

## ***Professional autonomy of elementary school teachers in the second half of the nineteenth century. The case of Slovenia***

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**Abstract:** This article analyses the means and boundaries of the professional autonomy that elementary school teachers enjoyed in the second half of the nineteenth century in the territory of modern-day Slovenia, previously part of the Austrian and Austro-Hungarian Empires. While their work had been regulated in great detail since the Elementary School Act of 1774, which laid down even the contents and methods of teaching to be employed, the subsequent 1869 Act stipulated that teachers could become members of school boards as a means of providing them with an opportunity to influence education policies. Teachers were required to attend teachers' conferences where, among other things, participants discussed successful teaching methods and developed detailed curricula and lesson plans. Teachers expected these changes to bring them greater autonomy, as well as a say in school policies and greater public confidence in their professional authority. This paper contains an analysis of whether or not these expectations were met. Our analysis of school board and teachers' conference reports published in the Slovenian educational press shows that in this period an important shift occurred in the way that teaching effectiveness was ensured and teachers' work supervised. A system was put in place which at the same time facilitated and monitored the implementation of teachers' ideas, and ensured and restricted their professional freedom. There was a significant change in authoritarian techniques, which quickly developed yet still facilitated the growth in teachers' professional authority, as teachers gained power and space to fight the authorities for recognition of their status and ideas.

**Keywords:** professional autonomy; professional authority; elementary school teachers; Slovenia; Austria.

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## 1. Introduction

Is the teacher merely an officer required to follow rules and regulations that prescribe his or her conduct in specific situations in the classroom environment? Or is the teacher an expert in the field of teaching who can freely use his or her expertise in the process of implementing the curriculum developed by others? Or is the teacher perhaps an expert that can autonomously make decisions on the curriculum and can assert influence on educational policies? Today, the first definition of teacher has long been overcome as it has increasingly become clear that teacher's work cannot be defined by a list of correct responses to specific situations that occur in the classroom environment. Various attempts to automate teacher's work have proven harmful to the quality of teaching. Contemporary thinking in education in regards to what means and limitations should apply to teaching mainly focuses on the latter two definitions. Some believe that teachers should not have any more influence on the curriculum than others, or, in other words, their decision-making should be restricted only to teaching methods and techniques; others maintain that teachers are indeed the most competent to make decisions in relation to teaching contents and as such they should play an important role in the development of educational policies (School autonomy in Europe. Policies and measures, 2007; Levels of autonomy and responsibilities of teacher in Europe, 2008).

However, the question of teachers' professional autonomy is not new. It has been fervently discussed on the territory of modern day Slovenia since the latter part of the nineteenth century. Ever since the first Austrian Elementary School Act was enforced in 1774, the prevailing belief was that success of teaching and school itself depended upon teacher's ability to implement and follow prescribed teaching methods. In other words, it was prescribed by law not only what to teach but also how to teach. Theoretically speaking, students all over Austria were supposed to study the same subject at the same time as they used the same textbooks and their teachers applied the same teaching techniques (Melton, 1988, 213)<sup>1</sup>. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, it became clear that teachers had to have a certain level of autonomy in their work as it was not only impossible to prescribe every detail of their work in advance, such prescriptive approach was also detrimental to the quality of teaching. It also became accepted that teachers had to have a level of influence over educational policies.

The third Austrian Elementary School Act of 1869 freed teachers from their obligation of church and organ work<sup>2</sup>, as it stipulated that teachers' wages had to be high enough to support a family. Additionally, a four-year teacher training college was founded and that significantly raised the level of teacher education. Teachers became members of school boards and were thus given an opportunity to influence school policies; they were required to attend teacher conferences where they were

<sup>1</sup> More on Austrian school historiography see for example Engelbrecht (1982-1995).

<sup>2</sup> In some cases it could be said the opposite was true, that is, the sexton was freed of school work. P. Flere's analysis shows some sextons refused teaching and only wanted to do church and organ work. For example, an advertisement from 1850 says: «A man of a good age, well versed in writing, speaking German as well as Slovenian and playing the organ wishes to find work as a sexton and organ player – but not also as a teacher!» (Flere, 1952, p. 5).

expected to discuss the efficacy of various teaching methods and details of the curriculum. Most teachers welcomed the Act as illustrated by their participation in teachers associations and reports in the educational press of the time (Schmidt, 1967). On the territory of Slovenia, there were two teachers associations that were particularly active: the Teachers Association for Štajer from Ljutomer which published *Slovenski učitelj* (Slovenian Teacher) and the Slovenian Teachers Association from Ljubljana that aimed to unite all Slovenian teachers from Kranjska (Carniola), Koroška, Štajerska (Styria) and Primorska through its paper *Učiteljski tovariš* (Teaching Comrade). In the period 1872-1890, *Učiteljski tovariš* urged teachers to respect the new school act but not do more than required as its editorial policy disapproved of the new legislation and the gradual diminishing of the role the Catholic Church played in school<sup>3</sup>. *Slovenski učitelj*, published from December of 1872 to December of 1877, on the other hand, promoted the new school act yet maintained the right to criticise and demanded amendments for items in the act that did not provide teachers with enough freedom to make decisions about their work (*Slovenskim učiteljem*, 1872). On the basis of similar views, another journal, *Popotnik* (Traveller) was founded in 1880.

Changes introduced to the teaching profession by the Elementary School Act of 1869 were based on intentions to improve the standing of the teaching profession in the society and to provide greater professional independence, increase influence over educational policies and enhance public confidence in teachers' professional authority. The aim of this paper is to analyse whether such expectations came to fruition.<sup>4</sup> The key issues are the teacher's role in the curriculum development and adoption; the level of autonomy the teacher had in the classroom, and the views teachers themselves held on opportunities and boundaries of their occupation. On the basis of an analysis that assessed teachers' participation in school boards and teacher conferences, this paper will address the question of whether or not changes introduced by the third Austrian Elementary School Act in 1869 improved public confidence in teachers' professional authority.

## 2. School boards

A system for supervision of schools and teachers was introduced by the first Austrian state law in 1774; it then continued to change along with changes in the administrative structure of the monarchy. However, apart from a few exceptions,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>A consequence of this orientation of the paper and the society was that many teachers left the society and cancelled their subscription (Ostaneč, 1961, p. 141).

<sup>4</sup>This paper is an updated and modified version of analysis published in *Šolska kronika* (Peček, 1996, 1998) and in monograph *Avtonomnost učiteljev nekdanj in sedaj* (Peček, 1998).

<sup>5</sup>Such an exception was the period of the French occupation (1809-1813). The Church supervision over elementary schools was abolished; immediate supervision was taken over by mayors and community representatives while indirect supervision was taken over by army officers. The level of supervision was also improved as higher level schools supervised lower level schools. Some changes were accomplished during the 1848 revolution and the Concordat of 1855. Regional school authorities were set up and supervisors acted as regional school councillors whose job was to provide scientific and pedagogic guidance to elementary schools, secondary schools and grammar schools (Schmidt, 1988, p. 22)..

government school authorities in this period were mainly concerned with administrative and economic matters, such as implementation of school maintenance and teacher support regulations, whereas supervision of educational work was in the domain of church authorities. The Political School Constitution of 1805, for example, stipulated that the teacher was to be supervised by the local priest who had to give his consent to the advancement of individual students and to the granting awards and distinctions for academic achievements. The teacher was not permitted to award final grades without consultation with the priest. The priest monitored educational contents and methods of instruction, students' and teachers' conduct and parents' attitude towards school, and reported to the parish school supervisor. The parish school supervisor was required to monitor the local priest's educational work, the teacher's morality and educational work, and the local authorities' efforts to ensure regular school attendance and provide school maintenance and teacher's wages. During his annual visit, the parish school supervisor had to determine the condition and situation of the school and its teachers and to check on advancement of students. On the same level as parish school supervisory were district offices that were required to ensure that school maintenance and teacher support regulations were implemented. Higher up, on the diocese level, elementary schools were under the authority of the diocese school supervisor who reported to regional authorities. Regional authorities monitored the implementation of educational legislation and provided recommendations and situation reports to the highest educational authority, the Royal Study Committee, for their consideration (For more on this topic see: Schmidt, 1988, Vol. 2, 9, pp. 187-188).

The main improvement of the Elementary School Act of 1869 was that it freed students and teachers from direct interference of the Catholic Church. The work of priests, parish and diocese school supervisors was taken over and broadened by local, district and regional school boards. According to the national law regulating the relationship between school and church, the detailed composition of these boards was left in the domain of regional legislations. This however did not mean that each regional government was free to form school boards as it liked. In accordance with the government draft of the regional school supervision legislation, local school boards had to comprise church representatives (parish priests or clergymen from the religions represented in the local community) who were in charge of religious education; school representatives (teachers), and two to five members from the community. The government did not permit any significant deviations from this model (Melik, 1970, pp. 41-42) as seen in government reactions to proposals submitted by the Kranjska Regional Assembly. The Kranjska government wished to give the clergy more seats and influence on school boards in order to ensure that the influence of the Catholic Church in schools would remain undiminished. The government, however, decidedly rejected such proposals and emphasised it was only willing to approve changes that were not of ideological nature. After heated discussions the Regional Assembly finally accepted the government position.

What did the new supervisory system mean for teachers and the teaching profession? Teachers became school board members. The local school board included the local teacher as its member or the school headmaster if the school

employed several teachers. If the local school board covered several schools, the headmaster of the top school became its member, and if several schools were of the same rank the eldest headmaster became the local school board member. Other headmasters were allowed to attend school board meetings but had the right to participate only on matters concerning their school<sup>6</sup>. The District School Board included two teachers elected by the District Teachers Assembly<sup>7</sup>. There were two teachers representing the teaching profession on the Regional School Board: they were appointed by the Emperor on the Regional Teachers Assembly's proposal<sup>8</sup>.

Such school board structure should provide teachers with much more opportunity to assert their influence over educational policies and to better their own situation. But, as *Slovenski učitelj* pointed out, this was more appearance rather than the actual situation:

It was expected that new school regulations would elevate teachers to a position of independence, but it now seems that the regulators are using us only to their own wretched means. The bodies in which teachers have seats and voice barely have any weight left, they have no significant rights and no regulatory influence over education and the teaching profession (Poglejmo v prihodnost, 1873).

Let us have a closer look at this accusation.

Local school boards were more or less passive. Their task was to represent the school community in all matters relating to school maintenance and legal affairs and especially in discussions regarding buildings and extensions to schools and school property. It was their duty to ensure that school legislation and orders from higher authorities were implemented and adhered to.<sup>9</sup> However, as *Slovenski učitelj* pointed out, local school boards failed to conscientiously fulfil their duties. They were usually chaired by prominent people from the community who were afraid that if they, for example, forced farmers to send their children to school this could affect their relations with farmers and subsequently hurt their business. Also, the position of the local school supervisor was not a very important one. He did not have the authority to do anything on his own but observe and report to the local school board which then reported to the District School Board. There were also problems with priests that wanted to interfere in school matters even though they should only mind

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<sup>6</sup> Members of the local school board were also a Church representative, two to five community representatives and a local school supervisor named by the District School Board.

<sup>7</sup> Members of the District School Board were also a representative of district political authorities, who was the school board's director, a priest, two representatives of the district and the district school supervisor, named by the Minister of Religion and Education.

<sup>8</sup> Members of the regional school board comprised also of the chairman, which was the regional head or deputy, two representatives of the regional committee, reporter for administrative and economic school matters, regional school supervisors, two priests and a representative of the municipal representation.

<sup>9</sup> Amongst other things school lessons had to be defined, teaching and teachers' lives supervised, school discipline and pupils' conduct out of school overseen, teachers helped with their official work, disputes amongst teachers and teachers and the community, etc. (Heinz, 1895, 409).

their own subject, religion. For this reason, *Slovenski učitelj* suggested that teachers should become the local school board chairs as they were the only ones interested in promoting school board activities (Šolska svetovalstva. Krajni šolski svet, 1873). This proposal, however, was not feasible as it would have raised the question of validity of the board as supervising entity.

Issues were also on the District School Board level.<sup>10</sup> Its chair was the district head, the *glavar*, who due to his other engagements did not have much time for school. Municipality representatives were elected by regional committees who had little knowledge of education. School supervisors, appointed by the Minister of Religion and Education on the Regional School Counsellor's recommendation, presented another problem. Their task was to provide advice on didactical and pedagogical matters and to deal with errors they observed in schools. For this reason, as noted by *Slovenski učitelj*, the supervisor was supposed to act as a role model, as somebody who knew the elementary school well and was thus qualified to advise teachers. According to the paper, the best person for this job was a teacher teaching in the elementary school, and not a secondary school teacher, a headmaster, or even a priest, as was often the case<sup>11</sup>. In the paper's opinion, the school supervisor should also chair the District School Board and thus insert some energy into its activities. *Slovenski učitelj* proposed that the supervisor should be elected by teachers and appointed by the Emperor for the period of three years. For his work, the supervisor should be paid wages instead of attending to this along all other responsibilities (Šolska svetovalstva. Okrajni šolski svet, 1873).

Teachers, thus, had their representation on the local and District School Boards but felt that these school boards were not efficient enough, not only due to the abovementioned problems but also because all important educational tasks were assumed by the Regional School Board. The Regional School Board, on the other hand, was becoming increasingly bureaucratic and very slow to attend to matters (Poglejmo v prihodnost, 1873). Its main responsibilities included supervision of schools and kindergartens that were under the authority of District School Boards, teacher training colleges, secondary schools and private schools<sup>12</sup>. In teachers' opinion, the main problem with the Regional School Board was that its membership was over-represented by government officials and under-represented by teachers (Šolska svetovalstva, Deželni šolski svet, 1873). *Slovenski učitelj* was of the view that

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<sup>10</sup> The board's task was to protect teachers and schools in economic and police matters, to fill temporary and help with filling permanent teaching positions, to supervise teachers' work, to facilitate teachers' further education, to run district teachers' assemblies, recognize teachers for their work, supervise local school boards, etc. (For more on this topic see: Heinz, 1895, pp. 421, 423).

<sup>11</sup> There were 11 district school supervisors in Kranjska in 1873. 7 of these were priests, 2 teachers, 1 headmaster of a secondary school, 1 main teacher and the remaining place was free (Šolska svetovalstva. Okrajni šolski svet, 1873).

<sup>12</sup> The board's tasks included supervision over local and District Boards, running teachers' training colleges, certifying headmasters and secondary school teachers, appointments of headmasters and teachers; development and reporting on the curricula, teaching aids and textbooks for secondary, vocational and elementary schools, submit yearly reports on the state of the educational system in the country and to make decisions on the language used for teaching and also on the second language used in the region (Heinz, 1895, pp. 21, 41, 95, 431, 432).



a source of difficulties was also the fact that Regional School Board members did not have first hand experience and understanding of school, its key issues, relationships, weaknesses and teachers' problems. Teachers' representatives appointed to the Regional Board were nominated by the Regional Assembly and teachers had no say in the appointments (Šolska svetovalstva. Okrajni šolski svet, 1873).

### **3. Teacher conferences**

One of the important outcomes of the 1848 revolution was that teachers were for the first time in history allowed to apply new and improved teaching methods at their own discretion. As textbooks were dated and new ones did not appear, they also had the authority to change teaching contents as they felt necessary (Schmidt, 1988, vol. 3, p. 61). Additionally, teachers were permitted to organise teacher conferences. At such meetings, teachers could exchange their experiences on teaching methods and contents, on approaches to discipline, discuss procurement of teaching aids, textbooks and teaching journals, and other matters that could be of benefit to elementary schools<sup>13</sup>.

Initially, the actual topics discussed at such conventions went far beyond the prescribed themes<sup>14</sup>, therefore Minister Thun decreed that teachers were only allowed to convene upon obtaining a permission from the parish school supervisor or his deputy and under the supervisor's leadership. It was also prescribed that criticism of the current educational legislation and school organisation, proposals for changes and issues not directly related to the teaching profession had no place at teacher conferences as they could only stir up emotions (Schmidt, 1988, vol. 3, p. 39). Further developments brought about even more specific and clearly defined regulations for teacher conferences. Parish deans, consistories, regional school authorities and the Minister took the opportunity and started raising questions at conferences related to didactic and disciplinary issues that required teachers to not only discuss but also submit written replies<sup>15</sup>.

A similar pattern for conventions was confirmed by the Elementary School Act of 1869. It prescribed subjects to be taught in school whereas the school order prescribed educational goals. Lesson plans and the main teaching method were not specified but had to be discussed at teacher conferences. In regards to teaching methods the Act stipulated that teachers should adopt those «methods that had been proven by science and experience and approved by a district teacher conference» (Heinz, 1895, p. 145); whereas district and regional school supervisors should «watch out and

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<sup>13</sup> Conferences were to be held once per month and attendance was non obligatory. The diocesan consistory had to collect minutes of these sessions from parish school supervisors and submit them every three months, along with his comments, to regional authorities (For more see: Schmidt, 1988, vol. 3, pp. 36-40).

<sup>14</sup> Teachers demanded an increase in wages which they would not have to collect themselves any longer; the separation of church and school duties; periodic meetings of all Slovenian teachers; better education for new teachers; a pedagogic journal in the Slovenian language; better equipment in schools, new schools, etc.

<sup>15</sup> If a teacher wished to submit an independent report on a topic, he or she had to report to the parish supervisor, get permission and submit the paper for the record. The assemblies still took place during the years of the Concordat but they were infrequent with increasingly lower attendance numbers.

ensure that teachers avoided experimenting and implementing changes to methods» (Heinz, 1895, p. 143). Attendance at district and regional conferences was, according to the Act, mandatory for teachers. The district teacher conference was chaired by the district school supervisor and its purpose was to discuss and consult on education related matters, especially subjects taught in elementary school, teaching methods, teaching aids, introduction of new textbooks and books, school discipline, etc. Every six years there was a conference held for representatives of district conferences under the leadership of the regional school supervisor (Heinz, 1895, pp. 87-93; 185-199).

Paragraph 4 of the Elementary School Act of 1869 stipulated that elementary school curricula was determined by the Minister of Religion and Education but only upon consultation with regional school authorities. Until this was arranged and put into practice, temporary curricula were introduced by a ministerial Decree of 20 August 1870 which also specified school and teaching order for elementary schools<sup>16</sup>. The ministerial Decree laid down only the basic principles for curricula of various elementary school categories; it was then left to regional school authorities to develop standard curricula based on these principles and, further down, to district school authorities to pass detailed curricula for schools under their jurisdiction on the basis of standard curricula and on recommendations of district teacher conferences and upon approval from regional authorities.

But the development of standard curricula proved to be a slow process indeed. The Kranjska Regional School Board in its memorandum of 8 October 1870 for academic year 1870/71 let teachers devise their own curricula and gave District School Boards permission to approve of them so that they could be used in schools. In the following years, no new memorandum followed. Teachers in *Štajerska*, *Koroška* and *Goriška* found themselves in a similar situation.

Many Slovenian teachers might be scratching their heads in an attempt to develop curricula. They do not know how many hours per week or per day they should assign to lessons, and how many hours to allocate to one subject or another as they wish to satisfy the law and yet not to overburden themselves.

*Slovenski učitelj* complained (O zgljednih učnih načrtih za slovenske ljudske šole, 1873). Because of the difficulties this presented to teachers the paper itself provided draft curricula that complied with the current legislation and took into consideration the actual situation in elementary schools on the territory of Slovenia. The prescribed number of lessons per week was split and allocated to individual subjects to suit single-class daylong one-year elementary schools, split (two-class) half-day one-year elementary schools and two-, three- or four-year elementary schools<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> It specified when students had to attend school; in what situations they were allowed to miss school; the duration of the school year, holidays; when students were eligible to stop attending school; educational methods teachers were allowed to use; teachers' responsibilities; teachers assembly; the method of splitting pupils into classes; educational goals of individual subjects; ethics; assessment, teaching aids and also on Schools for Girls Needlework and Housekeeping.

<sup>17</sup> If it was, for example, a three -class eight-year elementary school, the first class was divided into year one and year two, the second class comprised year three, four and five and the third class years six, seven and eight (O zgljednih učnih načrtih za slovenske ljudske šole, 1873).



The Act stimulated lively discussions among teachers also in other aspects. Teachers discussed not only in teacher conferences but also in their associations how to structure study materials; how to teach two-level classes; how to provide instruction; how to use teaching aids and textbooks and what to do if they were not available in the Slovenian language; how to teach the second language of the region, and what the timetable should look like. To what extent teachers' views were taken into consideration depended largely on the school supervisor who chaired the conference. Some supervisors were very autocratic and demanded that teachers do exactly what he told them; others, on the other hand, allowed a general discussion and on its basis made their decisions in cooperation with teachers that then became mandatory for all teachers.

As no standard curricula for elementary school was forthcoming, the Ministry decided to do the job itself. The Ministry developed curricula for various categories of elementary schools and made them public on 18 May 1874. These curricula specified educational outcomes for each subject, the number of hours per week allocated to each subject and the structure of study contents according to pupils' age and school category. It determined the level and the content the pupils had to learn in each subject and each year of elementary school. These curricula could serve as the basis for the standard curricula that regional school authorities were expected to develop and perhaps add practical recommendations on how to implement them. But what really happened?

Following the curricula issued by the Ministry, as known, a special section was founded by the Regional School Board to develop the new curricula for Štajerska.... For better discussion, sections for each subject were elected. These sections had their discussions in special meetings and then reported their findings to the congress. Not many changes were made and the new Štajerska curricula will be indeed very similar to the ones developed by the Ministry (Perva štajerska deželna učiteljska konferenca, 1874. The same also happened elsewhere. For more on this topic see: Učni načerti za Kranjsko, 1875).

The appearance of the new curricula developed by the Ministry invalidated the previous ministerial Decree of 20 August 1870 according to which district school authorities had the right to make decisions on suggestions from district teacher conferences about instruction planning. Only regional school authorities kept the right to make decision about recommendations made by district school authorities. In its explanation, the Ministry referred to the need for uniform instruction in all districts within a region. Thus, district teacher conferences no longer had the authority to make decisions about proposed curricular details. Instead, their role was reduced to relaying information from school inspectors to teachers. This is well illustrated by the following example from a district teacher conference held near Ljubljana, where

Mr. Inspector reported extensively on the new curricula. According to him, in "arithmetic" the Arithmetic I textbook should be used in year one on both levels; in year two level one, pupils should study the whole Arithmetic II and Section I in Arithmetic III, and on level two, Arithmetic II and section II in Arithmetic III.

Mr. Cvek claimed this was not possible. To which Mr Inspector answered that it certainly was possible and that this was what he was going to insist upon as these curricula were approved last year by the Regional Conference. Mr. Kuhar said that everything coming from that Conference was very impractical and if this was indeed what was confirmed by the Conference, an impossible thing was approved. Mr Inspector said the curricula were developed by the Ministry and sent to the Regional Conference to be discussed where they were for the most part approved and accepted. Representatives Mr. B and Mr. G had been present at the Conference, therefore the District Conference had no right to make any changes.... Mr Inspector said the curricula could not be altered in any one point and had to be accepted as such. ... To this Mr Boršnik's said that if the curricula could not be altered all they could do was to confirm it and finish this discussion as it was a waste of time (Dopisi, Iz ljubljanske okolice, 1875).

The disregard of teachers' opinions created dissatisfaction which was further deepened by other issues. One of them, for example, was the lack of teaching aids and textbooks in the Slovenian language. They had to be approved by the Ministry and it was not allowed to use unapproved books, but the Ministry approved only very few books and teaching aids. Therefore, many subjects had to be taught without textbooks and that presented problems to teachers.

Also, teachers were not happy with their obligation to group children by levels. They were required to divide pupils according to the number of years in school rather than according to knowledge levels which was in their opinion a more sensible criterion. Teachers were very much against such strict divisions anyway (See, for example Grebenec, 1875). They believed it was wise to split years into levels in one-, two- or three- year schools but did not see much sense in doing so in multi-year schools (Ali niso nove šolske postave po nekaterih novejših ukazih nekoliko svoje prvotne vrednosti zgubile? 1875).

When the curriculum was broken down to lessons, each lesson was supposed to take 30 minutes. Teachers saw this as another serious problem and believed the new curricula was totally impractical:

I ask of you, what will the children manage to achieve in, for example, half an hour of drawing? We used to have two-hour drawing lessons in the former technical school, even if other subjects lasted only one hour. And now we are only supposed to draw for half an hour in the elementary school? That cannot be practical (Grebenc, 1876).

Another problem were detailed lesson plans which had to be drafted at district teacher conferences and once they were passed all schools in the district or several districts were required to use them, as shown in the following example from a district teacher conference of the Celje, Konjiško and Šmarsko district held on 15 October:

Senior teacher Mr. Lopan reported on detailed lesson plans (Lektionsplänen).

Stressing the importance of planning in everything one undertakes and especially in teaching, Mr. Reporter explained how difficult it was to develop

detailed lesson plans that could apply to all schools in three districts. We learnt this two years ago when we spent hours and hours structuring history and natural sciences contents at the district teacher conference and who of us would claim we got it right for every school? The speaker doubts that this very important task can be completed at this district conference. School conditions at different places are different and this should be considered in the drafting of detailed lesson plans. What use are very well thought out detailed lesson plans if we can not follow them due to local circumstances? (Dopisi. Celje, 1880).

Even more challenging was the timetable in multi-year schools as the same time had to be allocated to different subjects in different years. Timetables, as detailed lesson plans, had to be discussed at district teacher conferences and all teachers in the district had to respect them:

On Wednesdays, when year one studies arithmetic, year two studies natural science and on Fridays it is vice versa. In order to teach natural sciences successfully and in a practical manner visual aids are required, young people should be shown as much as possible in the natural environment. Especially lessons about plants should be held in the school garden so that pupils can see what must be imprinted in their memory. But as the curriculum requires that I teach natural sciences to one year and arithmetic to another at the same time, where am I supposed to be? With the group in the classroom or out in the garden? Whatever I do is not right, I cannot leave any one alone and I cannot teach both at the same time (Grebeneč, 1876).

The Order by the Ministry of Religion and Education of 8 June 1883 regulated that regional school authorities had to review curricula for different types of elementary schools due to changed conditions. This was followed by the ministerial announcement of 10 November 1884 according to which district school supervisors were required to organise special conferences attended by good and experienced elementary school teachers where the selection and structuring of study contents by levels and years were to be discussed. District school authorities had to submit recommendations from these conferences to regional school authorities for confirmation. Regional authorities published reviewed curricula for different types of elementary schools which were then discussed at district conferences and detailed lesson plans were drafted. Again, teachers were told what to teach in each lesson and instructed to rigidly follow the curriculum issued by the District School Board (Dopisi in razne vesti. Iz črnomeljskega okraja, 1899). «However, the teaching method, the structuring of teaching material, to regulate this in accordance with conclusions from local conferences, this imposes restrictions on individual's liberty and personal pedagogical convictions» (Pedagoški paberki. O domačih konferencah, 1906) were complaints voiced in *Popotnik*:

There are too many orders and decrees that take away teachers' freedom in their daily work... Detailed curricula, contents, the number of homework exercises and school exercises are prescribed for the whole year ahead, etc.

For beginners and carefree teachers this surely is of great importance, but the latter often bring about more damage than good with their bullheadedness. Hardworking teachers develop their own curriculum and revise it year after year as they always find something still lacking that can in accordance with their experience be improved. Teaching always in the same way and using the same pattern is too dry and boring for both the teacher and the pupil. Following this path, we teachers can never reach the heights of our profession; this path leads to regression rather than progression! ... A wise educational administration should not be satisfied with merely issuing orders but should instead strive to motivate teachers to work independently in their profession; ... A teacher's awareness of his professional duty and of his work will be of much more use than all school supervision bodies and their formalities! (O preobilnem uradnem pisanji, 1891).

As articles in *Popotnik* and *Učiteljski tovariš* show, teachers were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the way in which it was prescribed what they were allowed to teach and for how long, but above all they resented having their teaching method prescribed:

There is no doubt the teacher will have to decide on one method. It is only natural that this will be the method the teacher is most comfortable with and with which he hopes to achieve the most. And it is very likely the teacher will achieve best results using this selected method as it is the one that will allow him to enjoy his work. To prescribe the work method is a thankless and dishonourable task. A free hand works best. Bureaucracy should never intervene as far as prescribing even the method that should be used in all schools (Přibil, 1900).

Teachers started to see that the government through its regulations was increasingly making their positions similar to those of public servants whose only duty was to conscientiously follow rules and regulations. They voiced their concerns by pointing out the diversity of pupils and teachers and varying circumstances in different school environments where following a predetermined set of rules was neither possible nor beneficial to the teaching profession. They claimed the government did not trust them enough, it was depriving them of their professional authority and of their desire to conscientiously attend to their duties. (Fiedler, 1901; Ali naše slovenske šole kaj napredujejo?, 1877; Ali niso nove šolske postavbe po nekaterih novejših ukazih nekoliko svoje prvotne vrednosti zgubile?, 1875). Or, as *Popotnik* in 1891 claimed:

If the teacher is allowed some freedom in his work, at least to the extent where he is responsible for what he does or does not do (the teacher may make mistakes but will eventually find the right way to achieve the desired results), then this can only be beneficial. The teacher's awareness of his professional duty, of his work will be of more use than all of the school supervision bodies and their formalities! (O preobilnem uradnem pisanji, 1891).

## 4. Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis presented above, it can be concluded that teacher's autonomy was, despite opportunities to participate in the decision-making process, very limited. Through their representatives teachers had the opportunity to play a role in school boards but this did not give them much influence over school policies. They had the right to discuss teaching methods and lesson plans at teacher conferences; however, it seems this right was reduced to mere attendance and being told of decisions made at higher levels of authority. It was claimed as early as in 1873 that teacher conferences had «no real authority, no authority to decide on anything that might be beneficial to the teaching profession and schools as all decisions depended on higher school authorities» (Poglejmo v prihodnost, 1873). The decision-making process related to detailed curricula only confirmed this situation. Reports from teacher conferences and teacher associations following the passing of the third national Elementary School Act show that teachers were very enthusiastic about making improvements in the quality of educational processes in schools; however, by the end of the nineteenth century, there is also apparent a significant level of resignation and anger as they realised that the government was attempting to disable teachers using their own agreements that had to be accepted at teacher conferences and that their work was increasingly regulated and prescribed.

The above analysis also shows that an important change in quality assurance and supervision of teachers took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. All educational work had been regulated in great detail by law ever since the first Elementary School Act was enforced in 1774 as it did not only set the formal and legal boundaries of school activities but also extended its influence to the professional level by determining the contents as well as methods of teaching. In contrast, the third Elementary School Act of 1869 did not lay down detailed curricula or teaching methods but instead tried to engage teachers through teachers' conferences and school boards in order to ensure better performance. This newly established system of prescribing teachers' work took teachers' desire to be autonomous into consideration; on the other hand, however, consideration of teachers' desires was curbed to reflect the reality. A system was put in place that encouraged but also bound teachers to perform and meet expectations related to the elementary school educational system; it was a system that at the same time supported and supervised teachers' ideas and ensured but also restricted their professional freedom<sup>18</sup>. Or, to quote Servan: there was a realisation that «a stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas» (Servan in Foucault, 1984, 101-102). In this sense it could be said that, drawing on the M. Foucault's analysis, a modification of power techniques

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<sup>18</sup> This theses is further confirmed by Protner (2014), who analysed herbartianism and its consequences for education in the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Slovenia. According to his research, «the teachings of formal steps has its flaws, but the negative image which follows these teachings until today has mainly been shaped by supervisors and is firmly connected to the bureaucratisation of pedagogy performed in Kranjska by school authorities. Formal steps in their hands turned into a means for state control over the execution of lessons and prevented teachers from performing their work autonomously» (Protner, 2014, p. 76).

occurred which multiplied and became even more effective through an attempt to influence the teaching profession not only by orders and regulations but also by shaping teachers' ideas. However, this is only part of the story. It is not possible to implement a work plan that counts on supervision alone. Even though it can be said that the Elementary School Act of 1869 introduced a new method to supervise teachers' work, it can also not be denied that this new method facilitated growth in teachers' professional authority, that it provided teachers with power and space to fight for their beliefs and ideas with authorities.

The above analysis demonstrates that even though the boundaries of teachers' professional autonomy were still narrow during this period there was also an increased awareness among teachers that a certain degree of autonomy and trust in their professional authority were essential to their work and that overly regimented routine and prescription diminished their performance. It can be said that the new method of supervision and influence exerted over teachers' work stimulated their awareness of teachers' professional authority, of the fact that they were the experts in the field of education and that they possessed enough knowledge to have a say in education: that they were capable of making their own decisions not only in the classroom but also in school politics. Thus, this paper manifests that teachers' professional authority does not depend solely on teachers' awareness of its existence but also upon their insistence on its implementation.

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