



SOME ASPECTS OF THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN REBUILDING SOCIETY, FAMILY LIFE AND LIVING CONDITIONS IN CONTEMPORARY SLOVENE SOCIETY

Jana Goriup

Faculty of Arts, Maribor, Slovenia
jana.goriup@uni-mb.si

Vilma Alina Šoba

International school for Social and Business Studies, Slovenia
vilma.alina.soba@mfdps.si

Abstract:

The article briefly presents the differences of life and living in Slovenia (almost) two decades after and focuses on achieved results in political, economical and social life. The comparison shows that not all survived processes were reasonable, required and efficient. Some today are overstrained and demand consideration by many involved. The author's in their article after the short historical introduction argue with political, economic and especially social changes in Slovenia "Two decades After". They point out, that economic, cultural, social and political change go together in coherent patterns that have and still are changing the Slovene society in unpredictable ways what on trajectories has been attractive but controversial. Globalization and transition processes also have a negative side; many Slovenes have been hurt by it without being supported by a social safety net and many of them have been marginalized by labour market. They critically establish that even (mostly in coalition) the governments tried to establish a liberal political culture by passing numerous fundamental laws and to carry out a social and economic transition into a social market economy with private initiative. But they did not manage to prevent excessive social stratification, and consequently, social differentiation. Yet it cannot be denied that the increasing unemployment is debilitating the social state, which is mostly cooperative but powerless with against it.

Keywords: post-modern Slovene society, educational system, transition, globalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 80'ties discussions developed among the Slovene society, especially politicians, on how to combine freedom and socialism, new political demands and higher living standard. Started polemics and suggestions in open discussions about (all inclusive) democratic socialism were led by the Union of Socialist Youth of Slovenia that initiated the creation of "new social (ecological, feminist, peace etc.) movements Intellectual and political debates were also stirred up by issue No. 57 of the literary journal *Nova revija*. The situation became even more agitated when the federal authorities proposed a reform of the educational system, according to which the teaching subjects such as (national) literature, history, geography etc. was to be "standardized" in all schools all over the country and as in May 1988 a process against the "counterrevolution" in Slovenia, with a trial against the "gang of four" took place, as they were accused of high treason for revealing a military secret. This process provoked mass revolt in Slovene society and the process of establishing new independent political parties, and of independence, began. By the end of 1991 as Slovenia adopted its constitution, which based on the rights of free citizens, it had become clear that Slovenia would achieve international recognition for its independence. It happened as the European Union recognized Slovenia in the middle of January 1992 and the United Nations accorded its membership in May 1992. The way for realization of dreams became free, the expectations were enormous. But not all became true. Paradoxically, there is also an increasing dependence upon Slovene politics to provide the answers to social as well as political problems.

But, of all the changes that cause Slovenes distress today, the most important continue to be changes in everyday life: partnerships, relations, family life, and parenthood. At the same time, radical social changes also have implications for intimate and family worlds. Today it is difficult to speak of the family within a traditional framework of reference. People in Slovenia are confronted with new challenges and risks: they are growing up in a country that appears to be relatively successful and stable and in which an individualized social and cultural climate has been gaining ground, i.e. one which opens new options but also related risks. It is no longer possible to lean on the past resources of security and reliance (values, referential areas, systems of social security). Young people and their parents are compelled to make earlier and better informed choices. This involves a shift back of responsibility for one's own life almost to the period of childhood.

The challenge two decade before was not to attack globalization or to destroy the economy but to achieve an independent state. The most distressing consequences of post-socialism was the collapse of the labour market and resulting mass unemployment, inequality of income as well as, and new forms of poverty. Another consequence was the renaissance of neo-liberal understandings of the market's role in which the stress is placed on individual initiative, self-trust, and a more pronounced feeling of responsibility for one's own life. In contemporary Slovene society we experienced significant demographic changes - the number of marriages decreased and couples began to delay having children; as resulted in a sharp decline of fertility and postponed parenthood. Late parenthood is directly related to an increasing need for, and possibility of, the individual planning of a personal life course and free decision making. For young women who have more freedom and opportunities than their mothers had, education, work and careers are a means of preserving their independence. All are important components of identity. On the other hand, for modern women the mother's role is an emotional one rather than a mission. The decision to postpone parenthood is therefore understood as result of negotiating relationships. Today, more and more "Slovene individuals" first test their relations before they commit themselves to parenthood.

The individualization of risks goes hand in glove with the individualization of responsibilities and achievements. Both are values incessantly reaffirmed by the media, the educational system, the entertainment industry, educational system and attentive parents. The combination of the pressure to accept individual responsibility (which is a mechanism of disciplining), and the realistic experience of helplessness, produce strong feelings that risks and dangers are omnipresent. Uncertainty and doubts have pervaded all aspects of life; self-identities have become fluid and subject to continual reinterpretations. Life has become a "reflexive project" exacting incessant modifications of personal biographies in accordance with ever changing possibilities and risks.

2. SLOVENIA TWO DECADES AFTER: CHANGES IN SLOVENE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM-AFFECTING VALUES, FAMILY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

The expectations were extensive, great, the reality limited. What Is Happening Is More Differentiated Than Expected. A gradual shift toward the values of the post-materialists – towards less emphasis on respect for authority, is observed. Norms concerning respect for authority have been moving in direction predicted: to more political freedom, higher living standard and better habitus, new religious norms, declining confidence in hierarchical institutions etc. Of all changes that causes in Slovene society today the most important continue to be changes in educational system and everyday life: values, partnerships, family life, parenthood and contentment with life conditions. At the recent time, radical educational, political and social changes have great implications for work, intimate and family worlds. Today it is difficult to speak of the individual satisfaction within a traditional framework of reference. People in Slovenia are, not only because of the global economic crises, confronted with new challenges and also risks. The older are living and the younger growing up in a society that appears to be less successful and stable, at least within the European context, and in which in individualized social and cultural climate for a while opened new options but also related risks. It is no longer possible to lean on the past resources of security and reliance (values, referential areas, systems of social security, health system, attitudes toward abortion, norms concerning homosexuality and extramarital sex etc.). Young people and their parents are compelled to make earlier and better informed choices. It has become clear that the standard economic indicators no longer explain as much as they once did, in the realm of political behaviour. Slovene public evaluate their politic leaders by different, and more demanding, standards than those twenty years ago. The erosion of political authority can be traced to factors like: the public has become fed up with waste, corruption and ineffectiveness of Government in struggle with social inequality, growing poverty and unemployment, as well as not realized expectations of economic progress. But, as the erosion of trust does not apply to all institutions: it is specifically a withdrawal of confidence from authoritarian institutions, the environmental protection movements rose from obscurity to attain remarkably high levels of public confidence.

Pervasive changes are taking place in political, as well as social and religious values. So most of the religious norms show strong correlation with making traditional values progressively, even if the Slovene mass media tend to convey exactly the opposite impression. Church attendance in Slovenia is one indicator of the priority which Slovenes accord to religion, but we estimate that it measures external behaviour that might be motivated by sociability, habit or even conformism, rather than genuine religious feeling. In time, in which Slovenia is undergoing economic decay and political upheaval, the Slovenes shift toward greater emphasis on religion. Islam presence and (hidden) religious conflicts are cited, even the

revival of religion is evident, too. This involves a shift back of responsibility for one's own life. However, insecurity is pervasive. Also, why the political regime is unstable and real per capita income has been declining in recent years.

The abolition of the self governmental system did in no way mean also the continuous improvement of social position of women. Various indicators showed that the »modernization and democratization« included more and more obvious androcentric and even misogynist attitudes. Ironically, revitalized religious (Catholic Church) activity focused on the return of the traditional division of gender roles. In spite of that, various empirical investigations since 1990 till 2003 show, that the majority of population (women and men) still do accept egalitarian perspective (Mladenič et al 2006). This is not just a marginal failure. It is a striking reversal of the shift towards post-modern values, not in just a few deviant cases, but across the great majority of Slovene society. On the other hand, we are coping with “an era of new form rising nationalism”, which reality is more complex, and as xenophobia has, linked with insecurity, dramatic consequences in political and everyday's live. Feelings of national pride tended to move as:

- reaction against non-Slovene immigration, as our cultural heterogeneity is developing very fast, which cause tensions, even if migration is a world-wide phenomena;
- reemphasized one's own traditional ethnic identity, where multiculturalism is often intricately connected to multilingualism;
- opposition against Arbitration Agreement between the Slovene and Croatian Governments (because of not resolved territorial and maritime border disputes in the course of the past 18 years).

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

2.1. Changes in everyday life-patterns related to post-modern society

Of all the changes that cause distress today the most important continue to be changes in everyday life. But, however, data concerning family structure and family life courses in Slovenia shows that family life is conspicuously »European« in character: type and size of families, fertility, marriages and divorces, co-habitation, and common law marriages place Slovenia within the European statistical average. Development trends in the area of family life do not essentially differ from predominant European trends, as post-materialist values show strong correlation with a whole range of norms concerning sex, marriage and especially family. Yet, this by no means implies that family life has been heading towards uniformity. The overall picture resulting from the basic development trends in family life in Slovenia is as follows:

- a strong pluralisation of family formations and family lifestyles; the traditional family (i.e. a married couple with children), accounts for only one third of all the family types in Slovenia;
- parents decision to have children later (where postponed motherhood is more frequent than postponed fatherhood) and fewer children and the decision to have children at all is no longer self-evident;
- formalized marriage has been losing its social status and significance; increasing
- numbers of people, primarily young couples, opt for partnership unions or other
- types of family union; and the number of divorces has been increasing.

Table 1: The number of marriages and divorces in Slovenia

	1980	1990	1995	2004	2005
Marriages	12.377	8.517	8.245	6.558	5.769
Divorces	2.309	1.858	1.585	2.411	2.647
On 1000 inh.					
Marriages	6,5	4,3	4,2	3,3	2,9
divorces	1,2	0,9	0,8	1,2	1,3
divorces on 1000 marriages	186,6	218,2	192,2	367,6	458,8
average age					
Bridegroom	27,5	28,7	30,1	32,6	33,0
Bride	24,1	25,4	26,9	29,6	29,8
On 1'st marriage					
bridegroom	25,5	26,6	27,9	30,3	30,6
bride	22,5	23,8	25,2	27,8	28,2

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Slovenia 2002.

- the number of single-parent families has been increasing. According to the available statistical data, single mother families are predominant in this group and account for 25 % of all families. Research shows that the living circumstances of single-parent families are the most difficult compared to those of other family types;
- the number of reconstituted families, where at least one parent sets up a new family, has been on the increase as well. Our estimate is that more than 35 % of children in Slovenia today do not (longer) live with both biological parents;
- the areas that have undergone the most important changes are the transition stage in which young people leave the family of origin and set up their own families, and fertility patterns. An increasing number of young
- people postpone setting up a family of their own and continue to live with their parents in a special, semi-dependent style;
- a typical Slovenian household has altered considerably. An average Slovenian household counts only 2.8 members and a further decreasing trend is noticed for the number of household members. Namely, the number of single- or maximum two-person households is on the rise, whereas the number of households with several members is declining.

In Slovenia, however, the demographic changes had been steadily occurring ever since the 1980s. At the beginning of the 1980s, fertility in Slovenia was higher than two children per woman; by the mid 1980s, it fell to 1.7 children; by 2000, it fell even further to 1.2 children,

by 2007 come to 1.3 children. Nearly the entire cohort of women born in the 1960s gave birth to at least one child by 1995 (Obersnel-Kveder et al., 2001). While a similar conclusion holds true of the cohort born in the second half of the 1960s, we should point out that this cohort includes 20 % of educated women who had not had a child between 30–34 years of age, i.e. by 1995. By 1995, 85 % of women with elementary or lower education and 80 % of women with secondary school education in the 25–29 age groups had a child, compared to only 30 % of women with high school or university education. The "basic general trend of rising proportions of childless women" is undoubtedly present in Slovenia.

The reasons for postponed parenthood are not only the professional aspirations of potential parents, especially mothers, but also the changed values applied to the role of successful parents and the expected outcome of a happy and satisfied child. To achieve both, appropriate social-global and intimate family conditions should be created. The role of parents is becoming an increasingly demanding social and individual role, and potential parents carefully consider their decision to have a child: but it is also evident that their on demands, expectations, and aims are increasing -as young parents are not willing to accept any kind of a child. They will make sacrifices to improve possible defects and/or differences or deviations from expected and social acceptable (such as a stutter, strabismus, partial deafness, eyesight defects etc.). Parents frequently encourage their (even preschool-)child to develop specific abilities (as early language learning, courses in various sports, learning a musical instrument etc.) and they consciously influence their child's development. In this way the importance of individuality-dependent on the social and cultural capital of the family into which a child is born-is increased. The post-modern understanding of successful parenting is based on developing the child's individuality to its greatest extent. The role and duty of parents in learning socially valid norms and values is seen as less important. Childhood, especially prolonged childhood, is understood as a social category that varies in time and place, but as one also influenced by other factors. In Slovene contemporary society, the differences in understanding the education of children are huge, typical and imminent. Most frequently the education, income and age of the parents define the education they desire for their child. Empirical data (Bezenšek, 2007) suggest that parents who espouse the liberal concept of individualistic education and/or the democratic post-modern education (which is increasingly considered important in Slovene society) are more educated, have higher incomes and also follow the global social aim to improve the quality of life. The traditional and materialistic oriented and understanding of parents who regard social development as limited to providing material conditions and centralising power of the state is losing ground. These parents are not well-educated and their incomes are lower. Of all of the changes affecting family life, it seems that the changes in patterns related to the post-modern society attract most attention, while in it a young person leaves the family of origin and sets up his/her own family and it is passage to this stage that has been increasingly postponed, which is known as a postponed parenthood and is characteristic for Slovene society, as well. The average age at which young people in Slovenia leave their parents' homes is the end of twenties or the early thirties. For economic reasons (prolonged education, unemployment, expensive housing etc.) we should add, however, that the average age at which young people leave their families of origin has been increasing, as well, and "strong" family continues to be the cultural norm. This is manifested as a prolonged stay of children with their parents, even if they create a family of their own and the "expected children's care for their aging parents", which in most cases is more a desire as reality because of children's full employment or their financial incapability to support their parents. The data for Slovenia shows that prolonged living with parents in Slovenia results from a lack of choice. The reasons stated are:

- objective (prolonged schooling; difficulties with finding jobs, i.e. attaining economic independence; housing problems etc.) and
- subjective (the comfort and cheapness of living at home, a high level of freedom and autonomy at home, friendly relations with parents, material and emotional security etc.). (Ule et al, 2000; Ule & Kuhar, 2003).

The transition from the family of orientation to the family of procreation takes place later. This stress on kinship and vertical relationships between generations is also a result of the influence of the Catholic Church, which is traditionally present by far in Slovene social place, as well as being a remnant of Muslim tradition that is characterized by the community life patterns and networks of relatives. Several types of family in Slovene Society are characterized by a faster individualization of the life course. The important values within it are individualism and independence of individual generations, especially the young. In these families, children gain independence from their parents faster, while parents themselves rely less on their children's support in their old age and prolonged living with parents appears to be a matter of choice. The underlying reason for this surprisingly process is the fact that this process is heavily influenced by whether or not the individual young feels secure concerning survival. Insecurity enhances the need for predictability and absolute norms and conversely, a sense of security is conducive to relatively permissive and flexible family norms. The attitude towards family life in Slovenia is obviously expressly ambivalent. Young people, on the one hand, delay the setting up of their own families, so the proportion of singles' households is on the rise. On the other hand, public opinion surveys indicate that individuals, including young people, attach great significance to private family life.

3. CONCLUSION

On the whole, changes in educational system are part of a general transition to a post-modern Slovene society underlined by intense processes of globalisation and individualization. Some are also definitely related to circumstances that transcend national borders, e.g. the restructuring of the labour market as characterized by a demand for a new, specialized, flexible and educated workforce, and measures arising from social policies which nearly everywhere prolong the period of young people's dependence on their families of origin. Yet it should be stressed that part of these changes occurring in Europe have a particular effect on the post-modern Slovene society. In addition to the transition to post-modernity, Slovenia also embarked on the process of transition from a planned society to one based on the values and movements of the market. The centrally planned society had been disintegrating for several decades, even before the fall of the socialist system in 1991. This disintegration created room for a market-based social order that is still indeed problematic and complex and, actually a far cry from any real order desired. The most distressing consequences of post-socialism are the collapse of the labour market and resulting mass unemployment, inequality of income as well as new forms of poverty. Another consequence is the renaissance of neo-liberal understandings of the market's role in which the stress is placed on individual initiative, self-trust, and a more pronounced feeling of responsibility for one's own life. The changes that are otherwise characteristic of transition processes also inevitably induce changes in the structure of private and family lives in Slovenia. The influence of factors of social inequality (social inclusion/exclusion) has thus been shifting away from interclass inequality towards intra-class differentiation. While this does not mean that class differences are losing their significance, it does mean that the factors underlying differentiation within classes, particularly with regard

to family support, have been reining forced. Increased competitiveness and selection determining admittance to (prestigious) schools and access to (suitable) jobs accorded to family's emotional support and family social networks play decisive roles in this. Almost two decades after another important reason for the increasing significance of privacy is an ever more intense deconstruction of the welfare state and a conspicuous re-allocation of costs and responsibilities from the state (and its social policies). As a result other significant conclusions are as follows:

- There has been a shift from the model of ethical and educational family to the model of emotional and supportive family. The traditional rigid distribution of generational and gender roles implying heteronymous rules coming from "the top" has become inefficient.
- The models of communication within the family have also changed. Parents as partners and as parents and children define and re-define their partner and family roles on a daily basis. Partner and family life is characterized by intense work on relations involving incessant mutual negotiations and agreements. A high level of tolerance and the allowance of individual autonomy characterize this type of "work intense" family.
- The parents' role in the life of young people has been increasing, particularly the significance of the mother on both the instrumental and emotional levels. Mothers increasingly assume the role of valuable "therapists" and agents mitigating distress and conflicts caused by the "outer world."
- Economic factors (insufficient or uncertain income as a consequence of economic crisis and unemployment, high costs of childcare, low possibilities of resolving the housing problem, difficulties in balancing professional life/career with family life).
- Quality of life (a tendency towards a more comfortable life, desire for independence and personal development, career, self-fulfilment).
- New risks and uncertainties (fear of the future, unstable partnerships, greater responsibility and more demanding tasks related to the process of growing-up, schooling, children's education, bad experience in parents' family).
- Great responsibility and demanding tasks related to parenthood (this is related to high aspirations concerning children - young people want to be responsible parents, so they post pone the birth of their children until they can provide all the conditions necessary for exemplary parenthood).

It became clear that several misunderstandings would have to be sold with negotiations between adults as partners, children and other family members. In view of pursuing the demographic policy of a country, whose efforts to stimulate earlier starting of new families and a rise in birth rate are manifested in various measures, 2007 our Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning prepared legal bases for subsidising young families, who are dealing with the housing problem for the first time. Solutions to this problem were provided in the form of the National Housing Saving Scheme Act and Housing Grant for Young First-Time Homebuyer Families. Personnel with higher and university education, master's degrees and doctorates are undoubtedly of great importance for the development of any society. *Especially the gradual increase in age at which young people leave school, enter the labour market, find a steady job, leave the home of their parents, establish a stable, affectionate relationship and establish their own home, has triggered a whole series of interdependent mechanisms underlying life courses.* The extent consequences of this complex processes as a positive outcome of the situation in Slovene society remains not to be seen, by yet. *There is a set of expectations to be realized: better living standard and living conditions for all, preventing social exclusion, economic and tax reforms, intense foreign investments,*

greater role of small and medium sized companies, equal availability and free choice for all those entitled and especially, the unreliable situation of the young, etc.

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