



Research report

Living together, learning together



Minority Education Issues in Vukovar-Srijem & Istria Counties

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*I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles;
but today it means getting along with people.*

Mohandas K. Gandhi

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1. Introduction

The research that is presented in this report was realised as part of the European Commission funded project *Leadership for the Local Community* carried out by the Forum for Freedom in Education in partnership with the Network of Education Policy Centers (NEPC) and the Vukovar-Srijem County. It started in early 2012 with the aim to strengthen capacities of youth and the education system in the area of democratisation, human rights, integration of minorities and non-violent conflict resolution in Vukovar-Srijem County.

Apart from the research whose findings and conclusions will be presented in this report, the project also includes the education programme for a group of youth (18 – 30 year olds) from Vukovar-Srijem County on civic engagement and project management, as well as *in-service* teacher training on civic education and teacher leadership with the aim of producing change at school level.

Therefore, this research was an integral part of a larger project which hoped to ensure a more holistic approach to the complex issue of separate schooling in Vukovar-Srijem County in order to get a better insight into its effects on students, to analyse the policy context of such schooling and examine other policy options and solutions. The authors, as well as the participating organisations, are aware that such a sensitive topic needs to be approached with responsibility and care. Therefore, the analysis of this issue takes into consideration the context of the County's profound social division based on the ethnicity of its inhabitants, resulting from the devastating war (1991-1995) and deepened by economic hardship and a weak labour market. It also takes into account the minority rights regulations in Croatia, especially the right of minorities to be educated in their own language and script.

The issue of separate schooling is not unique to Vukovar-Srijem County, or even to Croatia. The Network of Education Policy Centers conducted a similar study (2008/09) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Latvia, Romania,

Slovakia and Tajikistan and the results were published in a study called *Divided Education, Divided Citizens?* (Golubeva et al, 2009). This study, together with the results of the current research that was conducted in Istria County, will provide data for the comparison with the situation in Vukovar-Srijem County and will also ensure multiple perspectives of this issue. The report will present commonalities and differences in the situation in two counties with substantial national minority population in Croatia as well as a comparison with the previous studies.

Since the very beginning of the peaceful reintegration of the Eastern Slavonia and Danube region in 1998, the issues of social division in Vukovar-Srijem County and separate schooling in particular have been in the focus of many researches and studies. Today, in 2013, Croatia is about to become a member of the European Union and it might seem that deep social divisions and ethnic conflicts are a part of its obsolete history. However, the authors of this research and civil society organisations involved in it retain that these are still crucial matters that need to be addressed in order to achieve the reconciliation and stronger social cohesion that is most certainly lacking in that region, as it is, to a somewhat milder degree, in all of Croatia. Since this research is being undertaken by civil society organisations, it naturally has the features of an engaged research and as such it is significant in at least two aspects. Firstly, it promotes positive social changes towards multicultural integration of both minority and majority members in Vukovar-Srijem society through advocacy actions that the participating CSOs and their partners will conduct in their future activities. Secondly, it represents a contribution to evidence-based policy making in education by civil society, a legitimate actor in producing and sharing knowledge with other actors, thus supporting democratisation of knowledge and different ways of learning.

The authors of the research and the organisations involved in it consider that the issues of ethnic conflict, social division and separate schooling on

the one hand, and the issues of reconciliation, strengthened social cohesion and integration on the other hand, are pertinent issues to both majority and minorities. In this context, education and school play a crucial role and therefore any related decision or practice will have a long-term impact on society, its development and the quality of its members' lives. Hence, this research report is intended for a wider professional community:

- experts and practitioners in the field of minority rights and social integration in Croatia, South East Europe and beyond;
- minority organisations and representatives;
- educators interested in the topic of schooling in multicultural and post-conflict areas;
- decision-makers at the national and local levels.

Finally, the authors would like to point out that because of the very nature of this research it was impossible to avoid classification of responses according to ethnicity, which might seem as adding to this category a greater significance than it actually should have, but that they have still, at all times, kept in mind the inherent value of each individual human being.

2. Context of minority schooling in Croatia

In order to grasp the issues of minority schooling in Croatia, some context must be provided. Croatia's geopolitical position was influenced by numerous migrations and political changes which resulted in the culturally diverse character of Croatia's population. According to the census of 2011¹, out of the 4.284,889 total inhabitants of Croatia, 410,568 or 9.58% are members of one of the 22 different ethnic minority groups with a recognised legal status of ethnic minority in Republic of Croatia.

The breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in the 1990s and the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Croatia in 1991 have caused the number of minorities to increase, and a division into what is sometimes referred to as “new” and “old” minorities. All nationalities that lived within the Croatian territory while in SFRY had the status of constitutional nations (Bosniaks, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs and Slovenians) and got the status of national minority in 1991. The Republic of Croatia has inherited its model of minority rights' protection from SFRY which guaranteed and regulated the rights of only certain minorities – i.e. members of the Czech, Hungarian, Ruthenian, Slovakian, Italian and Ukrainian minorities², and the state had to face the challenge of finding a democratic and appropriate way for protecting the rights of all recognised minorities.

The study concentrates on two minority groups, and therefore the situation of the Italian and Serbian minorities will be described in greater detail.

According to the 2011 census, 186,633 members of the Serbian national minority live in Croatia, constituting 4.36% of the population. This is drastically less than in 1991, when Croatia had 12.2% of Serb population. The decline in percentage is mostly due to the 1991 – 1995 war in Croatia. However, even with this drastic decrease, Serbs remain the biggest national minority in Croatia. The Serbian minority is mostly concentrated in North-eastern Croatia (Vukovar-Srijem County, Osijek-Baranja County). The majority of the Serbian minority live in Vukovar-Srijem county – 27,824 or 15.50%.

Vukovar-Srijem County has a history of multiculturalism - for centuries it has been home to different ethnic groups such as Croats, Serbs,

1 Data taken from the results of the 2011 census available at http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/censuses/census2011/results/htm/H01_01_04/h01_01_04_RH.html (accessed on March 5th 2013, 22:29 CET)

2 In Siniša Tatalović: Nacionalne manjine u Republici Hrvatskoj / National minorities in Republic of Croatia, *Politička misao*, Vol XXXVIII, (2001.), no.3, p.96.

Yugoslavians³, Ruthenians, Slovaks, Hungarians, Ukrainians, Muslims, Germans and others, that often lived in ethnically mixed marriages/families/communities.⁴ On the other hand, its recent history is marked by inter-ethnic conflict between Croats and Serbs, war atrocities and, most of all, human sufferings. In the period 1991 – 1995, the territory was under Serbian governance that ended with the beginning of the process of peaceful reintegration 1995 - 1998. This process began by the signing of the Erdut Agreement in 1995 by representatives of Croatian and Serbian governments, and was implemented by the UN Security Council, which established a special UN Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia (UNTAES) for this purpose. This process was not an easy one, and even long after its formal end, the interethnic tensions and mutual distrust are still strong. This distrust is perhaps most evidently expressed within the city of Vukovar, where the social life and its relations are determined by ethnicity, and where the public space that normally would be ethnically neutral has borders established on the codes of interethnic differences, the borders invisible to an outsider, yet very clear to its residents – e.g. the existence ‘Serbian’ and ‘Croatian’ cafés or grocery stores.

The Italian minority according to the 2011 census numbers 17,807 or 0.42% of the country’s population. The Italian minority is mostly concentrated in Western Croatia (Istria County, Primorje-Gorski Kotar County). Most Italians in Croatia live in Istria County – 12,543 or 6.03% of Istria County population.

Istria, as a geographical (and cultural) region is divided between 3 neighbouring states – Croatia, whose Istria county covers about 88% of the geographical territory, Slovenia with 10.9% of the

territory and Italy with 1.1% of the territory of Istria. This is why in this study we use the term *Istria County* in order to denote that the focus of our research is on the administrative unit within the territory of the Republic of Croatia.⁵ The described geographical division, as well as the demographic structure is a result of political history, in particular of the 20th century world wars. For the Italian population, the most significant changes in their number happened during and after the 2nd World War and Treaty of Peace with Italy. Before that period, according to the 1910 census, Italians constituted 4.5% of the population of Croatia, which means that their number decreased by 87.4%.⁶ The changes in the number of Italians in Istria County are caused by the forced migration of the Italian population to Italy, known also as the *Istrian exodus*, in the period 1943 – 1960. Italian sources do not agree with Croatian and Slovenian ones on the number of exiled (30,000 – 350,000) and murdered (4,500 – 10,000) people, but since it is not part of the researchers’ expertise, nor the topic of this study, we will not discuss these numbers. It is useful, however, to keep in mind that the Istrian situation is also the result of a number of political, historical and economic factors. Yet, it can be said that today people in Istria live well together. The Istrian identity as a regional identity is strongly present, maybe even more strongly than the national one – being Istrian and belonging to that cultural context is more important than to differ by belonging to any of the dominant ethnicities – Croatian, Italian or Slovene.⁷

2.1 Legal framework of minority education in Croatia

The legal framework for minority education defines the right of minority students to be educated in their own language and script at all levels of education – pre-school, primary, secondary and at

3 In the 1991 census, citizens of SFRY had the opportunity to declare themselves as Yugoslavians, belonging to Yugoslav nation.

4 For more information on ethnic structure of Vukovar-Srijem County and the data from 1991 census (last in SFRY) available in Croatian National Bureau for the Statistics: Population of the Republic of Croatia according to religion and ethnicity, 1880-1991, by settlements.

5 Source: Istarska enciklopedija / Istrian Encyclopedia, 2005, Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža

6 Source: www.nacionalne-manjine.info/nacionalne-manjine.html (accessed February 11th 2012 at 09:19 CET)

7 Referring to the interview with one of the experts, Mr. Davor Gjenero.

higher education level. This right can be realised through 3 models of minority education:

- **MODEL A – classes in the language and script of the national minority**, i.e. all subjects are taught in the language of the national minority, with the exception of Croatian language, which is a compulsory subject to be taught in the same number of lessons as the mother tongue subject.
- **MODEL B – bilingual classes**, i.e. Natural sciences are taught in Croatian and according to the general curriculum, while the Social science group of subjects are taught in the language of the minority, presumably for students who are members of that minority. According to the State Pedagogical Standards this model can also be taught in separate classes.
- **MODEL C – nurturing language and culture**, where the minority content is taught in the minority language during additional classes lasting 2 to 5 school hours per week, including minority language, literature, geography, history, music and arts.

In addition to these models, there are 3 other ways/ types of minority education:

- Within one class, in which all students are taught both the language of the majority and the national minority (**community language**) –in schools located in the areas where the members of this minority constitute a significant part of the population. An example of this type of education can be found in the Croatian language schools in Istria teaching Italian language as the community's language.
- Special classes: summer school, winter classes, correspondence-consultative classes
- Special programmes for the inclusion of Roma students into the educational system⁸

However, it should be noted that model B is hardly ever applied in the education of national minorities, and not at all applied for the minorities and counties

of interest in this study (Italian and Serbian minority; Istria and Vukovar-Srijem Counties). The study will therefore focus on Model A of minority education.

3. Methodology – technical parameters of the research

The research methodology was based on a previous study conducted by Network of Education Policy Centers' in 2007 – 2009: *Divided Education - Divided Citizens?*⁹, which explored the issues of civic enculturation of students attending separate schools for majorities and minorities in 8 countries. The research in Croatia was conducted in 2012 with the aim of gaining insight into possible differences between civic values and the outlook of minority and majority students and the possible impact that separate schooling may have on these differences in Croatia. The study describes factors that impact the civic enculturation of students, and how civil enculturation in a separate schooling environment is experienced by those involved. Moreover, the study, by looking at these questions, sets out to reveal the areas of potential synergy and divergence between majority and minority youth in the fields of citizenship, perception of history and interethnic relations.

Research phases

The research included 4 phases and methods for collecting data:

1. Desk research
2. Structured interviews
3. Focus groups (students, teachers, parents)
4. Questionnaires (students, teachers)

⁸ Source: MoE website <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=3194> accessed on May 4th 2012, 09:54 CET. State Pedagogical Standard for Elementary Education, National Gazette 63/08 and 90/2010

⁹ Golubeva, M., Kazimzade, E., Nedelcu, A. & Powell, S. (2009) *Divided Education, Divided Citizens? A comparative study of civil enculturation in separate schools*. Network of Education Policy Centres, http://www.edupolicy.net/images/pubs/comparative_studies/dedcinternationalreport.pdf

1. **Desk research** included examining various legal documents and literature on the current situation of separate schooling in Croatia regarding:

- Political background and power relations between different ethnic, religious or other groups
- The legal, financial and social status of separated schooling
- Special support to integrate migrant and minority students in mainstream schools
- How separation influences the school's institutional culture (extracurricular activities, national, religious and ethnic festivals, attitude towards majority/minority groups in society)
- How separation influences the teaching of civic topics

2. The researcher conducted five **structured interviews** with policy makers and experts in Croatia regarding the teaching of civic topics in mainstream schools and in minority schools, the special measures for supporting diversity within the national education system, and the Ministry's official stand on segregation.

3. **Focus groups** were conducted with members of minority and majority groups in schools: teachers, students in the final year of elementary schools (8th grade, age 13/14) and parents. The purpose of focus groups was to gain more insight into the issues they face in terms of civic enculturation. The topics of the focus groups included themes on perception of the spatial and symbolic separation of minority schools in Croatia, the effects of separation on their future ability to engage in civic activities, political relations among different ethnic groups in Croatia. 15 focus groups in total were conducted in 3 Croatian regions: Vukovar–Srijem County (6 focus groups), Istria County (6 focus groups), Zagreb County (3 focus groups). The focus group protocols were translated into Italian and conducted in Italian for students and teachers in the Italian language programmes. Each focus group included between 4 and 15 participants. Recordings of the focus groups were transcribed and summarised to inform the construction of the questionnaires.

4. **Questionnaires** for teachers and for students in the final year of elementary schools (8th grade, age 13/14) were constructed based on reports from the desk research, interviews and focus groups.

Four types of questionnaires were developed – for teachers and for students in elementary schools with instruction in the Croatian language, and for teachers and for students in elementary schools with instruction in the mother tongue. Questionnaires for minority schools in Istria County were translated to Italian.

Questionnaires for teachers are focused on investigating the following main questions:

- How does the practice of separate schooling of minority and majority students impact the teachers' and students' perception of citizenship in Croatia?
- How do the type of school and its location impact the civic education of students?
- How is this experienced by those involved?

Questionnaires for students are focused on investigating:

1. Students' opinion on languages, ethnic groups and national minority schools in Croatia
2. Students' opinion on citizenship, history and politics.

Sample and research process

Before discussing the sample we first have to point out that it is impossible to get statistics on the exact number of students in the 8th grade for schools with instruction in mother tongue per county. This posed a problem for sample size and we decided to use the available statistics for school year 2010/2011 on the number of students belonging to a national minority and the number of students in different models for minority education, as declared by the Government's Report on the Implementation of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities for 2010 (Table 1).

Students	No. of students belonging to the national minority	Model A	Model B	Model C	Total number of students (A+B+C)	%
Czechs	309	291		387	678	219%
Hungarians	486	208	8	783	999	206%
Serbs	3766	1992		444	2436	65%
Italians	321	1341			1341	418%

Table 1. Comparison of the number of elementary school students declared as members of national minorities with the number of students enrolled in elementary education according to the models (A, B, C).⁹

Type of school	County	Number of Schools
Instruction in the mother tongue (Serbian)	Vukovar-Srijem county	3
Instruction in Croatian	Vukovar-Srijem county	2
Instruction in the mother tongue (Italian)	Istria county	3
Instruction in Croatian	Istria county	2
Instruction in Croatian	Zagreb county	5

Table 2. Sample of schools per type and county

The other available statistics is the number of schools per county with Model A type of instruction. In Vukovar-Srijem County there were 11 elementary schools and 4 secondary schools implementing Model A for education in Serbian language and script in the academic year 2010/2011. In Istria County there were 7 elementary schools and 3 secondary schools implementing Model A for education in Italian language and script in the academic year 2010/2011. Data for the academic year 2011/2012 was not available during the period of conducting this research, but there can only be a small deviation compared to the academic year 2010/2011. Since there were no other statistics available, it was decided that the school will be the unit of our sample rather than the student or the teacher.¹⁰

Therefore, the researchers decided to conduct the research in 5 elementary schools in each county of the study as well as in 5 schools in the 'neutral' region of Zagreb County (Table 2).

Vukovar-Srijem and Istria counties had two lists of schools (Croatian language instruction schools and minority language instruction schools). Schools on the lists within a county were selected by the SPSS software by method of random choice, so researchers had no influence on the selection. Both focus groups and questionnaires were conducted in the first schools listed for each county, after obtaining the schools' permission for conducting the research.

In order to enter schools and conduct focus groups and questionnaires, the NEPC had to obtain permission by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. Therefore, all protocols and questionnaires were submitted and the NEPC team was given permission to conduct the research in schools. The size of the sample is in accordance with

10 Source: Report on the Implementation of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities for 2010, July 2011, Government of Republic of Croatia, section Education in the language and script of national minorities, pg 13, available at http://www.uljppnm.vlada.hr/images/pdf/izvjesce_ustavni_zakon_utrosak_2010.pdf

the total number of teachers and students in the regions and types of schools which were included in the research. Collected data was analysed with the SPSS software package according to the researchers' instructions. The study results in this report are based on the given analyses but also on the first three modules of the research: desk research, interviews and focus groups.

Ethical issues and confidentiality

Due to the great sensitivity of the topic, all participants of the research were guaranteed confidentiality, and the researchers and all involved made sure that there was no pressure on anyone to participate. Each school that was contacted to participate in either the focus group or questionnaire phase of the research was free to refuse participation in the research.

In order to follow ethical practice when working with children, the researchers requested that all students participating in the survey have obtained a signed permission by their parents. To assure confidentiality, these approvals were archived in schools, while the NEPC received a written statement from each school that children participating in the research have their parents' written permission.

Teachers participating in the focus groups and the survey were free to participate or to refuse participation in the research. The NEPC also obtained written statements from schools on the number of teachers participating in the focus groups and questionnaires for each school.

The research team believes that following these practices and assuring full confidentiality contributed to valid responses and therefore to reliable survey outcomes.

Obstacles and Limitations

The research team faced a number of obstacles in the process. Firstly, there was a significant delay in obtaining the permit from the Ministry, which forced us to enter the schools at the end of term, which is usually a very inconvenient time.

Secondly, once we, having the Ministry's permission, contacted the schools to participate in either focus groups or survey research, they could choose whether to participate or not. The inconvenient timing and short period given, because of the delay in obtaining the permit, are the reason why some schools refused to participate.

However, taking into consideration that we were refused by altogether 9 schools, mostly from the Vukovar-Srijem County, speaks also of the unwillingness of schools to participate in such a research for other reasons as well. One of the reasons for this could be the sensitivity and the politicisation of the issue, while another reason could be the fact that the region has become an excellent research ground for many different topics of social research and the population has had enough of research and researchers.

School size and the number of students and teachers set the limitation for the sample. Due to the random choice and the number of schools that refused to participate, we actually conducted the research in small rural schools with a very small number of students and teachers. Any conclusions made, therefore, based on the quantitative research have to be taken with this limitation in mind.

The final limitation is that the choice of school, especially at elementary level, is made by parents, rather than by students. It would have improved the study had we included parents in the questionnaires.

The described obstacles and limitations have to be taken into consideration when reading the study results and findings of this study.

4. Results and Findings

„Here, it is so, but not abroad - it is not necessary to assimilate people or students – that is not the goal of a modern democratic society but respecting differences. It is not by chance that separate schools are needed in Vukovar, it might have been a necessity, but it is necessary to insist on it though education. We all have some prejudices from home but separate schools are not an ideal, the language barrier should be broken and worked on and then they should be included. All other content is adopted through language“, teacher, Zagreb.

4.1. Legal framework issues

National minorities in Croatia have the special right to be educated in their own language and script. Legal foundations for the realization of this right can be found in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities and in the Law on Education in the Language and Script of National Minorities. Minority education, as a part of the general education system, is also regulated by the general laws and provisions on education – the Law on Pre-school Education, the Law on Primary Education and the Law on Secondary Education, as well as the Law on Institutions (for the establishment of minority schools). The organisation of education for national minorities (e.g. standards for schools and classes) is described in a document called State Pedagogical Standard. Until after the parliamentary elections won by the left-wing coalition in December 2011, a special Directorate for Education of National Minorities existed within the Ministry of Education. With the change of government, the situation within the MoE changed, too, and the Directorate ceased to exist.

Furthermore, it can be seen that a legal gap is present and that there are differences in the legal status of schools between the regions and minorities which may have significant practical

consequences. Most of the schools with classes in a minority language, where such education had been implemented before the proclamation of the Croatian state in the 1990s, have the **legal status of a minority school**, since they were legally registered and founded as a minority school. An example of such schools are the Italian schools in Istria County.

However, schools with a programme in Serbian language and script in Vukovar-Srijem County do not have the same status. This means that they have the status of a regular school that either a) implements the classes entirely in Serbian language and script, - or b) implements classes according to both Model A in Serbian language and script and the programme in Croatian language and script, most often organised in different shifts and/or spaces.

The schools in Serbian language and script in Vukovar-Srijem County, with the support of the Serbian community organisations¹¹ have requested to be registered as Serbian minority schools, but this situation was not solved and it is causing public disputes. Their request was based on the rights guaranteed by the Erdut Agreement, more specifically on the Letter of Intent by the Government of Croatia on Peaceful Reintegration of the Croatian Danube Region (1997) where the right “to prepare and implement the educational program that fosters national identity, history and legacy, if it does not harm any right or benefits in regards of international educational standards and Croatian laws.”¹² is guaranteed to the members of the Serbian minority, as well as other minorities.

One of the formal reasons why such requests were not accepted was the fact that the law foresees only the establishment and registration of minority

11 Joint Council of Municipalities / Zajedničko veće opština www.zvo.hr – organisation sui generis, a body in charge of the protection of interests of members of Serbian ethnic community in the territory of Osijek Baranja County and Vukovar-Srijem County, created based on the Erdut Agreement on Peaceful Reintegration in 1995.

12 Letter of Intent by the Government of Croatia on Peaceful Reintegration of the Croatian Danube Region (1997), Art.8.

schools and not the *re-registration*. The government that won the elections at the end of 2011 has stated clearly in its programme of 2011 – 2015 that it will: „support the registration of the Serbian minority schools founded in the territory of Eastern Slavonia during the period of the peaceful reintegration.“¹³ Another challenging issue is the status of majority students, as well as the students belonging to other ethnic groups within the minority schools and the regulation of their right to be instructed in their mother tongue(s) – this issue is not at all regulated by the Law on Education in Minority Language (2000).

The legal framework regarding this aspect is unclear and leaves space for non-transparent and inconsistent interpretations, as noticed by the OSCE Case study on minority education in the Vukovar-Srijem County (2003): *“The Croatian legislative framework regulating minority education is extremely progressive as it grants to persons belonging to national minorities the right to be taught in their mother tongue at all levels of the educational system, if conditions regarding a minimum number of students are met. However, schools with education in minority language, which are designated as the primary option for conducting mother tongue education and given important privileges, are not properly defined. (...) The progressive spirit of Croatian legislation on minority education is thus seriously undermined by these inconsistencies.”*¹⁴

„Every minority is a part of Croatia“, parent, Vukovar-Srijem County

„Every minority has the same wishes as the ones in majority“, student, Vukovar-Srijem County

„All together we would act better and achieve more“ student, Vukovar-Srijem County

One of the consequences deriving directly from this situation is that “all schools currently offering education in Serbian language at the primary and secondary level are not entitled to all the privileges reserved under the LAW ON EDUCATION IN MINORITY LANGUAGE to schools with education in minority language.” (OSCE, 2003) As mentioned in this study, even though they did not have their status denied *in practice*, this is a “result of the reintegration process and of the *current* good will of the Ministry rather than a permanent, legally entrenched right”, and there is no guarantee that their position cannot be changed in the future.

Another important issue that needs to be considered is the fact that although the legal framework allows for 3 different models for education of minorities, some of the models, such as Model B (Table 1), are hardly used. Only 8 students of Hungarian minority attended this model in the school year 2010/2011, while some models are used more frequently. This might indicate that parents who select the school for their children do not have enough information on the possibilities of minority education or that Model B is not really an option if the state cannot provide it.

Funds for minority language schools are allocated in the State budget and the budgets of relevant local self-government units (county, city or municipality, according to the administrative division of the Republic of Croatia) and are provided in the same way as for other schools. Schools can also receive funding from other sources (e.g. donations), according to the law.

4.2. Language and culture

The national minority schools’ **curriculum and syllabus** in Croatia is supposed to contain a general section, as well as a section dealing with

13 Programme of the Government of Croatia in the mandate 2011-2015, www.mvep.hr, pg. 26.

14 Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Mission in Croatia, Field Centre Vukovar: Minority Education in the Republic of Croatia: A Case Study in Vukovar-Srijem County, August 2003

the language, literature, history, geography and cultural tradition of the minority in question. As defined by legal acts, these specificities within the content of the minority curriculum are decided by the Croatian Ministry of Education (MoE) based on the consultations with the minority organisations. However, it is not clear how and in which documents this content is defined (see *History teaching*).

According to our findings from the students' survey it is clear that there is a **strong difference in the perception of relative social importance of minority culture and language between students in schools with instruction in Croatian and those in Serbian language programmes in Vukovar-Srijem county**. While most students in Serbian language programmes consider the minority language and culture important for a successful professional career, their peers in Croatian language programmes tend to think it less important. Also, in Istria students in Italian language programmes are more likely to rate the importance of the minority language and culture more highly, than those in Croatian language programmes.

„It is necessary if they do not understand Croatian, on the other hand it is difficult for them to socialize and fit into the community“; teacher, Zagreb

On the other hand, an interesting finding from the teachers' survey is that the attitudes towards a hypothetical joint schooling of Croatian and Serbian students is perceived as a threat to the cultural identity of minority students by teachers in the Serbian language programmes (but not by those in Croatian language programmes). Moreover, while teachers in programmes in Serbian and Italian languages view the loss of cultural identity by minority students as a distinctly bad thing, teachers in Croatian language programmes in all three regions tend to see it as neutral or even positive (with teachers in Croatian language programmes in Vukovar-Srijem County evaluating it more positively).

Most teachers tend to agree that joint schooling would improve majority language proficiency of minority students, with those in Croatian language programmes tending to agree more often that this would be the case.

4.3. Participation in public life and politics

„He should respect other citizens, other minorities, other nationalities, but he should also be proud of who he is not something special, but to know he is from Croatia“, student answering the question „What should a citizen of Croatia be like?“, Istarian County

According to the survey, students have diverging views on the legitimacy of participation of all ethnic groups in politics. Students attending minority language programmes in Vukovar-Srijem County and Istria County tend to agree strongly that the opinion of all ethnic groups in society should be taken into consideration when making important political decisions, while students in the Croatian language programme in Vukovar-Srijem County in particular are neutral or even disapproving, with 28% of them disagreeing that all ethnic groups should be consulted when making decisions.

The notion that it is good to have politicians from national minorities in the government enjoys even less support among students in majority language programmes, especially among those in Vukovar-Srijem County (while students in minority language programmes in both counties support this thesis with 87% of them agreeing and strongly agreeing with this - see Figure 1.).

Perception of the relative importance of ethnicity in social and political life is for the most part the same across all groups, with students for the most part wishing for human equality in the future, regardless of ethnic origin. The only significant difference is in the perception of the statement “It is not difficult

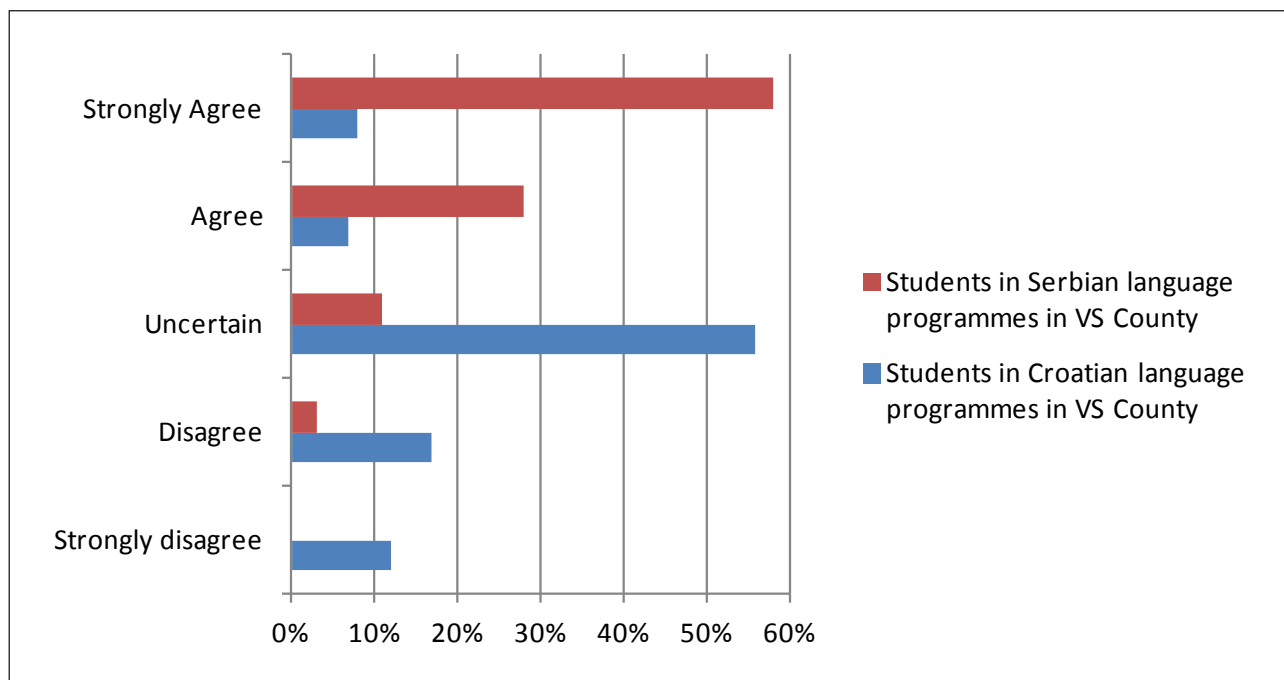


Figure 1. Percentages of students' opinions according to programme on the statement "It is good to have politicians from national minorities in the governing structures" for Vukovar-Srijem County

to understand the disappointment of Serbian minority people in some political decisions in our country", which students from the Serbian language programmes in Vukovar-Srijem County support, while other groups are more reserved.

Importantly, there is no major difference in the perception of the degree of potential effectiveness of one's participation in public life among students of different groups. On the whole, more students tend to disagree with the statement "My participation cannot change anything in the policies of the government", and there is no regular pattern of divergence between minority and majority students in this respect, although students in Vukovar, from both groups (those studying in Croatian language and those studying in Serbian language), on the whole tend to be a little more sceptical about the effectiveness of their participation.

Focus groups have shown that on the whole the students' perception of a good citizen is a mix of characteristics of subject-type citizen (law-abiding, respectful) with characteristics of participant-type

citizen.¹⁵ However, an important exception is visible in the case of Serbian minority school students from Vukovar. For them, a good citizen is a participant, protest-oriented citizen, with a special emphasis on minority rights: *Active citizen – one that protests and asks for his/ her rights*. At the same time, their perception of citizens' rights, unlike that of their Croatian peers, includes an emphasis on the right to work (*Rights should include equality and access to work in one's own town*) - possibly due to the fact that (as parents' focus groups have shown) their parents have difficulties in the labour market and it is assumed in the Serbian community that it is more difficult for Serbs in Vukovar to get a job.

Parents' focus groups in Vukovar also indicate the range of grievances expressed by the Serbian community there (and possibly affecting attitudes towards separate schooling):

- Serbian parents feel that they are living in a temporary arrangement after the war. They

15 On the definitions of subject type and participant type citizen attitudes, see Almond, Gabriel A. (1989) *Civic Culture Revisited*. Sage Publications.

believe they have difficulty to access the labour market (for better jobs, ethnicity and religion matter). They feel they are not treated in an equal manner.

- Presence of Serbian politicians in the Parliament of Croatia is seen as tokenism. On the other hand, the parochialism of Serbian party politics (giving jobs to party members) is also criticised.

Students of all groups tend to believe in non-discrimination, free choice of the country to live in, and the right to participate in the political process. At the same time, focus groups with Serbian school students in Vukovar show that they do not believe this is currently the case: *“It is much easier to find a job in Vukovar for a Croat, than for a Serb”*.

Normative orientations towards protest and the readiness to protest are more or less similar across all groups of teachers and students, with teachers and students in Italian language programmes showing a somewhat more participatory attitude. Focus group with students in an Italian school in Istria County bears this out - according to the students, *“An active citizen is one who takes part in the community actively, one who helps. One needs to show good will to become an active citizen”*. By comparison, focus group with students in a Croat school in Zagreb shows a more subject-type attitude: *“a citizen’s duty is to obey the laws of the country where he/she lives”*.

Belief in the effectiveness of own participation, however, shows that teachers on the whole display less confidence in the ability to influence public life through participation, and tend to agree with the statement “My participation cannot change anything in the policies of the government” more often than students do. As with students, teachers in the Vukovar-Srijem County (irrespective of the programme they teach in) are the most sceptical about the effectiveness of their participation, with teachers in Croatian language programmes tending to believe even more often than students that their participation cannot change anything. This may be an indication of the general sense of political

helplessness in the region, driven by economic as well as social factors.

4.4. The paradox of endorsement of separate schooling

The opinion of teachers on whether the existence of minority schools is good is somewhat polarised in Vukovar (with teachers in Serbian language programmes finding it for the most part very good and teachers in Croatian language programmes being much more reserved, though not overwhelmingly finding it bad). However, teachers from Italian language programme in Istria are even stronger supporters of national minority schools, and teachers in Croatian language programmes in Istria are also mostly in favour of schools for national minorities. Teachers in Zagreb share the reserved attitude of their colleagues in Croatian language programmes from Vukovar towards minority schools.

„Here it is different than elsewhere – here even during the war there was no hate or anything like that. Later kids from Italian schools go to Croatian secondary schools and kids from Croatian schools go to secondary Italian. Some of our kids, due to lack of space, hang around in the Italian school”, parent, Istrian County

„I think they would hang out together, but they are scared and their parents might get angry about it and so, but I think if it was up to kids they do not bother each other”, student Istrian County on students on Vukovar-Srijem County

There is relatively little support across all groups of teachers for the idea that joint schooling would create a more unified nation of citizens in Croatia, with teachers from Zagreb tending to support this thesis somewhat more than others. At the same time, there is unanimity across all groups of teachers that a more unified nation of citizens would be a good thing.

An interesting conclusion can be drawn from the students' answers to questions relating to the existence of schools for minority students and the willingness to study together with students of 'the other' ethnic group.

While students in Croatian language programmes from Vukovar-Srijem County are particularly sceptical about the need for schools for minorities (and students in Serbian language programmes are for the most part convinced that minority schools are necessary), the readiness of students in Croatian language programmes from Vukovar-Srijem County to study in the same class with students from Serbian language programme is lower than that of students in Zagreb or those in Croatian language programmes in Istria, and a little lower than the readiness of students in Serbian language programme from Vukovar-Srijem County to study in the same classroom with their peers from the Croatian language programme. Thus, while they are on the whole against separate schools for Serbs, students in Croatian language programmes in Vukovar-Srijem County are less ready to share the classroom with them than their peers in other parts of the country.

Reasons for studying in minority schools

„We will all share the labour market equally, the schools should be too“, parent, Vukovar-Srijem County

Students in minority language programmes were also asked for the reasons why they or their parents have chosen the minority school. The answers reveal that normative reasons (preservation of language and culture), reasons of convenience (ease to study in one's mother tongue) and social reasons (everybody I know goes to such school) are almost equally important for both groups, with the social reason being somewhat less important for students in Italian language programmes.

4.5. History teaching – policy and perception

The history curriculum in minority education is regulated by the provision of the Law on Education of National Minorities. This curriculum, beside the general part (referring to what is taught in all schools in Croatia), must contain the part that refers to the history of the national minority. However, this special part of the curriculum containing the history of national minorities is not available on the website of the MoE, where the only special subject curricula are those for minority mother tongue (Czech, Hungarian, Italian, Serbian).¹⁶ We could assume that what was written in 2003 by the historian Magdalena Najbar-Agičić still holds true¹⁷: “Education in the language of the minorities must be implemented according to the current curriculum.¹⁸ However, at the same time it was planned that, together with the part of the curriculum that is valid for all students in the country, the curriculum for national minorities ‘obligatorily contains’ also ‘a part that refers to the particularity of the national minority (...)’. Articles 6 and 17 of the LENM foresee that 6 months after its coming into force, this special curriculum will be promulgated, but until now, as far as I know, it has not happened.”¹⁹

There is also a lack of clarity on teaching about the role of ethnic groups other than Croats in the history of the country. According to the said article: “(...) the history curriculum shows that what is planned within history teaching is mainly the history of the Croats, while the existence of the national minorities on Croatian territory is hardly ever mentioned. The only exceptions are the information on the conflicts and different interests of Croats and other ethnic groups (...)”²⁰

16 For more information see <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=3301> (education for national minorities section)

17 Najbar-Agičić, M. (2003) Nacionalne manjine i nastava povijesti/ National minorities and history teaching, in *Dijalog povjesničara-istoričara*, 7, pg 269 – 283, available at The Political Science Research Centre website www.cpi.hr

18 *ibid.*

19 *ibid.*

20 *ibid.*

Indeed, even in the subject curriculum for history from 2006, the overview of the content indicates that minorities are almost exclusively negatively portrayed – as aggressors or (more rarely) as victims – e.g. the suffering of Serbs, Roma, Jews, Germans and Italians (within the unit on the 2nd World War taught in the 8th grade of elementary school).²¹

The same author mentions that there is a very little space dedicated to the multiculturalism of Croatia in history textbooks, giving the impression that only ethnic Croats have lived there always (usually stated as ‘from the 7th Century’) “while the other ethnic groups are mentioned only as malicious newcomers and therefore, the causes of conflicts and problems (...) Of all minorities living on the territory of the Republic of Croatia, members of the Serbian minority are most frequently mentioned... Serbs are mentioned, just like other minorities, only in relation to the conflicts (...) neglecting the long periods of coexistence of different ethnic groups in the territory of Croatia and neighbouring countries.”²²

In terms of history curriculum in Serbian language minority in Croatia, it is difficult to assess what is actually taught in the schools since the teaching of minority-related subjects in minority language schools is not standardised. The Law on Education of National Minorities foresaw that these curricula would be created within 6 months of its coming into force (year 2000). These curricula, if they exist, have not been made publicly available in an electronic form on the website of the Ministry until the present day. The only curricula for minority schools available online from the Ministry are mother tongue subject curricula (covering also literature and some parts of cultural tradition). **At the level of official curriculum it is difficult to say how history is actually being taught in minority schools** and whether minorities get separate instruction on the history of the country of ethnic origin.

„I heard that Croatian history is concealed“, parent, Vukovar-Srijem County

There is another issue that needs to be mentioned in the context of recent history teaching in the Danube region (Osijek Baranja County and Vukovar-Srijem County) that shows the political context of this subject. A part of the agreement between the Croatian Government and the UNTAES in 1998 was the establishment of the moratorium on recent history teaching in that region that ceased in 2003. In the next few years, there were few attempts to issue history textbooks for recent history teaching and this addition was finally published at the beginning of the 2008, however not by the Croatian Government, but by the civil society organisation Documenta – Centre for Dealing with Past and the authors that were originally engaged by the Ministry to write such a textbook²³. Even though a part of the public, especially the CSOs active in the area of reconciliation and dealing with the past, endorsed this edition for its critical approach that treats the subject from various viewpoints, it got negative reviews from a part of Croatian historians that retained that the book is relativizing the war events, which led to its sensationalist presentation by some media as a falsification of history.

Perceptions of history

There is no significant difference in the perception of the war of 1991 -1995 between both groups of students in Istria, while perhaps not surprisingly there is a rather strong difference in perception of the same war among students in different groups in Vukovar-Srijem County. Croat school students tend to agree in seeing the war primarily as a case of aggression against Croatia from which the Croats as a group defended their country. Focus group with teachers in a Croatian language school in Vukovar-Srijem illustrates some interest among students for the topic of '91-'95 war:

21 See Croatian National Educational Standard (CNES), 2006, at <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=2501>

22 Najbar-Agičić: Nacionalne manjine i nastava povijesti/National minorities and history teaching.

23 For a detailed chronology of this process see S. Koran, M. Najbar –Agičić and T. Jakovina: The Supplement to Textbooks of Current Croatian History /Dodatak udžbenicima za najnoviju povijest, Documenta, Zagreb, 2007

Librarian: *“Children do not read much, but to mention something about history – many boys read really voraciously about the Homeland War. The books by the Homeland defenders, they are enchanted with this. I am surprised, boys that usually do not like to read.”*

Researcher: *“Are those books based on historical documentation or more like personal journals?”*

Librarian: *“Yes, more like journals. These are not historical facts and content, there is no requi*

At the same time, the extent to which students in the Croatian language programmes agree with the statement *“In the war of 1991 – 1995, the Croats succeeded to protect their Homeland against aggression”* is roughly the same across three regions, which may imply that history curriculum for Croatian language schools plays a greater role than the location.

The survey of students shows that there are relatively few differences in the perception of the statement *“Many different nations have always lived in the territory of Croatia, and their history is part of Croatia’s historical heritage”* across all groups of students in all

locations. On the whole students tend to support this view, which suggests that at least at the normative level, education succeeds in transmitting a model of peaceful coexistence and respect for the multi-ethnic character of the country’s historical heritage.

There is also relative agreement around the statement that *“It is impossible to understand the history of Croatia without knowing the history of Serbia, Austria/ Hungary and Italy”*, with the students in the Italian language programmes in Istria tending to agree slightly more than other groups.

Perceptions of history teaching

„I know what this is about. Of course it is the history and its textbooks that are problematic, societies break on this, The biggest problem is keeping quiet about it and not talking about certain issues. History is complex. I don’t want to make a classic mistake and say everything is wrong or everything is right. If there was will it could be done differently. No one is black or white”, teacher, Vukovar-Srijem County

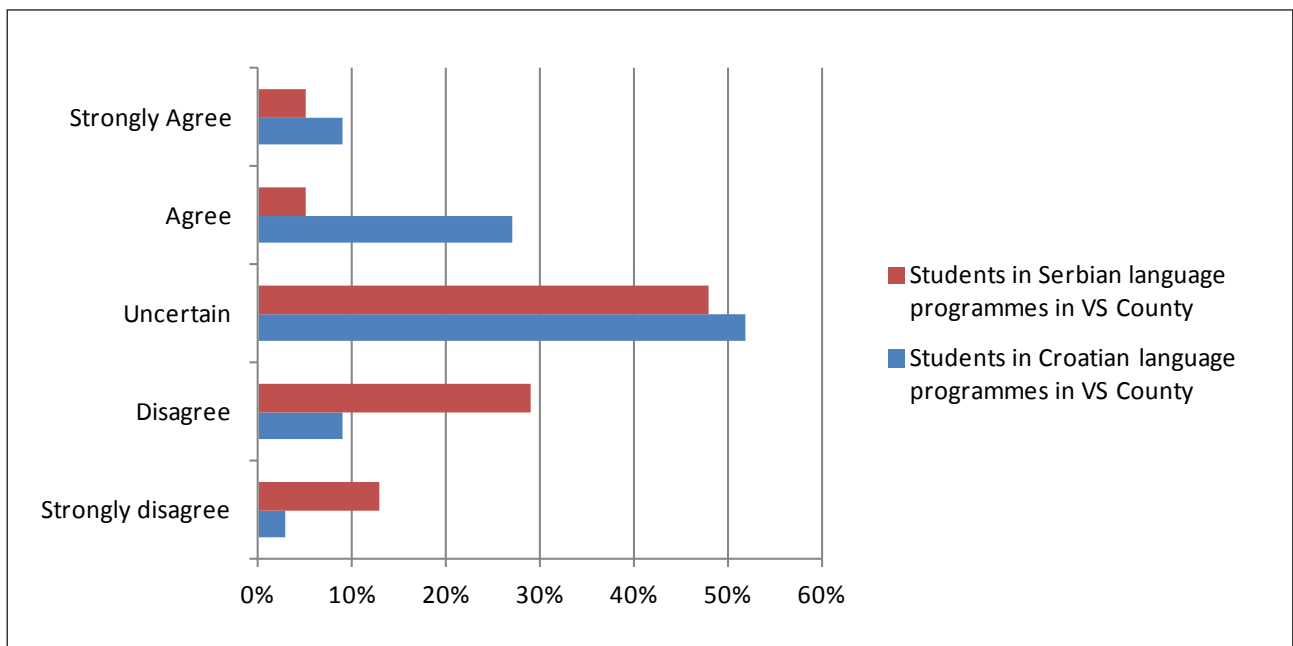


Figure 2. Percentages of students’ opinions according to programme on the statement *“The representation of minority and majority in history textbooks is balanced and fair”* for Vukovar-Srijem County

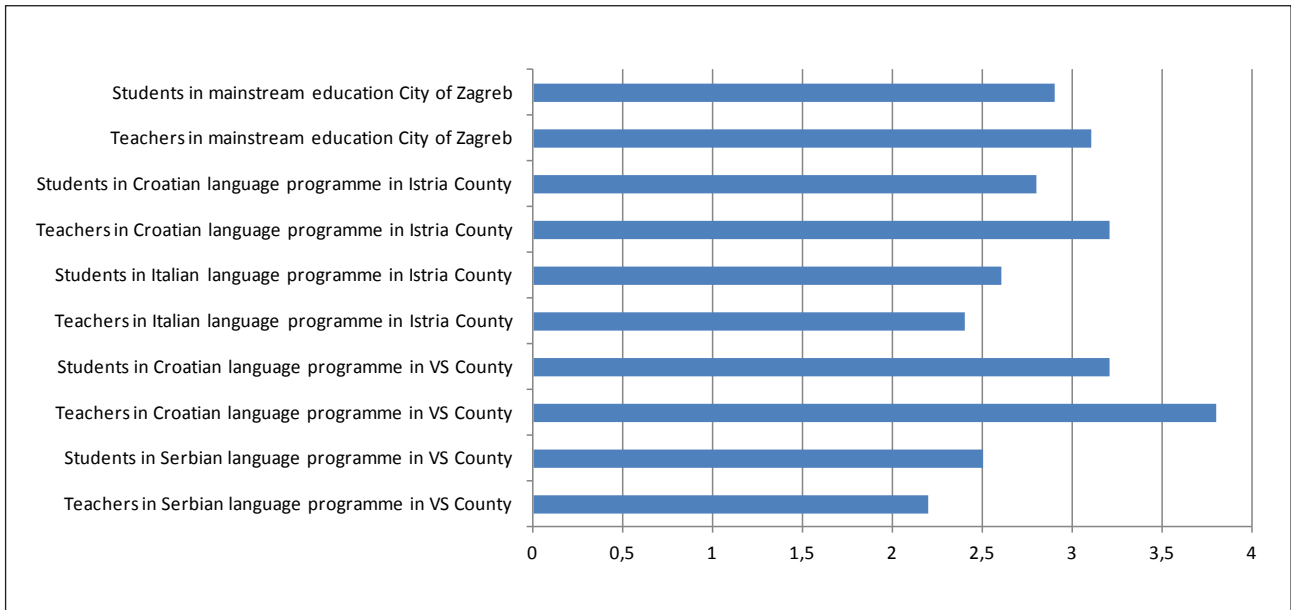


Figure 3. Mean values of students' and teachers' opinions according to programme on the statement "The representation of MINORITY (translated as Serbs for majority and Serbian minority schools, and Italians/ Istrians for Istrian minority schools) and Croats in History textbooks we use at school is balanced and fair" for Vukovar-Srijem County, Istria County and City of Zagreb County. The scale is numbered from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

There is less agreement on the perception of history teaching. Students in minority language (Serbian and Italian) programmes tend to be less certain that the representation of minority and majority in history textbooks is balanced and fair (Figure 2.), and the difference between perception of relative fairness of textbooks among students in different programmes in Vukovar-Srijem county is particularly pronounced.

Teachers in Serbian language programmes are mentioned more often as communicating to their students that the history of their group was different from how it is described in Croatian textbooks. 33% of students in the Serbian language programmes report this happening often or almost always.

More teachers in schools with minority language instruction believe that the curriculum in History and Literature presents mostly the Croatian point of view. More teachers in those programmes claim they have noticed ethnic stereotypes in the curriculum. In this respect, the results of the

survey confirm the same pattern as similar surveys in other DEDC²⁴ countries, especially in Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia.

Teachers in minority language programmes have also somewhat more often told their students that there were different perspectives on the history of the country, although the difference in share of teachers who have done so is not very pronounced. The school teachers in the Croatian language programmes have often done the same.

Both in Vukovar and in Istria, teachers and students in minority language programmes alike tend to be sceptical about the fairness of history curriculum towards the role of majority and minority ethnic groups, while teachers in the Croatian language programmes in Vukovar-Srijem County are the ones who believe in the historical fairness of the curriculum most strongly (Figure 3.):

²⁴ Golubeva et al. (2009), 21.

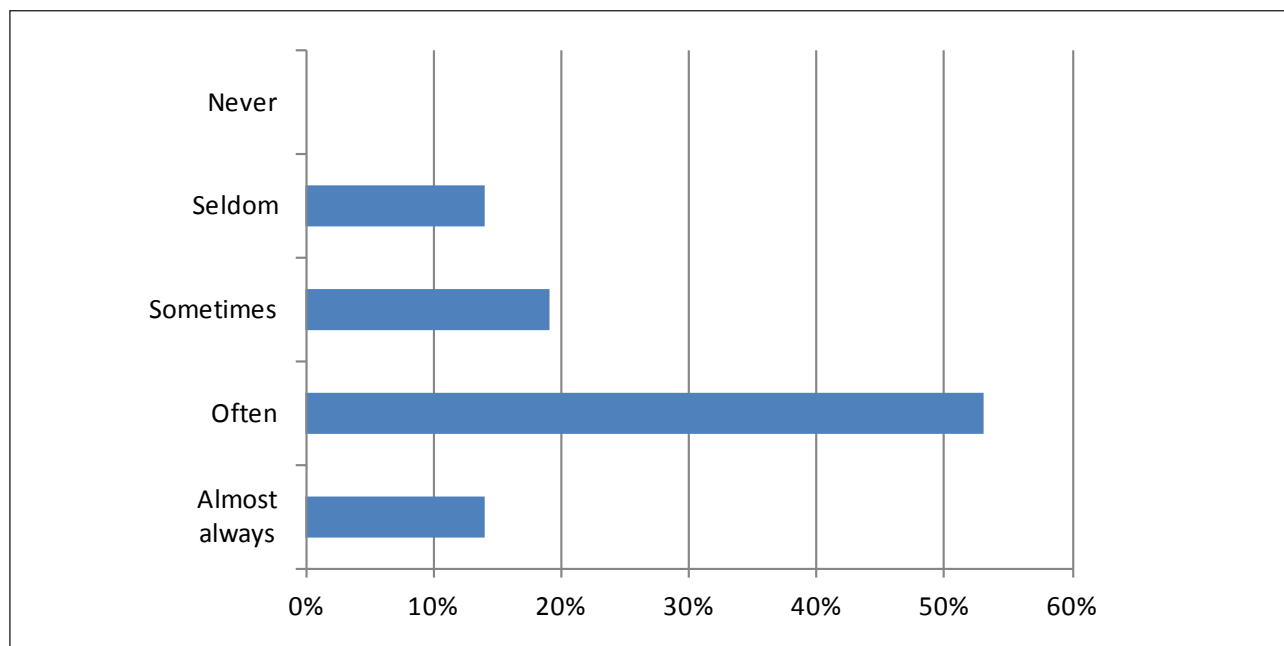


Figure 4. Percentages of students' opinions on the question "Does your history teacher tell you that the role of the minority in history was different from how it is described in history textbooks?" for students in the Serbian language programmes in Vukovar-Srijem County

Interestingly, both groups of teachers in Vukovar-Srijem County are distinctly more ready to articulate a dissenting opinion on what is written in the history textbooks (if they consider it unbalanced) than teachers in other regions (73% minority schools and 71% in majority schools in Vukovar-Srijem County, while only 35% of teachers in the Croatian language programmes in Istria are prepared to do the same). This demonstrates the sensitivity of Vukovar-Srijem teachers to the question of historical fairness and representations of history in general, and their strong orientation towards voicing their position on history. This should be taken into consideration when developing any activities regarding history teaching and commemoration, both curricular and extracurricular. Overall, 86% of students in schools in Serbian language have indicated that their teachers have shown some degree of disapproval for official history curriculum and reacted by correcting its message (Figure 5.).

Focus groups have also shown that history, especially recent history, creates serious tensions

among teachers, students and parents of Croatian and Serbian schools in Vukovar. Current representations of local history are seen by Serb school parents as manipulated and exclusive: „This currently is Croatian history and I do not think that it was as they tell it (...) Vukovar has its own history – we Serbs, we were in second place – after the Germans, and after us there were the Hungarians. This is history, and now it is said that Vukovar is only Croatian. Vukovar is a town belonging to people of 26 nations, I am very proud of it, and I do not know why there is always this accent on the conflict between Croats and Serbs – nobody says that Vukovar belongs also to the Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Hungarians, Germans etc., only to Croats and Serbs.“

Parents also related episodes of symbolic conflicts around commemoration issues occurring between schools of two groups under one roof when the commemoration of the fall of Vukovar was taking place in the Croatian school upstairs, and pictures commemorating the war were placed downstairs (in the school part used by the Serbs):

„And they put it downstairs!²⁵. I said - put it upstairs!²⁶ And what happens? Our children come and destroy the exhibits! Because they read the stuff about their parents, grandparents.... They destroy it, do you understand? Well, I guess they will get smarter next time and put it upstairs.“

There was also a sense of unfairness among Serb parents in Vukovar, who were of the opinion that commemorating the tragic events of the recent past blames their children for their ethnicity: *„And it is always our children that are blamed... It is sad, 20 years have passed and the kids that are 7 now, what do they have to do with it?“*

These instances demonstrate that any careless or inappropriate strategy regarding history teaching and commemoration has a high potential of reviving ethnic tensions between school communities of the two groups in Vukovar.

4.6. Citizenship values and teachers' experience of intercultural education

Teachers' choices of most relevant aspects of good citizenship are not fundamentally different across groups, but teachers in the Croatian language programmes tend to give more prominence to the understanding of a good citizen as “an honest and law-abiding person” while teachers in minority language programmes tend to attribute more importance to tolerance.

At the same time, for both groups of teachers in Vukovar-Srijem County the characteristic of a good citizen as someone who supports peaceful resolution of conflicts is important. This may show the success of peace education in the area after the war, but it might also indicate the strength of the effects of a close experience of war in a way that it became a priority to preserve peace among the two groups.

²⁵ (researcher's note – in the ground floor, where the children have their classes in Serbian language)

²⁶ (researcher's note – on the first floor, where the children have their classes in Croatian language)

54% of teachers tend to discuss civic values with their students more than once a month (19% among those claim they do it in every class).

56% of teachers claim they teach or discuss cultural diversity, tolerance and non-discrimination more than once a month (22% among those claim they do it in every class).

Neither majority nor minority teachers have largely participated in trainings to improve their intercultural skills. In fact, in the schools teaching in minority language the percentage of those who have participated is somewhat lower (22% of teachers as compared to 31% in schools teaching in majority language).

5. Comparative findings

In 2009, the NEPC conducted the *Divided Education – Divided Citizens?* (DEDC) study about civil enculturation and citizenship-related attitudes of students in minority and majority schools in 8 countries.²⁷ Among these, there were two Western Balkan countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) and three East-Central European countries (Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia). By comparing some of the data from the current study to data from the 2009 study, we can see how the reaction of majority and minority students in Croatia to polarising questions about ethnic belonging, political participation and coexistence of different communities in one society relates to the general context of tensions inherent in separate schooling setting in the region.

Support for participation of minorities in decision-making

The statement which provoked the most controversial responses in the DEDC study was the notion that “it is good to have politicians from

²⁷ Golubeva et al. (2009).

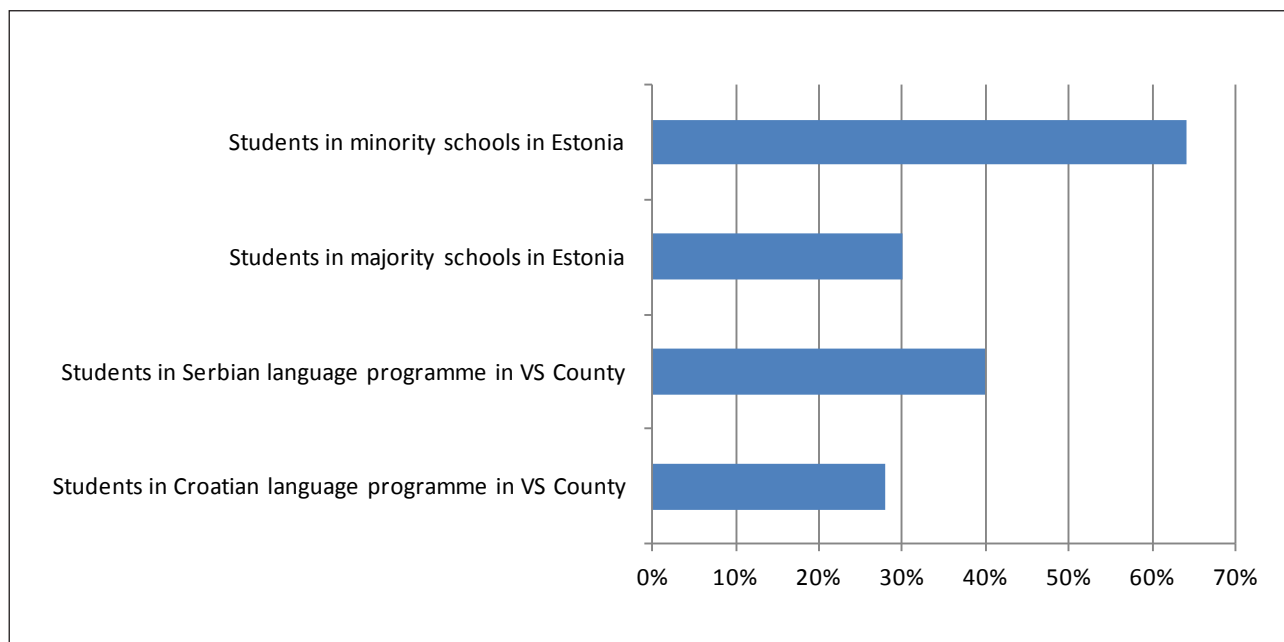


Figure 5. Percentages of students' opinions according to programme on the statement "My participation cannot change anything in government policies" for Croatia, Vukovar -Srijem County and Estonia.

national minorities in the government". Thus, in Slovakia, 41% of majority students disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. In Estonia, 25% of majority students disagreed that it is good to have minorities in the government, and in Bosnia these were 20.7% of the Bosniak majority. The students from ethnic minority schools, on the other hand, overwhelmingly tended to agree that it is good to have minorities in the government.

The situation in Croatia is rather similar, with 29% of students in the Croatian language programmes disagreeing that it is good to have minorities in government. It is remarkable, however, that in Croatia, where a violent conflict of ethnic nature has happened in the living memory of current students' parents, the percentage of those who disagree with the participation of minorities in government is lower than in Slovakia, where no violent conflict has happened since World War Two. There are two hypotheses that can explain this – either the efforts for peace education in Croatia after the War of 1991-95 have been successful, or there is currently less political mobilisation around ethnic issues than in Slovakia. Both of these hypotheses point to a hopeful scenario for Croatian society.

Perception of own political participation

As stated above, there is no major difference in the perception of the degree of potential effectiveness of one's participation in public life among students of different groups in Croatia. On the whole, students tend to disagree with the statement "My participation cannot change anything in government policies", and there is no regular pattern of divergence between minority and majority students in this respect. This is a significant difference from the situation in some countries in the DEDC study, primarily in Estonia and Latvia, where minority students tended to have much less confidence in the effectiveness of their political participation: in Estonia and Latvia, the percentage of minority students who did not believe that their participation can make a difference was significantly higher than among majority students (Figure 5.).

On the whole, the lack of sense of political disenfranchisement among minority students is very positive news, and gives hope that students of both schools in majority and minority language will have enough confidence to engage together in initiatives

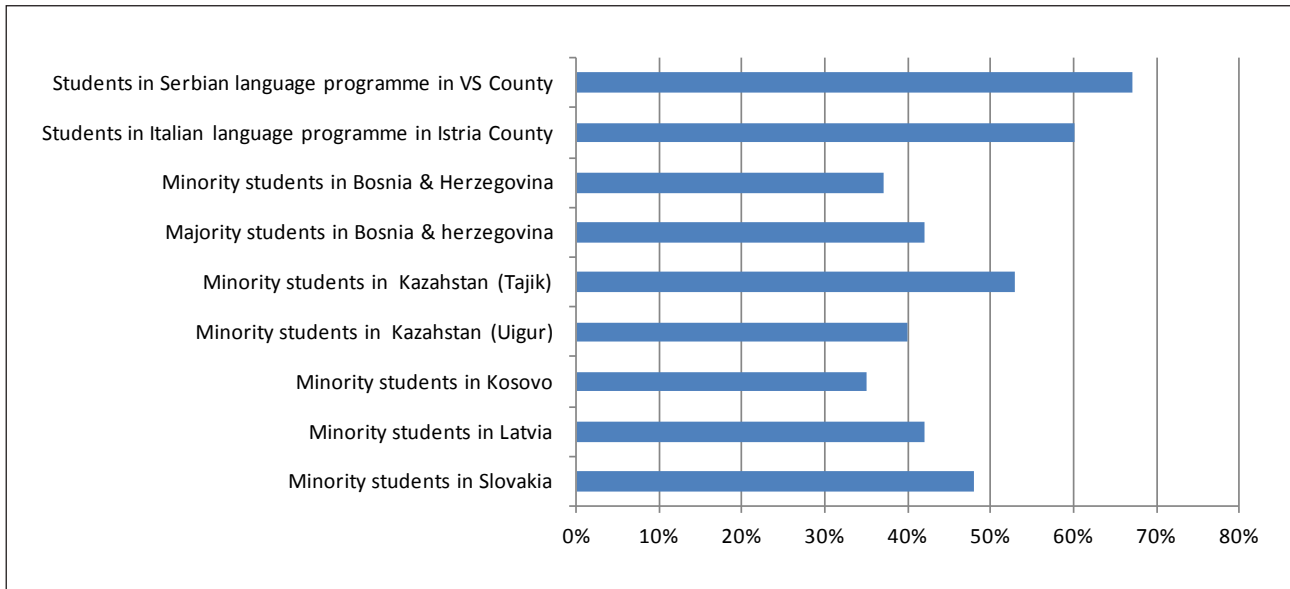


Figure 6. Percentages of affirmative answers (almost always & often) by students in minority programme on the question "Does your history teacher ever tell you that the history of your minority was different from how it was described in history textbooks?" in Istria and Vukovar-Srijem Counties, Kazakhstan, Estonia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Latvia and Slovakia.

bridging the gap between the communities, if they are provided with opportunities to do so.

Attitude towards studying together

Similarly to other countries in Croatia students in the Serbian language programmes are less averse to studying in the same classroom with their peers from the programmes in majority language than the other way round. There is no clear hypothesis that can be pronounced at this stage as to why majority students are more reluctant to see minority students in the classroom, but this has also been the case in Kosovo, Slovakia and Latvia. Thus, in Latvia, only 42% majority students were prepared to share their classroom with minority students, while among the minority, 56% expressed readiness to study in a mixed classroom. In Slovakia, almost 50% of Hungarian school students and only 36% Slovak school students were prepared to study in ethnically mixed classes.²⁸

Teachers' intervention correcting the perceived unfairness of the history curriculum

Compared to all countries where the previous DEDC study has taken place, the readiness of teachers in Serbian language schools in Vukovar-Srijem County to intervene in order to correct the message of history curriculum where it is perceived by them as unfair is much greater. It is also relatively high among teachers in Italian schools in Istria County. Thus, in the DEDC study the highest percentage of students whose history teachers 'corrected' the message of official history curriculum in their classes was in Slovakia (almost 48%) (Figure 6.). The occurrence of such experience among students of both schools with programs in both majority and minority language in Vukovar-Srijem was much higher (71% and 75% respectively). This is not surprising given the overall tension surrounding the issues of history and the relations of ethnic groups in the region of Vukovar in the aftermath of the War of '91-'95, as discussed above.

28 Ibid., 21.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

While the general framework regulating minority education in Croatia is often described as progressive²⁹ and there has been a long tradition of minority education in the country, there is a gap between the legal framework for minority rights in education and what occurs in practice. Ethnic divisions existing in the post-conflict area of Vukovar-Srijem County do not leave parents and students with a real choice of a schooling model for minority students – in practice they almost always end up in Model A minority schools. It is true that schools alone should not be expected to cope with profound social problems associated with ethnic divisions in society, such as those experienced in Vukovar-Srijem County. Any solution projected and implemented on a school level must therefore be supported through a wider action within the community, including the actions in the area of reconciliation, dealing with history, economic growth, fight against corruption (especially in the labour market), and active participation of citizens in decision making processes.

The biggest gap between the formally existing policy and its implementation can be identified in the models that minority school education policy framework supposedly offers. The situation on the ground and the number of students in different models (Table 1) clearly shows that Model B is not an implemented policy but rather an exception with only 8 students of the Hungarian minority attending it in 2011/2012. This is either a question of lack of resources or lack of demand on behalf of minority parents and students. **If the Ministry holds this is still a viable model for minority education, it needs to be supported through methodological guidance and resources. If this Model is shown to be unpractical or too expensive, or perhaps even outdated, it should be taken out of the policy framework. Keeping it in the framework in the current state of affairs is a deception, and does not empower parents for choice.** Real options for minority education beside Model A should be created, and local communities, educators

and civil societies in areas such as Vukovar-Srijem County and Istria County should be encouraged to take part in shaping these new models.

Empowerment of parents, especially those belonging to Serbian minority in Vukovar-Srijem County, is crucial, since parents are the important link between the school and the rest of a child's social environment, and since they are the ones choosing the model of schooling for their child, at least on elementary school level. It is essential for the local government in Vukovar-Srijem to provide more information on existing alternatives in schooling in order to support **an informed choice of schools by parents. It is also important to involve minority organisations in discussions on the possibilities of joint schooling (e.g. within the framework of civil society projects) and on the variety of models for minority schooling.**

One of the important findings of this study was that the students attending the school programme in the Croatian language in Vukovar-Srijem County support the idea of being educated together with members of the other ethnic group **less** than their peers educated in the Serbian language in the same county, or their peers in Croatian instruction schools in Zagreb and Istria. Taking into account the deep social division between Croats and Serbs in Vukovar-Srijem County and the fact that Model A is the one that is being implemented in all cases for the Serbian minority in that region at elementary school level, it indicates the need for **creating space for innovative projects and models that promote integration and interethnic communication in formal education, even if they do not strictly follow any of the existing models of minority education and even if they challenge them or, possibly, upgrade them.** This kind of creative space for projects, within the present situation, is left mostly to civil society organisations in the region. This is not surprising since civil society has for a long time been the sector in which interethnic collaboration and communication are established more easily than elsewhere. However, without policy making institutions –the Ministry of Education, the National Teacher Training Agency, local government, but also minority representatives – taking a step forward in creating such a space, there is little

29 OSCE - *Minority education in the Republic of Croatia: A Case Study in Vukovar-Srijem County (OSCE, 2003) available at <http://www.osce.org/zagreb/21381>*

chance for significant change. In this context, it could be beneficial for the entire community of Vukovar-Srijem, if **serious collaboration in terms of exchange of views, experiences and solutions between the civil society and policy making bodies were achieved**. It should be kept in mind that creating such a space does not mean reducing the rights of minorities, nor does it represent a menace for majority identity, but it would respond to a critical need of both these groups to ensure a decent quality of life for all members of the community, especially children and the young.

This research shows that a rather small percentage of teachers have so far participated in trainings to improve their intercultural skills (22% of teachers in schools in minority language as compared to 31% in schools in majority language). **Teacher training in intercultural education should be provided in order to empower teachers for dealing with interethnic issues and with the complex legacy of the past. This training should be more accessible and can be provided by experts from organisations of both formal and non-formal education.** Providing in-service training in intercultural education methods for teachers from both majority and minority schools is especially significant for educators in Vukovar-Srijem County, with its recent history of a devastating war.

The parts of the general curriculum related to the minorities' history, arts, culture, geography etc. should be made publicly available. Non-transparent and unclear ways of defining this curriculum not only leave space for non-transparent and controversial ways of teaching its content, but they also send a message to the public that minority content is something that should be generally hidden, denied or ignored, and not something that, **in the long run, should be included into the majority curriculum as well.** This approach deprives other members of society of important insights into the historical, cultural and other contributions of the minority and of the possibility of peaceful coexistence and competences related to intercultural exchange.

The gap within the legal regulation of status of the minority schools / schools with classes in minority language should be urgently overcome through a

clear definition of minority schools, as well as through the clarification of the conditions and the procedure necessary for becoming such a school.

The government on both local and national levels, as well as the minority and other civil society organisations present in the region, should monitor the impacts of the existing models of minority schooling on the community, as well as on the students' chances of future participation in the life of the community, which includes the right to academic and professional development, finding a job, and political participation. This is especially important in a region such as Vukovar-Srijem County – where it is imperative to keep track of the effects that separate minority schooling might have in a post-conflict situation of deep social division. It is also important to search constantly for new solutions, as well as revisit them when needed.

The local community and its actors, in particular the CSOs and local government should map, create and endorse projects that are of common interest to all members of the community that promote civic engagement across ethnic boundaries and are most resistant to the ethnic polarisation.

In view of the significance of finding solutions for schooling that would combine respect for and possibility to explore majority and minority culture and history with the emphasis on cooperation, integration and participation across ethnic boundaries, we recommend that the **local authorities of Vukovar-Srijem county in cooperation with national education authorities should seek support from the Council of Europe and international organisations represented in the region in creating a Fund for implementing innovative community school projects explicitly aiming at interethnic understanding and participation by all members of the community.** This fund could support the development of new school models, creating spaces for interaction and mutual learning, and could as well support joint activities by existing majority and minority schools, provided that the underlying concept of these activities is based on the understanding of intercultural learning and not on a simple perfunctory mingling of the two groups.

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Annex 1 – Summaries of relevant research

- 2001 – 2011, **Dinka Čorkalo Biruški** and **Dean Ajduković**, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, **Schooling and social integration of the youth in Vukovar** – This study presents results of the longitudinal research comparing inter-ethnic attitudes of students, parents and teachers engaged in schooling in the Croatian and Serbian languages over a 10 year period. The general conclusion is that there was a positive change in the attitudes in both groups during the 10 year period, yet that these changes are rather small. It also showed that there is space for further change in terms of social integration of children, increase of tolerance and decrease of differences between the minority and the majority relating to attitudes towards the assimilation of minorities. Yet the authors conclude that this change will not happen on its own, but that it requires planned activities towards such goal.
- 2004 – 2005 – **Nansen Dialogue Center Osijek**, Research on the quality of education in Vukovar, within the project **New School** – This research has been undertaken on a sample of 14.6% of parents of elementary school children in Vukovar and has shown that 71.4% of examinees is dissatisfied with separate schooling.
- 2003 - **Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**, Mission to Croatia: **Minority Education in the Republic Of Croatia: A Case Study in Vukovar-Srijem County** – This very detailed in-depth case study of Vukovar-Srijem County, analyzes the minority education issues that are relevant not only to this County, but also the rest of the Danube region and the Republic of Croatia as a whole.
- 2003 - **Baranović B., Jokić B., and Doolan, K.:** **Teaching history in a post-war social context – The Case of the Croatian Danube region** – The research was focused on history teachers' opinions about teaching recent history, and on the revocation of a moratorium on teaching former Yugoslavia's recent history in Serbian minority schools in the Croatian Danube region.



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