific needs of migrant children, knowledge about challenges produced by cultural diversity.
- Good self-organized system of welcoming of migrant children, good organization of the protocol of inclusion and the process of integration. This type of schools is usually included in national or international projects covering the areas of cultural diversity, multiculturalism etc.
- They welcomed our project and were very enthusiastic about collaboration.

# 4.2 Duality

## 2) Schools

with migrant children (ex-Yugoslavia) and ethnic plurality but without any awareness and reflection upon this.

The presence of multiculturalism is not noticed, they do not address it, they do not have protocols of inclusion and integration of migrant children, the educational community is not discussing the issue. They don't have any problems, no presence of nationalism, prejudices and xenophobia.

When explicitly asked why they don't address those issues:

*“Talking about this and opening discussion about the prejudices, xenophobia etc. will encourage students to notice the differences and encourages the potential xenophobia”.*

When addressing the issue of school diet and lunches in the school for Muslim students, the principal explained:

*“The school lunches prepared in the school are very nutritious and very diverse and they are covering all the nutritious needs of their students”.*

## 4.2 Duality

Duality: primary (PS) and secondary schools (SS)

- While protocols of acceptance/inclusion/integration of migrant children and other actions dealing with cultural pluralism in the school environment are mostly present in PS, in SS these approaches are almost completely missing.
- While educational community in PS perceive their role/mission more holistically as education, training and raising; SS - role of secondary education more instrumental as a provider of knowledge and preparation for universities/employment. Less interest in cultural pluralism of students.
- Cultural plurality, multiculturalism, xenophobia etc. are poorly addressed in the SS curriculum and textbooks.
- In the SS: only the basic language course for newly arrived.

## 4.2 Duality

Differences among the (different ethnic background) of migrant children:

- Some migrant children are more easily included in schools and learn language quicker than the others. Some migrant children are highly motivated, with higher aspirations, while the others not so much.
- Migrant children from ex-Yugoslavia learn Slovenian language quite easily (similarity of languages), teachers mostly understand their languages (Croat, Serb, Bosnian etc.), what makes the inclusion process easier. Geographical and cultural proximity.
- Albanian migrant children from Kosovo and Macedonia are exposed as big challenge.

- Reasons:

The Albanian language. The Albanian community has strong ethnic borders, is closed community, with limited interethnic contacts, strong intragroup control and the lowest number of interethnic marriages.

Traditional family patterns: mothers do not speak Slovenian language, are very low educated, not working and not in search of work, working father is representative of the (extended) family, communicating with the “outside” world.

Lower cultural capital and do not have high educational aspirations. Usually it is expected for Albanian girls to marry “appropriately” and the Albanian boys to continue the family business (construction and bakeries). After PS they often leave education, or they enroll in vocational schools.



- On the opposite side: the migrant children from Russia - highly educated parents, with cultural capital and very high educational and employment aspirations, children are included in other extra-school activities in clubs: music, gymnastic, other sports... after PS enrolment in (also) in high school.

## 4.3 Self-initiative of individual schools and good practice

- Due to the absence of systematic state approach individual schools and teachers self-initiatively organize the school system for welcoming, inclusion and integration of migrant children.

# The good practises of PRIMARY SCHOOL KOPER

- 15-25 newly arrived migrant children/per year.
- ¼ to ½ of all children with migrant background in every class.
- *The vision of the school*: “integration is mutual process”, not only adaptation of migrant children and families + Integration is not only concern of the teachers and principal, but also “janitor, cook and cleaner” & all included in the educational environment.
- *Language introduction classes (Uvajalnica)*: if possible before the start of the school.
- *Welcoming day*: day before formal start of the school. Welcome of the children and parents in all languages of children enrolled in school.
- *Inclusion of parents* and stress on establishing the contact with parents. Important feeling of acceptance and support!
- *First day in school in class*: teacher explain who are newly arrived migrant children and present some information about their language and culture. Children themselves has the opportunity to present in mother language.
- Organization of *language courses for parents* at school or in local environment.

# PRIMARY SCHOOL KOPER

- Integration of migrant children is the “holistic integration”, involvement of the *whole local community*.
- Presentation of all crucial point in the local community (hospital, Local municipality, post office, bank etc.)
- *Intercultural workshops and intercultural celebrations*: on new eve and other occasions: children presenting their own culture. Christmas greetings in all languages of children.
- Extra language classes of mother tongue of migrant children.
- The concerns, fears and prejudices among locals are present but they address them and discuss a lot about all of it (with parents) and also within classes with children.
- In the case of children from Afghanistan (translators)
- This school is leading big and very influential national project financed by the Ministry of education “*Challenges of intercultural cohabitation/Izzivi medkulturnega sobivanja*” (2016-2021)

# Concrete problems and challenges in Slovenian educational sphere

- Systemic state approach is missing.
- Too big differences between schools.
- Lack of Money/additional money needed and/or inclusion of additional teacher/professional as a support for migrant children
- Language courses (Too short and start to late)
- How to encourage peer to peer socialization in school and outside the school?
- Inclusion of migration/integration/cultural pluralism topics in curricula.
- Etc.

Thank you for your attention!