

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S EDUCATIONAL
TRAJECTORIES IN SLOVENIA

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ABSTRACT

Based on qualitative empirical data from the international research project "Governance of educational trajectories in Europe" (Goete), the article addresses the role of parents in coping and decision making regarding the schooling and education of 9th grade students. The study revealed the very important role parents play in coping with the school demands and educational trajectories of young people, which is in line with previous research on youth and education. The article strives to explain the broader social, political and cultural contexts that frame the role of parents and the family in general. Among others, these are the neoliberal process of individualising responsibility, reflected in high aspirations of parents and their children regarding education, the so-called familialisation, the protective attitude of parents to their children and the contradictions, low trust in school staff etc. The authors seek to show that it is important to study the constellation of these factors in order to reveal the complex picture of the common endeavours of Slovenian parents to do everything to give their children the best educational opportunities.

Key words: parental role, educational transitions, decision making, individualised responsibility

IL RUOLO DEI GENITORI NELLE TRAIETTORIE EDUCATIVE
DEI GIOVANI IN SLOVENIA

SINTESI

Sulla base dei dati empirici qualitativi del progetto di ricerca internazionale "Governazione delle traiettorie educative in Europa" (Goete) l'articolo riflette sul ruolo dei genitori nel affrontare e decidere riguardo le traiettorie educative e la formazione degli studenti del 9° grado. La ricerca ha rivelato il ruolo importante dei genitori nel affrontare le esigenze della scuola e della traiettoria educativa dei giovani. Questo è in accordo con precedenti ricerche sui giovani e l'istruzione. L'articolo spiega i contesti sociali, politici e culturali più ampi che incorniciano il ruolo dei genitori e della famiglia in generale. Tra gli altri, si tratta di processo neoliberista di individualizzazione e di responsabilità, che si riflette in alte aspirazioni dei genitori e dei loro figli per quanto riguarda l'istruzione - la cosiddetta familisation, atteggiamento protettivo dei genitori verso i bambini e le contraddizioni, scarsa fiducia nel personale della scuola, ecc. Le autrici si dimostrano che è importante studiare la costellazione di questi fattori al fine di rivelare l'immagine complessa di sforzi comuni di genitori sloveni che fanno di tutto per permettere ai loro figli migliori opportunità educative.

Parole chiave: ruolo genitoriale, transizioni educative, il processo decisionale, responsabilità individuale

INTRODUCTION

Three important social processes are considered to influence young people's lives today, namely familialisation, institutionalisation and individualisation (Edwards and Alldred, 2000). Familialisation means that children are understood as the responsibility of their parents and are "increasingly located as supervised sons and daughters in the home, and conceptualised in terms of their familial dependency status" (Qvortrup, in Edwards and Alldred, 2000, 435). A parallel process is institutionalisation, which means that children's lives are organised in "separate and protected organised settings, supervised by professionals and often structured according to their age" (Nasman, in Edwards and Alldred, 2000, 436), where the focus is "on their educational attainment and development" (Edwards and Alldred, 2000, 436). While familialisation, studied here in the form of parental involvement in children's educational trajectories and especially educational decision making and coping, and institutionalisation seem to go hand in hand and can also be seen a process where young people are constantly under supervision and control in their daily lives, the individualisation process at first glance seems to be in opposition to them. In the context of individualisation, children are perceived as "individual social actors (not dependents) who reflexively shape their own biography, and are responsible for their 'project of self'" (Edwards and Alldred, 2000, 436; Mencin Čeplak, 2012; Razpotnik, 2011). Two aspects of the individualisation process are particularly relevant in the case of children's educational trajectories and the role of parents in them, namely that children are also considered to be able to decide about (at least some aspects) of their lives (e.g. vocation) and that they are considered to be responsible for their own educational success or failure, which also means that they themselves actually take responsibility for their lives in this respect.

All of these processes can be observed in Slovenia and have been documented by several studies in the past two decades (e.g. Kurdija et al., 2011; Mencin Čeplak, 2012; Miheljak /ed./, 2002; Razpotnik, 2011; Rener, 2010; Ule, 2010; 2013; Ule and Miheljak, 1995; Ule et al., 1996; 2000; Žakelj and Švab, 2011; Živoder, 2013).

Despite the seemingly contradictory characteristics of individualisation and familialisation, in this article we attempt to show that these processes can be seen as complementary and that it is crucial to study various social contexts that influence the role of parents in young people's educational trajectories.

The article presents and discusses results from the research project "Governance of the educational trajec-

ries in Europe" (Goete),¹ focusing on the role of parents in coping with educational demands and in decision making regarding the educational trajectories of young people. First, we set the theoretical background in which we seek to grasp the wider social contexts which frame the role and agency of parents in young people's educational trajectories. Then we present basic information regarding the methodology used in the research project. The core part of the article presents key results from the qualitative part of the research based on interviews and focus groups with students, parents, teachers and school experts. Here we also use some data from a quantitative survey to support our arguments. In the final part of the article, we discuss the results and offer some concluding thoughts.

EDUCATION AND THE 'ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF'

Improving 'human capital' (i.e. skills, abilities and knowledge, made up of innate and acquired elements) is one of the key imperatives of neoliberal discourse on individuals as 'entrepreneurs of themselves' (Foucault, 2008). In that context, as Foucault points out, the child is seen as a potentiality, and responsible, competent parental care and education are considered as an essential 'tool' to realise that potentiality. Improving 'human capital' is a goal of various rational programmes, professional advice, training and therapies that try to encourage teachers, students and parents to improve their teaching, learning, parental skills and achievements (e.g. Rose, 1990; 1999; Holmer Nadesan, 2002). These skills are considered the most basic for successful participation in competition that is the key regulatory principle of the neoliberal "art of government" (or "governmentality") (Foucault, 2008).

Scientific investigations, professional and counselling literature treat the child as a 'project' carried out by attentive, responsible and competent parents with the support of therapeutic interventions (Holmer Nadesan, 2002, 242–426). They emphasise the importance of emotional support, intellectual stimulation and care for the child's cognitive, emotional, social development and her/his future academic, professional and social success (e.g. Walkerdine, 1984; Foucault, 2008). Careful organising of the child's daily life, offering the opportunity to attend 'useful' extracurricular activities, choosing a good school, being vigilant about the child's schoolwork, urging her or him to work hard, and involvement in the 'home-school partnership' are some of the duties of responsible parents (e.g. Lareau, 2003; Mencin Čeplak, 2012). However, hegemonic discourses of good parenting and corresponding practices are adapted to the middle class. They overlook

1 The project included 13 different institutions from eight European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, and the UK). Project co-ordinator Prof. Dr. Andreas Walter, University of Frankfurt Institute of Social Pedagogy and Adult Education; national co-ordinator Prof. Dr. Mirjana Ule, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences). For more information, see: <http://www.goete.eu/>.

the social, economic and political obstacles and inequities that make the norm of good, responsible parenting unattainable for families from de-privileged social backgrounds. They also (unintentionally and more or less indirectly) differentiate, exclude and blame marginalised parents for their children's low school achievements (Crozier, 1997; 2000; Edwards and Alldred, 2000; Griffith and Smith, 2005; Holmer and Nadesan, 2002; Lareau, 2003; Vezovnik, 2013; Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997; Walkerdine, 1984).

Public opinion surveys, surveys on the values and life orientations of young people, and the increasing enrolment levels in tertiary education indicate that education in Slovenia is considered as a condition for personal well-being, an important (or even crucial) factor for social success. Respondents in public opinion surveys in the 1990s and 2000s associate education with the possibility of a higher income; they treat education as a condition for "achieving something in life", for social inclusion and employability (Toš et al., 1999; 2004; 2009). At the same time, they express a high level of confidence in the education system and educational institutions, which can in part be explained by the objective features of educational policy and in part by a kind of Freudian self-depiction, an illusion that in a world full of contradictions, inequities and coincidences there exists solid, reliable support, an opportunity which – if we take advantage of it – enables certainty and a comfortable future. Namely, despite the relative accessibility of the education system, education is not equally accessible to all, and above all the education system must be selective to produce the diversified labour force needed by the market. The connection between belief in the importance of education and confidence in the fairness of the education system is the ideal effect of the neoliberal concept of individuals as 'entrepreneurs of themselves' that increases the burden of any eventual school failure, mainly borne by parents and their children. The burden resulted from the process of the individualisation of responsibility for social and personal welfare.

Soon after the political, economic and social changes of the 1990s, the share of secondary students enrolled in grammar schools (which open up the best opportunities for further study) rose from 25% in the 1996/1997 academic year to almost 40% in the 2006/2007 academic year (Statistični letopis, 2007). Due to the growing interest in grammar schools, the criteria for admission to a grammar school were raised. In such circumstances, school marks are very important especially for those compulsory school pupils who intend to enrol in a grammar school.

Surveys on the values and life orientations of young people in Slovenia (1999 and 2000) indicate that chil-

dren experience performance pressure very early in their lives, that they are clearly aware of the expectations of their parents and of the importance parents assign to their achievement in school. In a survey on the social vulnerability of youth (Ule et al., 2000), 96.5% of respondents agreed with the statement that for their parents "the school certificate is very important".² Anxiety over school failure and a high level of discontent with school reports and school marks are two widespread problems among children and teenagers associated with school. This is not surprising; namely, the range of choices of secondary school depends on the final grades of all compulsory subjects in the last three years of primary school. In the survey mentioned above, 38.5% of respondents found the fear of school failure to be a "very big personal problem", while another 45.7% considered it a "problem"; not even A pupils are entirely satisfied with their achievement, while among B pupils only 36.6% are satisfied (Mencin Čeplak, in Ule et al., 2000).

On one hand, the child's school achievement is considered one of the most important factors for his/her future and, on the other, as a reflection of parental competence, care, maturity, responsible involvement in the child's schoolwork, an indicator of the quality of the parenting role – especially of mothers. Namely, the shift of responsibility for education from the state and schools to the family above all means an increase in hidden gendered labour and the added culpability of women, especially single mothers, as Griffith and Smith (2005) point out.

In this responsibility shared among students and their parents, students' school achievement becomes a measure of parents' competence, care and love and, at the same time, proof of the child's love for her/his parents (Mencin Čeplak, 2012). Both of them are exposed to constant tests of their love, competence and responsibility, that are made more difficult by the fundamental contradiction of their relationship, i.e. the contradiction between young people's need for autonomy and the need for parental control (Backe-Hansen, 2002). Accordingly, it is no surprise that schoolwork and school achievement often play a central role in parent-child relationships and structure their daily lives.

METHODOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

The article is based on data from the research project "Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe" (GOETE), carried out in the period from 2010 to 2012. The qualitative part of the research project was based on interviews and focus groups with students of 9th grade

2 The role of parents in the educational process was also detected by the school inspectorate. While 171 initiatives for special control were submitted in 1995, the number increased to 532 in 2012. The majority of initiatives regard elementary schools and are most commonly related to evaluation/grades at the end of the school year (Košak, 2013).

of elementary school in Slovenia, their parents, principals, teachers, school experts and external experts from the field. Three towns were included, namely Ljubljana, Koper and Murska Sobota (one school in each region was chosen). The interviews and focus groups were carried out from April to November 2011. The focus groups were conducted with pupils who were in the process of decision making for a secondary school, and with their teachers. Individual interviews were conducted with parents, school experts and students who had already been present in the focus groups and were in the second phase invited to share with us their first experiences of attaining a secondary school. The interviews were on one-to-one basis, with the exception of one interview where both parents were present. All focus groups included 3–5 respondents and two researchers were always present, one doing the interviewing and the other taking notes. The duration of the interviews was very mixed, with the student interviews being the shortest, from 20 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews with the other respondents were usually longer, lasting from 40 minutes to 2 hours. In total, we carried out 114 interviews and 12 focus groups with 135 individuals.

Coding was performed according to the five main topics that were cooperatively developed at the level of the whole Goete project (the conceptual part of the project). These were: coping strategies in the field of education, education in the life course perspective, access to education, the relevance of education, governance (educational policies at the local and state levels). In the coding process, attention was paid to common patterns (codes or topics that had great support by citations) as well as to specific 'cases' according to the principle 'every statement counts'. The coding was followed by the analysis of the contents with a categorisation whereby the meaning of long statements was rephrased into synthesised categories. With these condensations of meaning, relevant themes were defined that finally served as a subject of extensive interpretation.³

In the article we also use some data from the quantitative part to support our arguments. The survey was carried out on a sample of 470 parents and 725 students. It was conducted in the period from October to November 2010 in 20 elementary schools from three cities and their surroundings: seven schools from Ljubljana, seven schools from Koper and six schools from Murska Sobota.⁴ In the sample of parents, there were 8.7% of mothers and 10.6% of fathers who had obtained a basic education (ISCED 0-2). More than half the parents included in the research (namely 51.4% of mothers

and 52.1% of fathers) had completed secondary education (ISCED 3-4), while 39.4% of the mothers and 26.2% of the fathers had a tertiary education (ISCED 5-6).

RESULTS

In the following main section of the article, we present the key results of the described study, focusing on the role of parents in coping with educational demands as well as in young people's educational trajectories in general. Important questions are how pupils and their parents perceive responsibility for school success, what are family strategies for coping with educational demands, what is the role of key actors in the decision-making process and what are parents' preferences regarding their children's future education path.

SCHOOL SUCCESS AS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The discourse on individual responsibilities is one of the dominant discourses related to perceptions of success in educational trajectories. Both parents and students themselves regard students as being responsible for their school achievements as well as for future achievements in life. Consequently, the concept of "hard study" is mainly accepted as the best strategy for most effectively coping with school demands.

Well, it depends on the individual person; I mean the student is the one who is responsible for their future (KP-students-interview-Maja⁵).

Well, it's your entire fault [if you don't succeed in enrolling in the school you wanted]. If you choose such school and you cannot enrol because you don't have enough points – you should know it before and that you have to work to get enough points (LJ-students-interview-Nejc).

Success is believed to be a result of someone's effort, while all other factors are overlooked:

Yes, this [success] depends on coevals, the school, but the mostly on oneself. It's true, if you want to achieve something you have to make an effort. You really have to work hard because nothing comes just like that (KP-parents-interview-mother-Tamara).

In order to be successful, one has to be responsible first. He has to be motivated. If someone

3 For detailed information, see Ule et al. (2011): Exploring educational trajectories of 9th grade students in Slovenia: National case study report (WP6).

4 For detailed information, see McDowell et al. (2012): Comparative analysis individual survey: Deliverable no. 17: work package no. 4.

5 The codes for the respondents are structured to show: the city where the qualitative research was conducted (KP for Koper, LJ for Ljubljana and MS for Murska Sobota) - the group of the respondent (parents/teachers/experts/students) - the method of research (interview/focus group) - parental role (if applicable) - and a made-up name). In the case of the experts and teachers, we removed their school role to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

doesn't have the will to learn, then nobody can do it instead of him. The most he can do is to help himself. If this doesn't suit him, then he can do it in his own way. But, of course, he is responsible (KP-parents-interview-father-Tone).

On the other hand, the family offers an important support system, which has to assure everything needed for children's best opportunities (also see Ule, 2013). While the great majority of students strongly believe they are 'the creators of their own destiny', parents assure they will do everything to enable the schooling of their child as long as they are ready to study:

./.../ Let him study and then, if he'll like it, there is no problem. I am ready, he can study all his life. I'll finance it, there is no problem. Only to like it and me to see he is doing well. To see, he wants it. ./.../ He'll get all the options, but again it all depends on him (KP-parents-interview-father-Tone).

Parents expect their teenagers to study hard. A protective standpoint in practice thus influences how parents often perceive school obligations as a key (or even the only) responsibility of the child:

She has no other obligations when she comes home. She only has to study. That's all. ./.../ (LJ-parents-interview-father-Milan).

COPING WITH EDUCATIONAL DEMANDS

Child-centred parents invest immense amounts of effort, financial support and time for their children's education and planning of their future. On one hand, they play a protective role but at the same time place a great amount of pressure on their children, burdening them with high demands and plans about their future, and sometimes even relieving them of making these decisions themselves (Ule et al., 2011, 57; Ule, 2013).

In an attempt to cope with the various challenges they encounter during the educational career of their children, parents use a number of strategies (also see Živoder, 2013). The main strategies reported in interviews with students, parents and school staff include support with homework (direct help or supervision), arranging private lessons,⁶ providing technical equipment (computers, mobile phones), increasing children's motivation to study, offering advice in decision making, offering emotional support, making contacts with school,

and making use of support structures at school when needed.

In general, Slovenian parents appear to be overly engaged in their children's school obligations:

I think that nowadays parents meddle in it more than they did in the past. I think past generations had a lot more chances to freely choose... it seems as if parents have taken over everything – from points, grades, to enrolment. ./.../ (LJ-teachers-interview).

./.../ of course we encourage him... in the sense of 'start with this lesson', 'if you want to have this grade you have to study, if you want a better grade you have to learn harder'. It's true we have a lot to do with this grades now he is in 9th grade and he has to strive for points and to either keep the grade or improve it. In this sense, we control the learning procedure as parents. We offer help with some lessons, like maths, sometimes chemistry, and physics, he is not the type for natural sciences, and we also prepare his exercises. His older sister is a maths genius and she helps him. We handle everything within the family ./.../ (LJ-parents-interview-mother-Sonja).

Besides the direct parental involvement in providing this sort of support, the help of older siblings is also substantial. Parents who do not feel competent or are unable to provide help and support by themselves use various other strategies to help a child, e.g. they make an effort to find help in wider social networks (friends, relatives etc.):

You know, if she comes and tells me: 'I have to do this and that but I do not know how to', my boss has two daughters who have finished university. And she goes to them and they help her a little. ./.../ (LJ-parents-interview-father-Milan).
How can I help (my daughter in English lessons) if neither me nor my husband speaks English? (KP-parents-interview-mother-Tatjana).

Parents who place a high level of importance on school performance are strongly motivated to make sure that their children will be able to enrol at good quality schools. Arranging private lessons seems an option when difficulties with grades occur. The social situation of the family in this case plays a smaller role (although empirical data show that the employing of tutors is more common among students attending affluent schools):

⁶ The survey data show that 22.9% of parents included in the survey from Slovenia already employed a private tutor, mainly for mathematics and languages. The four main reasons for employing a private tutor are to help the child catch up with school work (9.4%), the child does not learn from teachers (7.6%), to prepare the child for a test for the next school (5.8%) and because the school does not provide enough help (4.7%). The figures in this case do not seem so high but, on the other hand, more than every fourth student (27.5%) already had a private tutor, which in addition to the combined informal help options of family social network members and the school help options show that both school demands and educational aspirations are high.

I'm worried that she will not do ok in secondary school, but in this case we'll hire private lessons; this can be solved (MS-parents-interview-Danica).

School help options (additional lessons, counselling etc.) do not seem to be regarded as the best help option. While parents and students are satisfied with the help options available at school in general, they had second thoughts about using this support (Žakelj and Švab, 2011). Although parents are informed about the availability of support at school they prefer their children to use it only occasionally, partly due to the fear of a stigma attached to the use of such support. Consequently, school support is not the first option and students instead rely on family and friends when they need help.

DECISION MAKING ON THE FUTURE EDUCATION PATH

The Slovenian primary school system includes a well-developed network of experts (psychologists, social workers, pedagogues) available in each primary school to counsel students regarding school demands and vocational decisions (in the transition from primary to secondary school), yet compared to family and parental support the school experts' role and influence is minor:

No, I haven't discussed with school staff what would be the best option for my son. They offered us this option (KP-parents-interview-mother-Tina).

The school counsels but it does not have the final word. In my experience, with this year's 9th grade. I think the parents did not comply with the recommended options, maybe they did in two cases (MS-teachers-interview).

Vocational counselling in Slovenian primary schools also includes all relevant information regarding the transition to and enrolment in secondary school. The counsellors are mainly school counselling workers but class teachers are involved as well. Students also have the opportunity to visit companies to obtain detailed information regarding various vocations, although these options are limited by the availability of companies in a given region. Nevertheless, despite the well-developed system of vocational counselling, the key decision-making process happens within the family where different options are discussed with parents, siblings and other relatives:

I think in elementary school parents and their notions on the preferred educational path play a decisive role. In second place, there are children's wishes, among other factors additional information is important. But I think the influence of the parents is the biggest (MS-experts-interview).

The majority of parents is strongly involved in the educational trajectories of students either by offering support, conversation and information or by directly guiding their children in their educational transitions. It is common for parents to accompany their children to schools on their open days and inquire about the admission procedures:

Previous generations were more independent in decision making. Now, a lot of them come with parents. ... There's really a lot of pressure and many times I hear children say 'Well, I would like to go to some other school!'; but the parents don't let him/her go (KP-experts-interview).

Some students are aware of the importance of parents' advice and they also admit that parental opinions have an important influence on their decisions:

Yes, my mum advised me to go to pharmaceutical school because she is a nurse and she told me this, and I agreed (LJ-students-interview-Jennifer). I also wanted to go to Ljubljana and I had already searched for a dormitory and a gymnasium which has a drama theatre programme so that I could continue to study it later, but my mother and father said no, and.. /.../ They said to me that I am too little, too young to go away. I know they would worry about me, just. /.../ (MS-students-focus group-Patricija).

Other students believe it was their decision, yet their explanation of the decision-making process points out the importance of the role of the parents or other relatives:

/.../ At the beginning yes, I wanted to enrol in secondary medicine school but then, because I want to become a paediatrician, my father asked people with experience. They advised it is better to go to gymnasium first and later to med faculty because in gymnasium there is a general matura examination but at the secondary med school there is only a vocational matura examination. / Yes (I would prefer to go to secondary med school). Because my education path would be certain, after finishing gymnasium you can enrol in whatever you want.

Interviewer: But who influenced the most about which school you will enrol in?

My decision was most influential. I wanted this from 5th or 6th grade on and the parents had nothing to do with it. They said enrol in what you want... /.../ (KP-ex students-interview-Ana).

Sometimes pressure can also come from other relatives as in the case of Nadal whose grandmother applied pressure for him to enrol in an elite gymnasium:

I would say it was my decision. /.../ I would say my grandparents are 'control freaks'. My mother said to me it is not important which school I will enrol in and that this is completely my decision. My father also said he has no plans for me. But it is true my grandma wanted to encourage me to enrol in Gymnasium Bežigrad because she decided that all three of her children, including my mom, would study there. I am lucky, my father's parents did not give so much pressure, neither did my parents. But anyway I would probably decide the same (he enrolled in the school his grandmother preferred) (LJ-ex students-interview-Nadal).

Parental gate-keeping practices are usually rooted in the belief that education improves one's life chances. Lower educational programmes like vocational programmes are rarely seen as an option. Parents influence the decision making on the basis of their perceptions about the prosperity of a specific vocation or profession. Their scruples about their child's wishes refer to estimations of the possibility of employment, the possibility of living properly on the basis of the economic aspects of the profession and estimations of the suitability of the profession/vocation in terms of the child's character:

He likes small kids very much. And he spends most of his free time with neighbours who have two small kids and he became labile, he started to change about secondary school hanging around the idea to enrol to educational secondary school but we then.... /.../ No, I was not in favour of this. Why? I'll be honest. Each parent wants the best for his/her child but, to work as a teacher, this is one of the hardest professions. Each parent wants his/her child not to suffer so much, but these are obligations not to joke about (MS-parents-interview-mother-Jožica).

In fact, it was like this – we tried to influence his decision a bit. We considered the vocation he would attain. And, according to the current employment situation, with this selection he would have an easier way to find employment after finishing school. /.../ If you go to a four-year secondary school to have an occupation you can find employment with... (KP-parents-interview-mother-Tina).

Finally, children accept parents' arguments as the best (most rational) option:

I would really like to be a photographer, but my parents won't let me be one, saying that this school is not good enough, the salary and this vocation. ... We had a discussion one day and we came to this conclusion (that this school is not ok

for her). ... I was thinking a lot and then decided that they (her parents) are right about that (KP-students-interview-Zvezdica).

To sum up, with their best intentions for their child's future life parents try to influence a child's decision making regarding their education and in the majority of cases have an important indirect (if not direct) role in this process (Živoder, 2013).

PARENTAL ASPIRATIONS REGARDING SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENTS

Parents agree that education is very important for the future life of their children. The survey results show 92.5% of all respondents would like their child to stay in full-time education, and 88.8% believe that they will actually do so. Moreover, 97.1% of all respondents support children in their wishes about their further education and future education. Parents also endeavour hard to improve the motivation of their children to study and achieve good results. For this purpose, some parents discussed the importance of education with their children, and some others offered immediate rewards. Strategies for encouraging students to study hard are not always only positive and may include pressures to meet parents' expectations. The teachers and school experts noted the positive and negative sides of this. Particularly better educated parents have high aspirations for their children. One of the parents (a teacher herself) admitted she is passing on the importance of educational success to her children:

It was only yesterday that I talked with my co-worker. She has two girls and she said she always thought they have to be excellent pupils. And I also share the same perspective or idea. Primary school has to be finished very successfully. I try to hold myself back, but I do not know if I subconsciously gave these signals. Now they are both very competitive and both want to get nothing but A's and I feel a bit bad and as a culprit of it. So, I do not know, I put a burden on them with it (LJ-parents-interview-mother-Ksenija).

An emphasis on the importance of educational success was also common among families which have migrated to Slovenia for economic reasons. They expect their children to work hard and achieve good results at school, mainly to improve their chances of having a better life:

Samra is in 9th grade. I told her: 'Samra, take the book and study, do not become a cleaning lady!' 'Yes, I am studying, I am studying...'. Children are not aware of the importance of education until they reach the age when they become aware it

would have been better for them to study before (LJ-parents-interview-father-Milan).

In this context, vocational programmes are devalued and considered a worse option. A common opinion on vocational programmes is that this option is only chosen by students who based on their school success cannot enrol in a gymnasium:

Today vocational programmes are sparsely selected. Less successful students enrol in vocational schools, but even they are thinking about a gymnasium and continuing studying and I think the vocational status is being devalued. And this is the reason that 75% of students enrol in a gymnasium /.../ (KP-experts-interview).

Due to the low reputation of vocational schools, some students who choose a vocational school hide their decision from their peers in order to avoid stigmatisation. Higher ambitions do not correlate so much with students' desires for their future life and career as much as parents expect:

My mother said to me: 'Enrol in whichever school you want, but I would advise you not to choose a

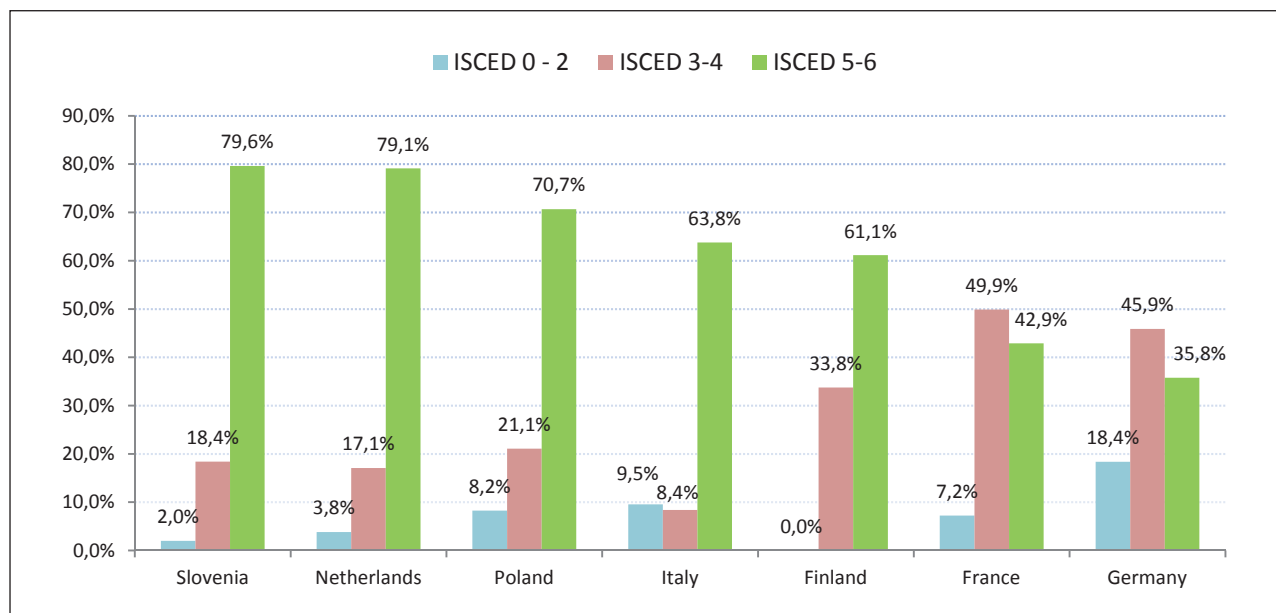
3-year school. Because this is a vocational school and the education you obtain is not so good', she said ... (MS-students-interview-Ronaldo).

It happened many times that a student came to us and said: 'I want to go to vocational school so much, but please you tell this to my parents.' This is an additional problem students encounter. They come here and tell it (KP-experts-interview).

The majority of Slovenian parents included in the survey (66.9%) want their child to achieve the ISCED 5 level of education, the ISCED level 3 is preferred by 18.4% and ISCED 6 by 12.7%. As seen in the figure 1, the expectations of Slovenian parents are the highest among all states included in the survey.⁷

The most common reason parents want their children to achieve the highest education level possible is the perception of education as a way to a job that gives a feeling of accomplishment (25.7%), followed by the belief that a high level of education will ensure a secure job with no risk of unemployment (22.8%). Doing a job that interests them regardless of pay is important for 17.8% of the parents included in the sample. A high income is the most important factor for 16.6% of the parents.

The general perception of finishing a high level of education is that it enables a 'better' life:



Source: McDowell et al., (2012, 87)

Figure 1: Highest level of education that parents would like their child to achieve, by country
Slika 1: Najvišja stopnja dosežene izobrazbe, ki bi si jo starši želeli za svojega otroka, po državah

⁷ The general opinion of society at large in Slovenia is that a higher education is directly connected to a higher income, easier working conditions, better life opportunities etc. With less restricted enrolments in gymnasiums (due to their growing number and the smaller generations entering secondary school), as well as schools that open opportunities to attend a desired university, the pluralisation of university programmes and simultaneous drop in enrolment criteria, tertiary education is today more available than before. Consequently, the state is encountering a growing number of highly educated youth with no job opportunities. Figures indicating the brain drain are rising, but higher education per se remains the aim of a middle-class parent.

.../ Nowadays, each parent wants his/her child to finish university, a faculty, not so much because of the title but for a better life. That's why we want this so much (MS-parents-interview-mother-Jožica).

I would like my children to achieve a university education. Anything more would be even better.

I found out recently, I really have to hold myself back (LJ-parents-interview-mother-Ksenija).

The degree to which the high aspirations of parents are already shared by pupils is evident in the share of primary school pupils wanting to enrol in university, where 69% of the pupils included in the research would like to attend university in the future.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The present article is based on a research project that enables an analysis of complex social contexts and multiple aspects of parental involvement in young people's educational trajectories in Slovenia. We mainly focussed on the role of parents in coping with educational demands and their role in decision making regarding educational trajectories, especially regarding the chosen vocations and schools. By taking account of different points of view (parents, students, school staff and experts), we strove to point out the complex relationship between the main actors directly involved in everyday school practices.

The data reveal several processes that contextualise the parental involvement, but two of them were expressed most clearly. These are the contradictory yet complementary processes of individualisation on one hand and familialisation on the other. The most striking finding is the persistent emphasis on the individual's responsibility regarding education that is present not only among the students who in the majority of cases are convinced that it is only up to them to achieve a good education if only they work hard, but also among the parents. Our results also confirm another side of the process of individualisation, namely that reflected in a high level of confidence in education (Ule, 2013): both parents and students agree that good education is a path to (if not a precondition for) a good future life. In this individualisation of responsibility, both of the key actors, i.e. parents and students, take their parts – and familialisation can be considered one of the effects of their 'shared' responsibility. Namely, the results also confirm the process of familialisation, which is especially seen in the perceptions that coping and decision making in the field of education is primarily a family matter. On the other side, this is also supported by the revealed low trust in school staff. The research did not go into details regarding the reasons for such low trust and so more detailed research is needed to reveal the reasons for this situation. Parents consequently apply a series of strate-

gies to support their children in coping with school demands on an everyday basis and have an important influence on decision making regarding their educational trajectory.

A highly relevant question arises concerning the contexts that influence parental strategies and practices, especially the high level of involvement. Some of them were already mentioned in the conceptual part of the article. Namely, we believe that parental involvement is a consequence of the very demands of the culture of individualism that burdens children as well as their parents. Children are burdened by the idea of self-responsibility for the "reflexive project of the self" (Giddens, 1995) and parents for helping them in achieving this project as successfully as possible. The latter is mediated through discourses of competent parents and attentive parenthood (e.g. Holmer Nadesan, 2002) which means that parents are socially expected to carry out the parental role in the most ideal way possible (i.e. to enable a child to develop all of their potential).

Both processes, i.e. the individualisation of responsibility and familialisation, can be considered as psychological and micro-sociological aspects of the growing social and economic uncertainty and dismantling of the welfare state where competition between individuals is among the key imperatives (Ule, 2013). It is therefore not surprising that parents (and students) attach such importance to education: when unemployment is rising and more and more responsibilities are being transferred from the state to individuals, employability is considered as one of the main goals and education as the most 'effective investment' (e.g. Mencin Čeplak, 2012). Therefore, in the context of the process of individualisation, parental involvement can be seen as a form of adaptation to late modern circumstances where no other alternatives are available.⁸ Parents' protective stance is probably (at least partly) a response to the demands of a highly individualised society and its demands on individuals. As already observed in the "Youth 1998" research, parental support is based on perceptions regarding the vocational and educational career of children that are at a very early stage "an object of calculative judgments and communication" between parents and children (Rener, in Ule et al., 2000, 110).

One of the side-effects of familialisation is a high level of control over a child's everyday life as well as life course (control is exercised, as already mentioned, not only in the private but also in the public sphere via the process of institutionalisation underway especially in school and other educational settings). Edwards and Alldred note that there is a paradox "that it is often children's dependency status within the familialisation and institutionalisation that is regarded as producing this individuated autonomous personhood" (Edwards and Alldred, 2000, 436). However, this creates children's

⁸ For an analysis of the role of individualisation on the level of governance, see Vezovnik, 2013.

dependency, limiting their autonomy. By trying to support young people in coping with the demands of late modernity, parents simultaneously also prevent them from preparing to cope (independently) with such demands in their future life course (Žakelj and Švab, 2011). This is also confirmed by our study as individualism is only present in some aspects, e.g. in self-responsibility, while (the expected) autonomy of the individual (from parents and other social actors) is rarely present in the students' statements (see Žakelj and Švab, 2011). Moreover, we should not overlook the fact that familialisation also means that families are taking over the roles and responsibilities of the welfare state, which (at least partly) contributes to social peace.

Further, a problematic part of the process of individualism is that students, parents and also school staff rarely problematise structural factors as those which influence individual student life, but instead emphasise individual responsibility, individual characteristics and abilities as being crucial for 'success in life' (being able to adjust, to be smart etc.) (Žakelj and Švab, 2011). This places the responsibility solely on individuals and does not question the broader social and economic contexts and, at the same time, it increases individual burdens

caused by imperatives of competitiveness and success (Mencin Čeplak, 2012). In this way, children are directly socialised in the culture of individualism (e.g. via self-responsibility). Familialisation at least partly contributes to making young people passive whose role is only supposed to be able to adjust to whatever conditions that come along (Žakelj and Švab, 2011). This does not mean that young people do not resist parents, school order in particular and social order in general. Nevertheless, one should not ignore the problematic aspects of the individualisation and familialisation processes in their contributions to existing social (and other) inequalities.

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, previous research on young people in Slovenia has already shown the importance of the family (and family support) along with some characteristics of individualism (Ule *et al.* 2000; Ule, 2013). The research "Youth 1998" (Ule *et al.*, 2000) posed a question about the reasons for the familialisation of youth that was on the rise throughout the 1990s, and wondered if this is a phenomenon of young people adjusting to an uncertain reality and events they cannot influence (Ule, in Ule *et al.*, 2000, 12). It is clear from our study that this is even truer for today's generation of young people.

VLOGA STARŠEV V IZOBRAŽEVALNIH POTEH MLADIH LJUDI V SLOVENIJI

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POVZETEK

Na podlagi rezultatov iz kvalitativnega dela raziskave mednarodnega projekta "Governance of educational trajectories in Europe" (Goete) avtorice analizirajo vlogo staršev v spoprijemanju s problemi ter odločanju v zvezi z nadaljnjim izobraževanjem učencev in učenk 9. razreda osnovne šole v Sloveniji. Študija je pokazala na pomembno vlogo, ki jo igrajo starši v spoprijemanju z izobraževalnimi zahtevami in na izobraževalni poti mladih ljudi, kar je tudi v skladu s preteklimi raziskavami. Avtorice skušajo pojasniti širše družbene, politične in kulturne kontekste, ki uokvirjajo vlogo staršev in družine nasploh, pri čemer izpostavljajo dva, na videz nasprotujoča si procesa individualizacije in familializacije. Rezultati raziskave kažejo na zelo poudarjen trend individualizacije v izobraževalnih poteh mladih. Visoka stopnja individualizma je najbolj očitna v dejstvu, da mladi v zelo veliki meri prevzemajo nase odgovornost za lastni uspeh (ali neuspeh) na področju izobraževanja; neposredno pa se vidi v starševskih strategijah v soočanju z izobraževalnimi zahtevami: starši se na primer čutijo visoko odgovorne, da pomagajo otrokom doseči čim boljše izobrazbo. Slednja ugotovitev nas vodi do drugega, na videz nasprotnega procesa, to je familializacije. Rezultati raziskave kažejo visoko stopnjo starševske vpletenosti in podpore v soočanju z izobraževalnimi zahtevami (npr. plačevanje in organiziranje dodatnih učnih ur, nudenje lastne pomoči pri učenju), visoke starševske aspiracije in izdelane strategije pomoči otrokom ter visoko stopnjo vpliva staršev na odločanje mladih glede njihove izobraževalne poti. Ne nazadnje, familializacija je posredno vidna tudi v nizki stopnji zaupanja v šolske eksperte, ko gre za pomoč pri učenju (morebitnih učnih težavah) ter odločanju o izobraževalni poti. Avtorice želijo pokazati, da so različni procesi, ki se na prvi pogled zdijo kontradiktorni, v resnici komplementarni in da je pomembno, da v analizi upoštevamo prav konstelacijo različnih dejavnikov, da bi razkrili kompleksno sliko o vlogi staršev v izobraževalnih poteh mladih.

Ključne besede: vloga staršev, izobraževalni prehodi, odločanje, individualizirana odgovornost

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