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Predictors of Distributed School Leadership in Croatian Primary Schools[1]

Abstract: This paper discusses the features of distributed school leadership (DSL) in Croatian primary schools with regard to its three central theoretical and practical dimensions: the participation of stakeholders in the process of school leadership, desirable social relations between the participants in the process of school leadership, and stakeholders' influence over the decision-making process. The paper also assesses the development level of three selected groups of DSL predictors: supporting attitudes and activities of school principals, supporting characteristics of stakeholders participating in the decision-making process and supporting organisational and material resources. The results indicate that, in Croatia, the number of primary schools with less developed DSL is approximately equal to the number of schools with more developed DSL. The statistically significant positive correlation between the development level of all three predictor groups and the development level of the DSL features was also confirmed. These results suggest that introducing certain policy mechanisms could contribute to the enforcement of the DSL features in Croatian primary schools, which could in turn be of great help to policymakers at all levels of the decision-making process within the education system.

Keywords: distributed school leadership, predictors of distributed school leadership, teachers' participation in school leadership, organisational and material school resources, leadership of school principals

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Introduction

The researchers' commitment and interest in the analysis of distributed school leadership (DSL) as the preferred leadership model spring from two central factors. First, in today's social environment, school organisation is becoming increasingly complex, and thus principals' roles and responsibilities are being significantly expanded (Harris 2008; Pont et al. 2008). A need for different stakeholders to share roles and responsibilities has consequently emerged. Secondly, the findings of recent empirical studies suggest a statistically significant correlation between the features of DSL and both school effectiveness and higher student achievement, as well as numerous other variables such as teachers' job satisfaction, teachers' job commitment, etc. (Buchberger et al. 2018; Bruggencate et al. 2012; Choi Wa Ho 2010; Curry 2014; Hallinger and Heck 2010; Hulpia et al. 2011; Minckler 2013; Robinson et al. 2008; Somech 2010). Research on DSL has been encouraged in the educational policy's environment, and recent policy documents (EC 2012; EC 2015) have also encouraged, explained and recommended this model of school leadership.

Previous discussions have emphasised key features and dimensions of DSL (Choi Wa Ho 2010; Curry 2014; Hallinger and Heck 2010; Hulpia et al. 2011; Somech 2010). These discussions have been dominated by the argument that DSL should be seen as a complex phenomenon which includes pluralistic, cooperative and active stakeholder participation in the decision-making process; the importance of a holistic approach to the concept of DSL has also been highlighted (Holloway et al. 2017, pp. 4-5). It should be noted that, along with the DSL phenomenon, recent studies have attempted to outline the circumstances supporting DSL development, which can be described as DSL predictors (e.g. Choi Wa Ho 2010; Harris 2014, 2008; Hulpia et al. 2011; etc.). Analysing the Croatian education context revealed a lack of empirical findings on the presence and features of DSL (Braš Roth et al. 2014; Buchberger et al. 2017; Kovač et al. 2014; OECD 2016). The data on the supporting circumstances, i.e. the key DSL predictors which are the focus of this paper, could serve as a valid basis for the development of strategies to strengthen and improve DSL and contribute to the pluralistic, collaborative and active parti-

cipation of different stakeholders in decision-making processes in various school contexts.

DSL Determinants and Dimensions

DSL is understood as the participation of different stakeholders in the school leadership process, which is achieved by sharing and assuming roles in order to execute leadership activities. Based on the authority and responsibility of those involved, influence is spread to different stakeholders inside and outside the school, prompting social interaction, i.e. the formation of social relationships (Gronn 2003; Hallinger and Heck 2010; Harris 2007; Hulpia et al. 2011; Lambert 2005; Spillane 2005). Based on the aforementioned definition and previous scientific discussions, the dimensions of DSL can be categorised according to (a) participation; (b) influence; and (c) social relations (Buchberger 2018, 2016), which will be further discussed in the following text.

Participation

The dominant participation of different stakeholders in school leadership activities, regardless of their formal positions, is attributed to DSL (Bush 2014; Bush and Middlewood 2013; Crawford 2012; Harris 2007, 2008, 2014). The participation of different stakeholders in leadership activities is not merely a delegation of activities and tasks by the leader (principal) (Harris 2014; McBeth 2008; Spillane 2006); rather, it is characteristic of DSL and implies the stakeholders' autonomy and a proactive taking of the initiative in leadership activities.

Participation in the decision-making process occurs when individuals or groups pursue their interests and autonomously contribute to choosing between different possibilities (Choi Wa Ho 2010; Curry 2014; Hallinger and Heck 2010; Hulpia et al. 2011; Somech 2010). When determining the features of such participation, the subjects participating in the decision-making process are clearly distinguished and involve different stakeholders—specifically, teachers, principals, other non-teaching staff, students, parents and other external stakeholders. The participation of teachers is particularly important, given their direct contact with students and their knowledge of curricula-related matters. Teachers can make the best decisions regarding the school's fundamental objective—improving student achievement (Choi Wa Ho 2010; Hallinger and Heck 2010). Involving teachers in the decision-making process related to curricular and teaching issues increases the level of expertise relevant to that process. This provides access to key information which teachers possess by virtue of their immediate engagement in the classroom, which also contributes to the more effective decision-making process (Somech 2010, p. 180).

Influence

As a common element in many definitions of leadership, influence[2] is determined by an individual's or group's intentional actions intended to achieve the goals, motivation or activities of other individuals or groups (Bush and Glover, 2014, p. 4). DSL can be seen as a process of sharing, redistributing and building mutual influence among different stakeholders, irrespective of their formal roles (Harris 2014; McBeth 2008). Somech (2010) defined teachers' participatory decision-making (according to Dachler and Wilpert 1978; McCaffrey et al. 1995) as the strong influence of teachers and other stakeholders on the proposal, consideration and adoption of final decisions related to issues perceived as important.

Social relations

In recent theoretical discussions, particular focus was devoted to the specificities of the social relations within which the process of leadership occurs (Northouse 2013; Spillan 2006). The definitions of DSL allude to developed social relations among involved stakeholders, which are grounded in collaboration, trust and support (Harris 2014; Spillane 2005, 2006). The dimension of collaboration highlighted here includes the encouragement of dialogue and discussion in the decision-making process (Harris 2014, pp. 39-41). Having identified the development of collaborative relations as a prominent determinant of DSL, it can be stated that such collaborations' existence can be recognised in the presence of developed group cohesion, precise division of roles among the stakeholders and stakeholders' dedication to the achievement of their school's common goals. In this respect, what stands out are the clearly defined and accepted mutual obligations and responsibilities of the stakeholders, the distribution of the resources among them and a certain degree of stakeholder readiness for change and adaptation (Adelman and Taylor 2000; Lasley et al. 1992).

After the final interpretations of the DSL concept, it should be pinpointed that each leadership model is theoretical and thus difficult to achieve in a pure and ideal form in educational practice. Thus, the educational practice of school leadership could be described as a practice with more or less developed features of DSL.

DSL Predictors

Previous studies on DSL have singled out important predictors, i.e. variables which could act as supporting circumstances for the development of

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[2] In this paper we decided to use the concept *influence* rather than *power* as an element of DSL because influence is described as non-coercive and democratic and is thus suitable for DSL. However, it is important to mention that researchers such as Lumby (2013, p. 586) have criticised DSL and singled out some authors (Fullan 2006; Harris 2008) for talking about a principal who uses his or her individual *power* to create an environment in which DSL can grow.

DSL.[3] Based on the presented theoretical discussions and conducted studies on DSL, DSL predictors can be categorised into three groups: (a) the supporting attitude and activities of principals; (b) the supporting characteristics of stakeholders participating in the decision-making process; and (c) supporting organisational and material resources (Buchberger 2018, 2016).

Supporting attitude and activities of principals

This group of predictors refers to principals' contribution to providing support, as well as building trust and collaborative relationships between stakeholders inside and outside the school (Harris 2014, p. 41). The role of a principal as a formal leader is crucial to monitoring and supporting informal leaders' engagement—i.e. the engagement of leaders whose influence does not derive from a particular formal position (for instance, members of a school board, teacher mentors, etc.). Moreover, the findings of several empirical studies have contributed to the notion of principals' supporting role, as the main focus of these studies was principals' roles in the school leadership process and in ensuring greater school effectiveness (see, for example, Bruggencate et al. 2012, p. 703). These findings point to principals playing a significant role in activities related to the establishment of positive social relations, collaboration, mutual trust and open, supportive communication. The importance of supporting the professional development of stakeholders while encouraging and implementing innovation at school is also emphasised.

Supporting characteristics of stakeholders participating in the decision-making process

Previous studies have confirmed that a significant predictor of DSL development is a positive attitude on the part of stakeholders, as well as the perception of participating in leadership (decision-making) activities as an important duty and an integral part of their job. Consequently, theoretical discussions on DSL suggest that one of the constraints for DSL development is stakeholders' resistance to participation in the school leadership process (Harris 2014), especially when they believe that leadership is not an aspect of their job. Choi Wa Ho (2010, p. 617) stated that some teachers tend to limit their role to implementing the prescribed curriculum, thus eliminating any aspect of school leadership as part of their duty. This is reflective of the importance of stakeholders' attitudes towards school leadership. The studies mentioned above also revealed that the interest of stakeholders is an additional feature which contributes to DSL development. It should be recalled that proactive involvement of other stakeholders, who are very interested in the school leadership process, takes the form of realizing DSL in educational practice (Harris 2008; McBeth

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[3] A number of empirical studies on DSL and school effectiveness (e.g. Leithwood and Sun 2012) have revealed that certain organisational factors might have significant effects on specific dimensions of school leadership, particularly those related to organisational conditions (i.e., working environment, perceived working conditions, school culture and school climate) and those related to teachers' and other stakeholders' organisational behaviour (teachers' job satisfaction, teachers' commitment, trust, etc.).

2008; Spillane 2006). In addition to the already-mentioned characteristics, it should also be emphasised that DSL is a challenging process which requires a high level of developed competences, ranging from strategic and critical thinking to the ability to motivate others (EC 2012).

Supporting organisational and material resources

Given the previous DSL studies, two key resources from the category of organisational and material resources can be distinguished: the availability of information and the availability of the time needed for the decision-making process. Based on the form participation takes—which should include informed, argument-grounded decision-making—it could be concluded that a precondition for achieving participation is nothing less than providing stakeholders with the information necessary to make informed decisions (Buchberger and Kovač 2017, p. 32). However, the importance of time to the process can be indirectly deduced from the results of those studies which have presented a lack of time as factor limiting DSL development (Harris 2014, p. 72). DSL, which includes the decision-making process based on these arguments and debates, implies that sufficient time and information for the decision-making is needed in such an environment.

Methodology

The following objectives were defined for this study:

– To examine the distribution of Croatian primary schools based on the presence of *participation, influence and social relations*, and whether these dimensions belong to the category of schools with more or less developed DSL;

– To examine the distribution of Croatian primary schools based on the presence of *DSL predictors related to the supporting attitude and activities of principals, the supporting characteristics of stakeholders and supporting organisational and material resources*; and

– To examine whether there is a correlation between *the development level of DSL predictors and the development level of DSL dimensions in Croatian primary schools*.[4]

The sample population used in this study comprised all central primary schools in Croatia (884), from which a sample of 80 schools was generated using the random

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selection method; 59 schools were finally included in the survey. The participants were
teachers working in each randomly selected school (the examination was performed
on 30 teachers employed by each sample school; in schools employing fewer than 30
teachers, all of the teachers were included). Due to the final number of schools in-
cluded in the survey the empirical results cannot be used to suggest firm conclusions
which can be generalised to all primary schools in Croatia. However, certain trends
and tendencies about relations between key research variables have been revealed
and discussed further below.

The *Questionnaire on Features and Predictors of Distributed School Leadership*
(Appendix 1), which was created and validated for the purpose of this study by the
project research team, was used to gather data. The starting point of the questionnaire's
design process was the operationalisation of theoretical constructs and the templates of
questionnaires used in similar studies which examined the correlation between school
leadership and effective schools.[5] To verify and improve the validity of the instrument's
content, an expert validation was conducted which included a validity assessment of the
content of all proposed items created on the basis of prior theoretical validation. The
purpose of the expert validation was to ensure that certain descriptive DSL features,
included in the Questionnaire on Features and Predictors of DSL, refer precisely to
those features which ought to be described in the specific context of Croatian schools.

The number of items per scale was as follows: *Participation*, 23 items; *Influ-
ence*, nine items; *Social relations*, nine items; *Supporting attitude and activities of
principals*, nine items; *Supporting characteristics of stakeholders*, seven items; and
Supporting organisational and material resources, six items. All scales are Likert-type
scales which rate the items from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In order
to further verify the instrument's metric characteristics, i.e. the internal consistency
reliability estimation, the measure of internal consistency (Cronbach's α) was calculated.
With respect to this, the following guidelines for the reliability estimation were used:
α < 0,7, indicating that the scale is not reliable; and α ≥ 0,7, indicating that the scale
is reliable (DeVellis 2003; Pallant 2011). The Cronbach's as for the scales are presented
in Table 1 below.

Scale	Cronbach's a
Participation	0,893
Influence	0,892
Social relations	0,935
Supporting attitude and activities of principals	0,951
Supporting characteristics of stakeholders	0,832
Supporting organisational and material resources	0,880

Table 1: Coefficients of the scales' internal consistency

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[5]   These questionnaires were the following instruments: The Distributive Leadership Inventory
(Hulpia et al. 2011; Hulpia et al. 2009); the Teacher Collaboration Scale; the Perceived School-Leader Sup-
port Scale; the Actual Participation in Decision Making Scale; the Satisfaction Concerting Participation in
Decision Making Scale (Formalization of Participation in Decision Making) (Honingh and Hooge 2014); and
the Subscale of Collaborative Leadership (Hallinger and Heck 2010).

Data were processed via Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20.0, IBM). The basic measures of descriptive statistics (the measures of central tendency, the measures of variability, percentages) were calculated in order to describe the DSL features and predictors. Based on the questionnaire's items referring to DSL features and predictors, composite variables were created according to the previously stated scales: the composite variable *Participation: DSL feature*; the composite variable *Influence: DSL feature*; the composite variable *Social relations: DSL feature*; the composite variable *Supporting attitude and activities of principals: DSL predictor*; the composite variable *Supporting characteristics of stakeholders: DSL predictor*; and the composite variable *Supporting organisational and material resources: DSL predictor*. Further data processing and data analysis were carried out at the level of composite variables.

The median split method and cluster analyses were used to examine the development of DSL features and predictors in Croatian primary schools and the corresponding percentages and frequencies were calculated. The data on schools obtained were divided into clusters (*K-means*) using the Median Split method, based on: (a) the leadership model (*less developed DSL* and *more developed DSL*); and (b) the development level of leadership predictors (*less developed DSL predictors* and *more developed DSL predictors*). Prior to conducting these analyses, the original data were transformed into standardised values (T values).[6] Further statistical data processing (the χ^2 test) was carried out at the level of the created cluster variables. To examine the contingency correlation between the level of DSL development and the level of the DSL predictors' development, the χ^2 test was used. The χ^2 test was also used on the composite variables: (a) the development level of DSL and (b) the development level of DSL predictors. In addition, with the aim of determining the contingency correlation between the DSL development level and general school characteristics (e.g. school size, school environment), as well as the development level of the DSL predictors and general school characteristics, the χ^2 test was used.[7]

Classification of Croatian Primary Schools Based on the Development Levels of DSL and DSL Predictors

The preliminary results of the examined Croatian primary schools' distribution based on the development levels of DSL and DSL predictors were obtained by calculating the average T values of composite variables prior to the cluster analyses and school classification process. The results are presented in the Table 2 below.[8]

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[6] T values were obtained using the formula: $50 + (10 \times Z \text{ value})$.

[7] To examine whether there was a contingency correlation between the DSL development level and both the school size and environment, as well as the development level of the DSL predictors and the school size and environment, several independent χ^2 tests were carried out. The analysis confirmed that there was no statistically significant contingency correlation in any of the examined cases, so the obtained findings were not further elaborated or interpreted for the study.

[8] It should be noted that the higher value of the composite variable related to the leadership models indicates a greater presence of the DSL model's features, which implies the dominant participation of various stakeholders in school leadership activities. This indicates that the involved stakeholders show a high level of interest and proactive involvement, along with developed social relationships based on collaboration, dialogue, mutual support, trust and appreciation. Moreover, the higher values of the composite variable related to the distributed leadership predictors indicate a greater development level of principals' supporting activities, interests, competences and positive attitudes towards the leadership of the involved stakeholders and the provided organisational and material resources needed for the leadership process.

SCHOOL ID	T value DSL	T value DSL predictors	SCHOOL ID	T value DSL	T value DSL predictors
S1	60.0145	59.5921	S31	51.7728	51.3427
S2	51.4275	51.9785	S32	45.6685	45.6835
S3	53.4942	41.5322	S33	50.9504	47.7321
S4	50.0945	52.4169	S34	51.0387	51.7515
S5	49.2501	48.3806	S35	45.9790	43.6047
S6	42.7778	43.2057	S36	51.7913	48.5420
S7	51.0556	55.3079	S37	48.8832	49.5148
S8	49.9343	46.5305	S38	57.6146	55.8565
S9	46.4306	46.4742	S39	50.0945	47.4375
S10	43.5154	45.9362	S40	51.7563	47.6469
S11	41.7482	45.5357	S41	52.7126	53.0038
S12	54.6132	53.6012	S42	53.7745	53.9741
S13	49.2188	49.0383	S43	44.2021	46.5867
S14	50.0465	49.3953	S44	53.6717	54.2839
S15	54.8864	58.3800	S45	52.4746	50.8735
S16	54.1389	52.7478	S46	54.4402	53.6360
S17	45.2159	48.6639	S47	46.0865	44.8920
S18	53.1578	55.1954	S48	58.9040	56.1308
S19	45.1692	44.3361	S49	59.7800	54.1585
S20	46.7576	47.5754	S50	46.5220	46.0038
S21	49.3737	51.4256	S51	48.8219	50.7471
S22	54.0888	52.8554	S52	56.2348	56.6583
S23	53.7622	52.5650	S53	41.7755	45.2047
S24	57.6490	55.2235	S54	45.4895	49.3100
S25	50.6526	53.3476	S55	45.8699	46.1269
S26	52.3870	53.9234	S56	46.3642	49.5376
S27	39.9555	42.3727	S57	52.8950	53.5869
S28	49.0812	48.5560	S58	54.4659	55.8199
S29	54.7750	55.2592	S59	49.9921	51.1418
S30	42.7611	41.0202			

Table 2: The average T values of composite variables – leadership model and leadership predictors for each sample school

The results indicate that the highest T values of composite variables were 60,0145 for DSL and 59,5921 for the DSL predictors. The lowest T values of composite variables were 39,9555 for DSL and 41,0202 for the DSL predictors. It could be preliminarily concluded that schools with average T values of composite variables < 50 belong to the clusters with less developed DSL features (that is, DSL predictors), whereas schools with average T values of composite variables ≥ 50 belong to clusters with more developed DSL features.[9]

Once the preliminary categorisation was complete, a cluster analysis (*K-means*) was conducted in order to finally classify examined schools according to the development level of the DSL features and predictors. The iterative method of classification was used, with a maximum of ten iterations allowed. On the basis of composite variables (*participation, influence, and social relations*), the classification of schools was conducted with regard to the presence of DSL features. Two clusters were identified: *more developed DSL* and *less developed DSL*. To estimate the success level of the classification, the analysis of variance for independent groups of results was carried out, which revealed a statistically significant difference between the groups for all three variables (*participation* $F_{(1,57)} = 65,781$, $P < 0,5$; *influence* $F_{(1,57)} = 60,079$, $P < 0,5$; and *social relations* $F_{(1,57)} = 132,237$, $P < 0,5$), indicating the methodological justification of the implemented classification.

Leadership features	Frequencies	%
More developed DSL	35	59,3
Less developed DSL	24	40,7

Table 3: The classification of the examined schools with regard to their DSL development level

The results presented in Table 3 above indicate that a higher, although not significantly higher, number of Croatian primary schools have more developed DSL.

On the basis of composite variables (*supporting attitude and activities of principals, supporting characteristics of stakeholders participating in the decision-making process, and supporting organisational and material resources*), the classification of schools was conducted with respect to the development level of leadership predictors. Two clusters were identified: *more developed DSL predictors* and *less developed DSL predictors*. To examine the success of the classification, an analysis of variance for independent groups of results was conducted. The analysis showed that there was a statistically significant difference between groups for all three variables—the variable *supporting attitude and activities of principals* $F_{(1,57)} = 64,624$; $P < 0,5$; the variable *supporting characteristics of stakeholders participating in the decision-making process* $F_{(1,57)} = 73,113$; $P < 0,5$; and the variable *supporting*

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[9]   In Appendix 2, the average T values of composite variables for each sample school are presented. A cluster analysis showed that 33 schools had a more developed participation, while 26 schools had less developed participation; 29 schools had more developed influence, and 30 schools less developed influence; 36 schools had more developed social relations, while 23 schools had less developed social relations. The average T values of each scale's items for the selected schools are presented.

organisational and material resources F(1,57) = 80,804; *P* < 0,5) – which implies the methodological justification of the implemented classification.

Leadership predictors	Frequencies	%
Less developed DSL predictors	30	50,8
More developed DSL predictors	29	49,2

Table 4: The classification of examined schools with regard to the DSL predictors' development level

The conducted classification of participated schools according to the development level of DSL predictors (Table 4) indicated that the percentage of schools with more developed DSL predictors is relatively equal to that with less developed DSL predictors.[10]

Correlation between Development Levels of DSL Features and DSL Predictors

The χ^2 was used to examine whether there is a contingency correlation between the development level of the DSL features and the development level of the chosen DSL predictors. The results indicated a statistically significant contingency correlation between the DSL features' development level and the DSL predictors' development level (χ^2 (N = 59) = 32,196, *P* < 0,01; φ = 0,773). This in turn indicated schools with more developed DSL are more likely to be identified as schools with more developed DSL predictors. Comparing the empirical and theoretical frequencies showed that the obtained results were higher than the theoretical expectations in both cases (see Table 5).

			DSL Features	
			Less developed	More developed
DSL predictors	More developed	Empirical frequencies	1	29
		Theoretical frequencies	12,2	17,8
		% leadership model	4,2	82,9
		Adjusted standardised residuals	-5,9	5,9
	Less developed	Empirical frequencies	23	6
		Theoretical frequencies	11,8	17,2
		% leadership model	95,8	17,1
		Adjusted standardised residuals	5,9	-5,9

Table 5: Contingency table of DSL features and predictors

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[10] The cluster analysis showed that 29 schools had a more developed *supporting attitude and activities of principals*, while for 30 schools this predictor was less developed; 34 schools had a more developed *supporting characteristics of stakeholders*, while for 25 schools this predictor was less developed; 28 schools had a more developed *supporting organizational and material resources*, while for 31 schools this predictor was less developed (see Appendix 2).

Discussion

The results of the analyses conducted showed that the schools examined are in the slight majority of schools with more developed DSL. It should be noted that Croatian legislation supports the active involvement of not only principals but also the various stakeholders in schools' decision-making processes. However, it is also important to remember that merely by ensuring support, this legislation ensured only the participatory dimension of the DSL (e.g. the participation of teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and founder—the remaining dimensions assessed in this research cannot be fully ensured. With respect to influence, most schools had a less developed influence dimension, meaning that even those stakeholders who participate in decision-making processes do not consider their process-related influence to be remarkable. It could also mean that they do not participate in the decision-making process related to the issues they perceive as important (Somech 2010, p. 177). This study's findings suggest that teachers and other stakeholders rarely become proactively involved in leadership activities (Buchberger 2018), which could in turn reduce their proactivity in the decision-making process. Bearing in mind that the above categorisation of schools is the result of the perspective of one group of stakeholders—teachers—it is important to investigate the perspectives of other relevant stakeholders involved to various degrees in the decision-making process. Current studies suggest that teachers are usually more critical when assessing their participation in decision-making than other stakeholders, such as school principals. Principals also tend to assume teachers participate more than teachers do themselves (Kovač et al. 2014, p. 177). It can thus be assumed that external stakeholders such as parents or representatives of local educational authorities in school decision-making bodies might assess their participation in decision-making as being less than was indicated by teachers.

The classification of sample schools according to the development level of DSL predictors implies an approximately equal distribution of schools in both clusters; the school classifications based on the development level of each predictor, however, produced slightly different ratios. Hence, the predictor *supporting organisational and material resources* was less developed in the majority of schools. This finding is consistent with previous studies which show that Croatian teachers estimate *the availability of information* teachers need for the decision-making process, as a supporting organisational resource, to be very low (Kovač et al. 2015, p. 53). Furthermore, discussions regarding *the availability of time* teachers need for the decision-making process, as a second organisational resource, often indicate that the time teachers invest in non-teaching activities is not recognised (for example, their activities as mentors) (Matejčić Čotar 2017). This surely has a negative impact on teachers' motivation to spend time on different activities other than teaching (project activities, leadership activities, etc.). This finding was expected, as the issues of insufficient *financial resources* allocated to the education sector (Braš Roth et al. 2017) and a lack of incentives for teachers' good work (Kovač et al. 2015) are continuously discussed in public and are probably among each school population in Croatia as well. Furthermore, the current discussions related to unequally dis-

tributed material investments in schools at the level of local self-government units (Kovač et al. 2017) could have impacted the obtained sample schools' categorisation. The results of this study suggest that the development level of organisational and material resources which can be controlled and modified at different levels of the education system should be monitored separately in order to detect the correlation of particular groups of resources and the development level of DSL features.

The findings related to the predictor *supporting attitude and activities of principals* are also of great interest as they coincide with the results of previous studies, implying that principals are often unwilling to delegate authority to other stakeholders, especially teachers (Peko et al. 2009, p. 76), and that the methods principals use to motivate their employees are inadequate (Blažević 2014, p. 15). In the Croatian education policy environment, the preconditions for principals' autonomous functioning are not sufficiently fulfilled, a finding which is also supported by the results of PISA and TALIS research which described the relatively low level of school autonomy in some key decision-making aspects (OECD 2015; Braš Roth et al. 2017). In addition, if not provided opportunities to participate in appropriate training programs, it can be assumed that not all principals have equally developed the competences necessary for DSL implementation.

The DSL predictors related to the supporting attitudes and activities of principals and supporting characteristics of stakeholders in the decision-making process function primarily at the level of a school as an organisation. However, recent studies have shown that it is also possible to affect these predictors and determine their contribution level to DSL development at the level of the policy environment and education system. Some international assessments of the implementation of the system-level policies and programs designed to provide teachers with incentives to motivate them to become part of the school's management team (Holloway et al. 2017) point to the limitations of such initiatives, unless they are focused on all key DSL dimensions. A program recently implemented in the United States,[11] which stands as an example of a top-down initiative aimed at involving teachers in school leadership, ultimately resulted in strong tensions and dissatisfaction of involved teachers. Holloway et al. (2017) found that the key sources of teachers' dissatisfaction are related to teachers feeling that their participation in leadership activities is limited, especially with respect to the activities they value the most, such as developing positive social relations and empowering associates, and that their work in this regard is instead usually restricted to completing additional administrative tasks.

Another interesting point should be mentioned. Based on the results related to the correlation between DSL development level in schools and general school characteristics (school size and school environment), as well as the correlation between DSL predictors in schools and general school characteristics, the examined correlations may not be statistically significant. It was expected that smaller schools or schools situated in rural areas would better facilitate the participation and collaboration of teachers and other stakeholders in the decision-making process (e.g. Hulpia et al. 2011; Bruggencate et al. 2012; Hallinger and Heck 2010). However, the findings of

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[11] The Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), which was implemented in the United States by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET).

this research do not support this expectation: They indicate instead that, for instance, a higher level of DSL development would be found in such schools. It appears that differences between schools are more likely to occur due to other environmental factors which were not examined in this research (for example, factors related to the type of school support provided by the local community or local self-government units). It may also be that, due to the ever-expanding globalisation and continuous information and technological progress, school differences based on general characteristics such as size or environment are being eradicated (Hodžić 2010).

This research confirmed the assumption and revealed the tendency that there is a significant correlation between the development level of DSL features and the supporting attitudes and activities of principals, the supporting characteristics of stakeholders in the decision-making process and supporting organisational and material resources. Consequently, this finding can be used by all decision-makers at different levels of the education system in the process of analysing the mechanisms which empower DSL features.

Concluding Remarks

This paper was a review of empirical data confirming the assumption that DSL would be more developed in schools with more developed supporting attitudes and activities on the part of principals, supporting characteristics of stakeholders in the decision-making process and supporting organisational and material resources. According to these findings, and in the event that some would want to implement policy recommendations related to DSL effectiveness, decision-makers at different levels of the education system can invest in numerous mechanisms to strengthen all three groups of DSL predictors. Both national and local authorities should consider enhancing material investment in schools by creating more appropriate criteria and methods for resource allocation, creating additional training programs for principals and teachers which would enhance their DSL competencies and defining incentives for teachers which would recognise and reward their involvement in school leadership (for example, rewarding teachers' leadership activities in the context of their career advancement).

It should be emphasised that this study is one of the few conducted in Croatia (as well as in other national systems) focused on the *school* as a sample unit and which implements a research design aimed at describing school characteristics. Using the cluster analysis technique enabled the classification of sample schools based on the observed composite variables of DSL and DSL predictors, making this one of the first studies to offer concrete empirical data on the observed schools' leadership models and the development levels of certain predictors for each sample school. This approach allowed the continuation of communication between researchers and schools, thus justifying a high level of practical applicability of this research and ensuring it can contribute to the creation of relevant guidelines for innovating professional practice.

The results of this research prompt new research questions, of which the following should be mentioned: which demographic characteristics of schools (apart from size and environment) can affect the greater development of DSL features and predictors, and, above all, how and under what circumstances should DSL be developed, if necessary? Ongoing discussions are revealing possible directions of new studies, such as monitoring the effects of initiatives intended for DSL development at the state, local community or school level, with the purpose of determining its actual contribution to improving school effectiveness and student achievement.

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Annex 1. Questionnaire on Features and Predictors of Distributed School Leadership

LEADERSHIP FEATURES					
ITEMS	1 – Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5 – Strongly agree
1 In our school, the decision-making is based on arguments and relevant information.	1	2	3	4	5
2 In our school, the principal usually makes decisions related to the school functioning independently.	1	2	3	4	5
3 In our school, only the principal defines the vision and goals of the school.	1	2	3	4	5
4 In our school, the principal consults and relies only on his/her closest associates in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
5 In our school, only the principal and non-teaching staff participate in the decision-making process at the school level.	1	2	3	4	5
6 In our school, parents participate in the decision-making process related to the school functioning through formal bodies only (school board, parent council).	1	2	3	4	5
7 In our school, all or almost all employees are involved in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
8 In our school, important decisions are made by organizing extensive consultations with a large number of different stakeholders.	1	2	3	4	5
9 In our school, teachers participate in the decision-making related to the school issues.	1	2	3	4	5
10 In our school, representatives of the school founders actively participate in the decision-making related to the school issues.	1	2	3	4	5
11 In our school, local community representatives participate in the decision-making process related to the school functioning, since the school board is not their only means of cooperation with the rest involved in school.	1	2	3	4	5
12 In our school, the principal entrusts school employees with activities essential to the school functioning (e.g., activities of a quality assurance team).	1	2	3	4	5
13 In our school, the responsibility for the decisions made is borne by the principal and other school employees.	1	2	3	4	5
14 In our school, teachers are keen to take over the tasks associated with the decision-making at the school level.	1	2	3	4	5
15 In our school, apart from the principal, only the non-teaching staff has an important role in the decision-making.	1	2	3	4	5
16 In our school, all employees have an important role in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
17 In our school, teachers' opinions and suggestions are taken into consideration even when decisions are made on the issues beyond their teaching domain.	1	2	3	4	5

18	In our school, the participation of teachers in the decision-making process is considered important.	1	2	3	4	5
19	In our school, parents have a prominent role in making decisions related to the important school issues.	1	2	3	4	5
20	In our school, the representatives of the school founders influence the decisions on the important school issues.	1	2	3	4	5
21	In our school, students have a prominent role in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
22	In our school, suggestions and opinions are openly expressed at the meetings of teacher and/or class council.	1	2	3	4	5
23	Among our school's employees, there is an exchange of information important to the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Stakeholders involved in our school understand their role in the decision-making process clearly.	1	2	3	4	5
25	In our school, the relationships between the employees are based on mutual support.	1	2	3	4	5
26	There is a mutual trust among our school's employees.	1	2	3	4	5
27	In our school, the employees respect each other professionally and humanly when making decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
28	In our school, the principal makes the decisions and supervises their implementation alone.	1	2	3	4	5
29	In our school, the principal, with his/her several closest associates, defines the vision and goals of the school.	1	2	3	4	5
30	In our school, all important decisions are made by the school board and the principal, without the involvement of other employees.	1	2	3	4	5
31	In our school, other employees, parents, and students participate in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
32	In our school, parents who are not members of the school board and the parent council also participate in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
33	In our school, special bodies were established in addition to the regular ones, which are aimed at encouraging the school development (e.g., a team for the improvement of the school functioning) and involve the school employees.	1	2	3	4	5
34	In our school, teachers participate in the process of proposing and making decisions proactively.	1	2	3	4	5
35	In our school, teachers participate in making all the relevant decisions related to the school functioning.	1	2	3	4	5
36	In our school, teachers possess the appropriate level of autonomy when it comes to the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
37	In our school, parental involvement in the decision-making process is considered important.	1	2	3	4	5
38	In our school, students' involvement in the decision-making process is considered important.	1	2	3	4	5
39	At the meetings, the teacher council discusses the problem-solving and the improvement of the school functioning.	1	2	3	4	5
40	When deciding on the issues related to the school functioning, teachers openly express their opinions and suggestions.	1	2	3	4	5
41	Our school's employees are willing to implement good decisions.	1	2	3	4	5

LEADERSHIP PREDICTORS					
ITEMS	1 – Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5 – Strongly agree
1 In our school, relevant information for the decision-making process is available to school employees.	1	2	3	4	5
2 In our school, teachers have enough time to participate in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
3 Due to the current distribution of working hours, our school's non-teaching staff has enough time to participate in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
4 In our school, there are enough material resources for carrying out the activities that contribute to school development.	1	2	3	4	5
5 In our school, the general perception is that decision-making at the school level represents additional work load for teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
6 Most of our school employees are interested in participating in the decision-making process at the school level.	1	2	3	4	5
7 Most of our school employees are capable of making decisions at the school level.	1	2	3	4	5
8 In our school, the principal encourages teachers and non-teaching staff to engage in professional development.	1	2	3	4	5
9 In our school, the principal commends/rewards the school employees for a job well done.	1	2	3	4	5
10 In our school, the principal contributes to the development of mutual trust among school employees.	1	2	3	4	5
11 In our school, the principal contributes to the development of collaboration among school employees.	1	2	3	4	5
12 In our school, the principal establishes good collaboration with local self-government representatives (county and city education departments).	1	2	3	4	5
13 In our school, the principal establishes relations with local communities based on trust and collaboration (e.g., museums, libraries, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
14 Due to the current distribution of working hours, our school's teachers have enough time to participate in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
15 In our school, the non-teaching staff has enough time to participate in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
16 In our school, the general perception is that decision-making at the school level presents an obligation for all members of school employees.	1	2	3	4	5
17 In our school, teachers are interested in participating in the decision-making process related to the school leadership activities.	1	2	3	4	5
18 In our school, the non-teaching staff is interested in participating in the decision-making process related to the school leadership activities.	1	2	3	4	5
19 Our students' parents are interested in participating in the decision-making process at the school level.	1	2	3	4	5

20	In our school, the principal provides school employees with work-related support.	1	2	3	4	5
21	In our school, the principal encourages positive social relationships among school employees.	1	2	3	4	5
22	In our school, the principal establishes the relationship with parents based on trust and cooperation.	1	2	3	4	5

Annex 2. The presentation of the average T values of composite variables for each sample school

SCHOOL ID	T value participation	T value influence	T value social relations	T value attitude and activities of principals	T value characteristics of stakeholders	T value organizational and material resources
S1	58.89	58.09	58.52	57.50	58.05	60.73
S2	50.54	48.64	55.96	52.92	51.88	49.55
S3	54.89	50.41	50.33	36.70	53.37	41.00
S4	49.13	49.71	54.12	53.48	49.54	52.45
S5	50.75	48.55	45.27	49.94	46.93	48.50
S6	44.15	45.13	43.07	42.65	45.16	45.45
S7	49.08	51.88	59.17	56.80	51.14	54.67
S8	50.41	48.95	50.70	48.69	46.17	47.74
S9	46.97	46.66	47.11	48.91	46.47	44.32
S10	43.26	45.69	45.44	47.32	45.98	45.57
S11	40.61	43.53	47.56	47.60	46.10	43.74
S12	54.90	53.32	53.83	53.45	52.02	53.66
S13	49.61	47.27	50.78	49.84	47.58	49.69
S14	48.65	51.61	51.33	47.65	48.54	53.32
S15	55.12	56.26	56.22	56.57	56.93	58.50
S16	50.08	56.00	58.80	45.85	52.99	61.02
S17	46.53	50.15	45.05	48.37	46.86	51.59
S18	50.89	53.75	55.81	54.66	54.31	54.44
S19	48.43	45.89	44.75	43.73	51.36	46.01
S20	49.88	45.97	43.78	45.98	50.98	47.71
S21	49.73	49.64	52.41	49.62	54.48	49.63
S22	53.94	53.77	55.63	50.15	56.71	51.78
S23	55.53	50.38	51.89	53.10	51.55	51.49
S24	57.13	56.16	56.83	52.77	55.25	56.58

S25	50.49	49.79	50.26	50.55	54.64	51.52
S26	51.89	53.76	51.08	52.88	53.22	54.70
S27	38.66	39.51	44.33	42.15	45.80	42.78
S28	49.89	51.06	47.59	53.55	43.85	46.09
S29	54.65	53.76	56.46	55.47	51.95	55.78
S30	44.13	43.87	43.95	42.00	41.40	43.31
S31	52.59	49.00	52.74	54.31	48.03	49.35
S32	46.10	46.90	44.35	46.25	46.74	45.70
S33	52.93	47.49	43.85	47.57	48.75	47.98
S34	51.28	49.35	50.97	50.96	51.51	52.10
S35	47.27	46.69	43.13	45.53	41.82	45.41
S36	50.46	53.37	52.17	47.05	50.72	49.33
S37	47.79	47.60	50.37	49.22	50.62	47.74
S38	57.30	57.34	56.42	55.72	52.64	55.85
S39	50.37	49.55	50.18	46.77	48.06	49.03
S40	51.07	49.16	51.40	50.30	45.79	47.16
S41	51.75	50.68	53.94	53.26	53.14	50.97
S42	54.73	52.47	50.66	51.85	53.56	55.85
S43	46.02	46.26	43.74	45.11	51.74	45.21
S44	52.67	52.27	52.55	55.39	52.07	52.62
S45	52.20	51.68	52.73	52.01	50.02	49.47
S46	54.16	54.93	53.53	55.39	50.98	51.67
S47	46.98	51.27	42.58	45.37	46.85	45.13
S48	53.52	60.48	55.25	53.01	56.71	57.55
S49	57.27	56.74	57.30	55.96	55.22	52.81
S50	45.78	48.06	46.15	46.60	46.85	44.93
S51	50.52	48.50	47.44	48.28	52.72	49.96
S52	55.61	55.74	57.09	55.87	56.88	54.89
S53	41.76	47.02	40.68	43.26	47.01	48.52
S54	44.19	48.09	46.72	51.72	47.17	49.11
S55	44.58	47.55	47.56	44.74	48.02	48.20
S56	46.09	49.08	47.56	49.84	48.70	50.05
S57	53.22	52.37	53.10	53.80	51.46	53.68
S58	54.97	54.93	50.28	54.85	54.93	55.47
S59	49.85	51.69	49.22	48.97	50.76	55.09

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NAPOVEDNIKI DISTRIBUIRANEGA VODENJA V OSNOVNIH ŠOLAH NA HRVAŠKEM

Povzetek: V prispevku obravnavamo značilnosti distribuiranega vodenja na hrvaških osnovnih šolah, zlasti njegove tri osrednje teoretične in praktične razsežnosti: (i) participacijo vseh deležnikov v procesu vodenja šolske institucije, (ii) zaželene socialne vezi med udeleženci v tem procesu ter (iii) vpliv, ki ga imajo različni deležniki na sprejemanje odločitev. Ob tem v prispevku ocenimo tudi doseženo raven treh izbranih skupin napovednikov distribuiranega vodenja, in sicer (i) podporna ravnanja in dejavnosti ravnateljev, (ii) podporne značilnosti deležnikov, vključenih v procese sprejemanja odločitev, in (iii) podporni organizacijski in materialni pogoji. Glede na rezultate raziskave je mogoče skleniti, da je na Hrvaškem število osnovnih šol z manj razvitim distribuiranim vodenjem približno enako številu šol, kjer je moč zaslediti bolj razvito distribuirano vodenje. Potrdili smo tudi statistično značilno pozitivno korelacijo med doseženo ravnijo vseh treh skupin napovednikov ter doseženo ravnijo značilnosti distribuiranega vodenja. Rezultati tako nakazujejo, da bi uvedba določenih sistemskih mehanizmov lahko prispevala k uveljavljanju značilnosti distribuiranega vodenja v osnovnih šolah na Hrvaškem, kar bi lahko bilo v pomoč odločevalcem na vseh ravneh sprejemanja odločitev v hrvaškem vzgojno-izobraževalnem sistemu.

Ključne besede: distribuirano vodenje, napovedniki distribuiranega vodenja, participacija učiteljev pri vodenju šole, organizacijski in materialni pogoji šole, ravnateljevo vodenje

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