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WALDORF SCHOOL. EX POST FACTO CASE STUDY: THE RECONSTRUCTION OF EDUCATIONAL BIOGRAPHIES OF CHILDREN OF ONE FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

The Waldorf school has existed for more than a hundred years. There are over a thousand of Waldorf schools around the world. Due to its pedagogical and didactic features and the ideas of the founder Rudolf Steiner, it is intriguing, both for parents and (non)experts. Since this is an alternative free school, it is epistemologically interesting to use a qualitative approach in reconstructing the biographies of adult former students of the Waldorf school. Therefore, the aim of the qualitative ex post facto research of the case study was to examine and understand the role that the Waldorf school played on the later formal education and lifestyle of former students, i.e., four adult siblings from one family¹. It is evident that the Waldorf school has an impact on later education in state schools as well as the lifestyle of former adult students. However, one should not consider it superior nor inferior to other alternative or state schools. Therefore, it is justified to say that the Waldorf school, in its hundred years of existence, has been positively evaluated in practice. The established perspective of educational sciences which claims that there is no such thing as the best school and that school is powerful, but not omnipotent verifies the aforementioned statement. This paper presents and discusses the theoretical premises and results of the case study.

Key words: education, qualitative methodology, reform pedagogy, Rudolf Steiner, Waldorf pedagogy.

¹ This paper is based on the results of the empirical research conducted by Herenčić (2021).

INTRODUCTION

The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century represented a time of changes and the creation of innovative educational ideas (Bartz, 2018; Klassen et al., 1990; Oelkers, 2010; Röhrs, 1980; Seyfarth-Stubenrauch & Skiera, 1996a, 1996b; Skiera, 2010). Based on the inspiring ideas of Johann Amos Comenius (1592-1670), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Friedrich Wilhelm, August Fröbel (1782-1852) and Lav Nikolajević Tolstoy (1828-1910), there is a departure from Herbartism and the established class-subject-hour system of schooling (Batinić, 2014; Topolovčan, 2023). Admittedly, Herbart also represented the reform and new school of his time (Higy-Mandić, 1934; Topolovčan, 2023). It was only his followers Wilhelm Rein (1847-1929) and Tuiskon Ziller (1817-1882) who completely formalized the teaching and consolidated the class-subject-hour system and what we now consider Herbartism. The changes in education at that time were a consequence of social, cultural, economic, scientific, and political circumstances of that time (Batinić, 2014). That also caused a departure from the class-subject-hour system, intellectualist school, rigid curricula, one-way authoritative communication in classes, undemocratic classroom climate and evaluation of student repetition of facts. The main idea was to overcome the rigid class-subject-hour system with project-based and integrated teaching focused on the student, learning outside the classroom in laboratories, gardens, workshops, etc. The emphasis was placed on flexible curriculum, holistic child development, learning using one's own head, heart, and hands, as well as a democratic climate, two-way class communication and (self)evaluation of holistic student achievement (Topolovčan, 2023).

These pedagogical and didactic innovations are known as “*reform pedagogy*” in Germany and the German-speaking area (German: Reformpädagogik), *Progressive education* in the USA and the Anglo-Saxon speaking area (also *New education*), *Radical school/education* in England, while in France it was known as *Education nouvelle* and *Ecole active* (Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2006; Oelkers, 2004). Admittedly, there are certain differences between what was meant by reform pedagogy on European soil and progressive education in the USA (Hopmann 2009). A “new school” appears, while all the previous traditional ones in the spirit of Herbartism were considered “old school”. Reform pedagogy did not emerge from school practice and pedagogical theory, but from criticism, more precisely, criticism of culture (Oelkers, 2004), and thus criticism of the society, politics and economy of the time. As stated by contemporaries (Filipović, 1938; Higy-Mandić, 1934; Pataki, 1938), reform pedagogy received a strong

impulse by new scientific knowledge of the then young science of psychology. An important contribution to the development of the new school was made by the *New Education Fellowship* and the conference of this society held between the two world wars of the last century (1921-1936) (Brehony, 2004).

Advanced teachers such as John Dewey, Alexander S. Neill, Maria Montessori, Georg Kerschensteiner, Hugo Gaudig, Peter Petersen, Celestin Freinet, Jean-Ovide Decroly, Charlton Washburn, Helen Parkhurst, Martin Wagenschein, Cornelis Boeke and others particularly stood out at that time (Bartz, 2018; Jakopović, 1984; Röhrs, 1980; Skiera, 2010). Innovative didactic concepts and schools were formed, such as the Dalton-plan by Parkhurst, spontaneous work experience by Kerschensteiner, free spiritual work by Gaudig, Winnetka-plan by Washburn, Montessori school and method, the free development of students by Litt, the free school by Tolstoy, the movement for artistic education by Avenarius and Lichtwark, free groups by Cousinet, active school by Ferrier, free working groups by Ficker, pedagogy by Freinet, Jena-plan by Petersen, school tailored to students by Claparede, etc. (Topolovčan, 2023). In Croatia, advanced teachers of the time were familiar with the worlds' educational innovations, which they then studied and applied in practice (Higy-Mandić, 1934; Pataki, 1938; Stein-Ehrlich, 1934; Trstenjak, 1908).

During the first decades of the 20th century, in the momentum of reform pedagogy, Rudolf Steiner devised an original concept of school in the form of Waldorf school. Like most reform concepts, Waldorf schools are still active today. During the past hundred years, but also in recent times, Steiner's pedagogy and other avant-garde ideas have intrigued many parents and experts. There are over a thousand Waldorf (primary and secondary) schools in the world (Doutlik, 2014; Paschen, 2014). The first primary Waldorf school in Croatia was founded in 1993 (Matijević, 2021). Waldorf school is one of the famous and intriguing alternative free schools of today (Dubovicki & Topolovčan, 2020; Paschen, 2014; Rawson, 2019; Richter, 2019; Schieren, 2016).

RUDOLF STEINER'S PEDAGOGY AND THE DIDACTIC-METHODICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WALDORF SCHOOL

Rudolf Steiner is the founder of the Waldorf school and pedagogy. It is difficult to interpret the Waldorf school and its didactic-methodical, curriculum and pedagogical characteristics without understanding the character and works of Rudolf Steiner, as well as the anthroposophy he founded. That is why it is

justified to point out some data belonging to his biography and anthroposophy (Carlgren, 1990; Matijević, 2001; Seitz & Hallwachs, 2011). Steiner was born at the end of February 1861 in Donji Kraljevac in Međimurje, Croatia, then part of Austria-Hungary. He was the eldest of three children. His father worked as a clerk for the Austro-Hungarian Railway. He finished high school in Vienna, where he studied biology, chemistry, and physics. At the same time, he was interested in philosophy and Goethe's ideas. He received his PhD in 1891. He also worked as a private teacher. From 1899 to 1904, he was a teacher at the "School for Workers' Education". He was also the editor of the culture magazine "Magazin für Literatur". At the same time, he developed an interest in spiritual experiences. In the early 1900s, he began giving lectures where he carefully presented his psychic experiences. He was a member of the "Giordano Bruno" society. As a member of the theosophical society, he gave lectures, and around 1913 he resigned from it and founded anthroposophy. Around 1919, he began giving socially engaged lectures for workers. In 1919, he founded the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart, Germany. It was founded as part of the "Waldorf-Astoria" cigarette factory for the children of workers at the request of the employees and with the support of its owner Emil Molt. Steiner dealt with various fields, from pedagogy to biodynamics, philosophy, medicine, art and architecture and with an impressive bibliography. He designed and supervised the construction of the wooden Goetheanum in Dornach, which burned down in 1922. Later, he designed a second Goetheanum made of concrete. The new Goetheanum was completed after Steiner's death on March 30, 1925 in Dornach, Switzerland (Carlgren, 1990; Matijević, 2001; Seitz & Hallwachs, 2011).

Anthroposophy is the science of man, spirit, and soul (Gk. *antrophos* = man, *sophia* = wisdom). Anthroposophy begins where the natural-scientific explanation ends (Matijević, 2001). According to anthroposophy, man is made of three elements: body, spirit, and soul, while the human being consists of four parts: physical body, ether-body, astral body and I (ego) (Steiner, 1990). Karma, reincarnation and seven-year life cycles are especially important parts of anthroposophy. Until birth, the child is surrounded by a living body. With birth, a physical (etheric) body develops. The child leaves the etheric body around the age of seven when the permanent teeth erupt, while the astral body is released at puberty around the age of fourteen (Steiner, 1990). Therefore, anthroposophy is about the triple birth of man (Matijević, 2001). Education based on Waldorf pedagogy is in accordance with the mentioned life cycles and rhythms. Steiner was spiritually imbued with the Christian religion, which is noticeable, but not dominant in his school (Carlgren, 1990).

All Waldorf schools are free schools, which means that the state is not their founder and they do not follow the state's national curriculum. They have the status of private schools founded by communities of teachers, parents and other social stakeholders. They are known for not having a principal (Paschen, 2014). They are co-financed by the state, in some cases up to 80%, while the rest is financed through donations from parents and friends of Waldorf pedagogy (Matijević, 2001). After completing a comprehensive primary Waldorf school (which is, for example, 12 years of schooling in Germany), students can also attend the thirteenth year as a preparation for university entrance (Matijević, 2001). Waldorf teachers are quite autonomous, therefore the number of hours in the curriculum varies. The Waldorf school is focused on manual work and artistic education.

Waldorf pedagogy places emphasis on the holistic development of the child by including as many senses and experiences as possible in the process of learning with the head, heart, and hands (Doutlik, 2015). It represents student-centred teaching which aims on the child's individualized upbringing in a community with a balanced development of intellectual, physical, and emotional predispositions (Doutlik, 2015). The emphasis is on raising a versatile, self-reliant, and creative person (Carlgren, 1990; Doutlik, 2015). An important didactic feature of the Waldorf school is main lesson by epochs, where students holistically study one teaching problem or content every day in a 100-minute block of time for three to four weeks (Glöckler & Goebel, 1990; Seitz & Hallwachs, 2011). After getting to know this continued content well enough, they move on to dealing with new ones in the main lesson by epoch. Waldorf pedagogy places a significant importance on the rhythm of changes in the main, subject and practical lessons, changes in the intellectual and physical, group and individual, as well as tense and relaxing student activities. The five-part structure of the rhythmic part, repetition, and the main, written, and narrative part is rhythmically alternated in the lessons by epochs (Doutlik, 2015).

Waldorf schools have full-day classes. Daily classes start around 8 a.m. and last until around 3 p.m. depending on the students. The first block of 100 minutes is taken by the lesson by epochs (main lesson). It is then followed by the second block, most often language or mathematics lessons lasting about 45 minutes. A block of about 50 minutes of artistic activities or religion follows. The fourth block lasts about 60 minutes and is focused on artistic content, often in the form of lessons by epochs. Older students also have a block of eurythmy or similar teaching content. A daily lunch is organized between the blocks (Matijević, 2001). A Waldorf school designs specific didactic-methodical arrangements for the teaching of certain teaching contents, such as learning mathematics

(arithmetic) through movement, learning initial writing, learning units of measurement, drawing maps in Geography classes, or performing experiments in Physics and Chemistry classes (Doutlik, 2015, p. 107). Such didactic-methodical arrangements have some features of what is today labelled as constructivist teaching (Topolovčan, 2023). Waldorf school offers not only didactic teaching arrangements, but also a complete conception of the school with an appropriate curriculum, which includes the educational goals of teaching, teaching content, didactic-methodical teaching arrangements, a method of evaluation, planning of school cooperation with the social community, and teacher training. Thus, in German Waldorf schools during the twelve-year educational process, the following subjects/areas are covered: Main lessons, English language, French language, Eurythmy, Gymnastics, Singing, Instruments and music, Handcrafts, Book binding, Crafts, Gardening, Latin language, Greek language, Geometric jobs, Spinning, Technologies, First aid, Shorthand, Religion (Matijević, 2001, p. 65). In a Waldorf school, one teacher organizes classes for all subjects up to the eighth grade, after which subject experts are also involved. The class teacher is also a subject expert for another teaching subject/area. This is significant because of the rhythmic periods according to anthroposophy since the child's phase of development from the age of 7 to 14 is quite specific. That is why one teacher teaches all subjects in personal concentration. That is important because it gives the teacher the opportunity to get to know his or her students very well, and it is also beneficial for the students' development to have the authority and trust of an adult (Carlgren, 1990; Seitz & Hallwachs, 2011).

There is a big emphasis on artistic education, which is nurtured since the first grade, and the curriculum is imbued with the activities of playing music, singing, eurythmy, dramatic expression and plastic shaping, as well as drawing and painting, which are also elements of everyday main lessons (Carlgren, 1990; Matijević, 2001; Seitz & Hallwachs, 2011). Steiner founded eurythmy as an art of movement that expresses speech and music, which is the hallmark of Waldorf school. There are three types of eurythmy: artistic, pedagogical and health related (Glöckler & Goebel, 1990). That is why every Waldorf school has several orchestras as well as stage shows at the end of the school year, and sometimes monthly. Physical exercise is also important, however not in the form of competitions, but cooperation, solidarity, and togetherness (Glöckler & Goebel, 1990). Emphasis is also placed on manual working education, crafts and working with hands, therefore every school has workshops where students work with wood, metal or clay and thus make aesthetically shaped useful objects (design). The development of motor skills is also included, so students learn to

knit wool from the first grade, which contributes to the development of cognitive skills. Schools often have a bread oven for preparing bread, a greenhouse and a garden for growing fruits and vegetables, and a hall for eurythmy (Matijević, 2001). Steiner's pedagogy expresses the importance of temperaments (sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic, choleric) (Rittelmeyer, 2010; Seitz & Hallwachs, 2011).

Steiner's pedagogy is very well known for emphasizing the deviation from the use of teaching audio, visual, and audio-visual, as well as digital media and new technologies, unless they are the subject of teaching (Doutlik, 2015). The reason for this is the intention that a child learns through his own senses and communication with the teacher in direct contact with the real world, and not through his image mediated by the media (Doutlik, 2015). Textbooks are also not used as printed teaching material; students learn in the natural reality or from parts of the natural reality brought to school. Upon learning, they systematically write down and draw in their own notebook, which takes on the role of a personal textbook (Matijević, 2001). Waldorf pedagogy places importance on talking and reading texts and their content chronologically divided into classes: 1. fairy tales, 2. fables and legends, 3. Old Testament, 4. Norse mythology, 5. Greek mythology, 6. Roman history, 7. discoveries of ancient peoples and 8. biographies (Matijević, 2001, p. 64). Two foreign languages are taught from the first grade. In Waldorf schools, there is no repetition of classes or numerical evaluation. If the student has learning difficulties, therapeutic eurythmy is organized for him. The contribution of the absence of numerical and emphasis on descriptive assessment, i.e., written final reports at the end of the academic year, lies in the increased student intrinsic motivation and learning without fear.

Waldorf school is a dynamic social organism consisting of parents, teachers and students, therefore the cooperation between parents and teachers is essential for the shared education of students (Matijević, 2001). That is why parents have an important place in the school, but cooperation is specific for each individual school (Doutlik, 2014). Cooperation between parents and teachers manifests itself in the form of lectures for parents, joint professional conferences of teachers and parents, help from parents at school, organization of field trips, work activities of parents at school, participation of parents in school management, monthly and annual school ceremonies and teacher's visits to parents' homes (Matijević, 2001, p. 72). Parents, regardless of demographic characteristics, have a positive opinion about cooperation with teachers and the school (Doutlik, 2014). That is a clear sign that Waldorf school represents a coherent pedagogical concept. Teachers and their education and training are also important. Teachers complete special training for teaching in Waldorf schools. After teaching a class for eight years,

teachers usually take a one-year leave of absence for professional development. All teachers of a school represent a conference or collective of teachers, while the school also has a presidency of the school council made up of teachers and parents who manage the school's financial issues. The teachers' conference meets once a week to discuss pedagogical aspects of teaching and management issues of the school (Matijević, 2001).

Seeing that this is a free and alternative school determined by a fundamentally different philosophy and anthropology of education, positivist and experimental research comparing Waldorf and state or other alternative schools have low scientific and epistemological value (Dubovicki & Topolovčan, 2020). If we compare them according to the standards of state schools, the educational achievements of students of alternative and free schools, and therefore of Waldorf schools, will be below average if not miserable. Likewise, the educational achievements of state school students will be weak if evaluated by the criteria of alternative schools (Matijević, 2001). Axiologically, ontologically and epistemologically, it is appropriate to research education in Waldorf schools with qualitative tools of understanding (German: *verstehen*) and naturalistic, phenomenological, and ethnographic case study approaches (Dubovicki & Topolovčan, 2020). Few biographical studies of the later lives of former adult students of Waldorf schools proved to be particularly significant (e.g. Bartz & Randoll, 2007; Hofman et al., 1981; Idel, 2007). Regarding the intriguing question of lifestyle, professional success and private life benefits, one research indicates that former students of Waldorf schools achieve average to above-average success in life, half of them complete higher education, and are at a slightly lower risk of certain diseases. Critical thinking, social responsibility, improved self-confidence, a developed sense of culture, lifelong learning and quality everyday life are highlighted as advantages of the Waldorf school in later life. The disadvantages of the Waldorf school are visible in the lack of worldliness and the low efficiency of convergent performances (Bartz & Randoll, 2007; Hofman et al., 1981; Paschen, 2014). Waldorf school students achieve satisfactory results on state final exams, which indicates that such education is neither better nor worse than the one achieved in public schools. Therefore, one can reason that the Waldorf school has been positively evaluated in practice during its hundred years of existence (Paschen, 2014). In the perspective of such research, it is scientifically intriguing to study the life and educational biographies of former students of Waldorf schools in Croatia, especially if several children (siblings) from one family attended such a school, considering that the Waldorf school has been existing in Croatia for three decades (Matijević, 2021).

THE METHODOLOGY OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The aim of the research was to understand the role of Waldorf education in the later formal education and lifestyle of four siblings of one family, all of them former students of the Waldorf school, and today adults. Likewise, the goal of the research was to understand and reconstruct the educational experiences of four siblings in an elementary Waldorf school and to compare them with the experiences of attending a state school and the adjustments that they had to go through after an alternative free school. Therefore, an empirical, non-experimental, *ex post facto* (Cohen et al., 2018) qualitative research was conducted in the form of a case study of children of one family (Yin, 2018) with an emphasis on a naturalistic, ethnographic and phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

The study consisted of four participants (siblings), members of a family from Croatia. To be more precise, four out of five children of one family, today adults, living independent lives. In addition to five children (one of five children did not attend Waldorf school), this family consists of living parents, i.e., father and mother. Three participants are male, and one is female. Linda is a specialist in communication management according to her educational qualification and works in her own business for services and production, primarily as a photographer. She attended the second, third, fourth and fifth grade of a Waldorf school, in the period of four years. Ivan is an engineer by profession, and currently works as a researcher at a university. He attended the Waldorf school for seven years, i.e., all grades except the fourth grade. Slaven has a master's degree in agroecology according to his educational qualification, and currently works as a warehouse worker. He attended the Waldorf school for six years, i.e., from the first to the sixth grade of elementary school. Mateo is a mechatronics technician by profession, and now works in the film industry. He was in the Waldorf school for four years, from the first to the fourth grade.

Methods and Procedure of Data Collection and Analysis

The data in this research was collected through a semi-structured interview with twenty-nine common open-ended questions. The interview questions were: How old are you? What is your profession and what are you currently

doing? How long did you attend a Waldorf school? What is your favourite memory from the Waldorf School? What is a bad memory from the Waldorf school? How was it for you to enrol in a new school? What was the most difficult thing for you to adapt to, for example constantly different professors, grades, amount of content, social relations, etc. What did you adapt to most easily in the new school? Were the teachers understanding in the new school/What was the relationship with the teachers like? What was the relationship with the students in the class like? Did they accept you? Has anyone teased you about Waldorf school? Can you briefly compare in general the students from both schools, for example intergenerational relations, male-female relations, etc. What was the relationship between teachers/professors and parents in both schools? Was it unusual for you not to learn in stages, which way do you think is better? At the Waldorf school, you make your own notebooks and textbooks, how was your adjustment to ready-made textbooks? Adjusting to the way and the amount of homework in a new school? What is your opinion on handmade work, should it be introduced in public schools? What was the adjustment to educational subjects in the state school like? Where did you have more free time? Which school pays more attention to children's and teacher's feelings? Describe that. Were you treated the same upon enrolling into high school? Did you stay in touch with your friends from the Waldorf school? If not, why not? Have you stayed in touch with your friends from the public school? If not, why not? What did you miss the most after the Waldorf school? Do you think that you are a more creative person because of the Waldorf school? What do you think should change in the state school, and what in the Waldorf school? Do you think that the Waldorf school is suited for all children? Would you enrol your child in a Waldorf school given your knowledge and experience? What are some life lessons that you learned at and because of the Waldorf school, and that you think you wouldn't have learned otherwise?

The research was conducted in 2021. All respondents gave consent to participate in this research. The interviews were conducted with each participant individually and were recorded with a voice recorder. They were then transcribed, and the participants' answers were grouped according to each question, which was also the unit of hermeneutic content analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All four siblings successfully completed elementary (Waldorf) school. At the same time, some successfully transferred from the Waldorf school to the state elementary school. Then they successfully enrolled and completed upper secondary education. Three of the four siblings successfully enrolled and completed higher education. The variety of successfully completed levels of upper secondary and higher education and the socioeconomic situation of the participants in this case study, after education in an elementary Waldorf school, confirms the conclusions of previous studies, which state that alternative schools are neither better nor worse than state schools (Bartz & Randoll, 2007; Hofman et al., 1981). Participants mentioned the experience and feeling of freedom, playing in the yard, and woodworking as their favourite memories from the Waldorf school. The participants stated that they missed the school playground, friends, feeling of freedom and understanding the most after leaving their Waldorf school, while one participant stated that he passionately wanted to leave Waldorf schools and that he did not miss anything after it. These statements confirm the theoretical characteristics of the pedagogical concept of the Waldorf school, which strives for freedom, togetherness, creativity, and solidarity (Doutlik, 2015; Matijević, 2001). However, as bad memories, they mentioned the bus transportation from a distant house to the school. The reason for that bad memory is the atmosphere on the bus because the other children considered them different since they were educated in an alternative school. Also, as an unpleasant memory from the Waldorf school, the participants mentioned the fear of public speaking, as well as the teacher.

The participants differ in opinion regarding the enrolment in a state school. Linda and Ivan, as two older siblings, stated that it had been complicated for them to get used to classes because of the textbooks, as well as the amount and methods of teaching content.

“It was weird for me to enrol in a state school in my fourth grade of elementary school because I was not accustomed to textbooks and answer boxes”. (Ivan)

The younger siblings stated that they got used to different learning more quickly. They also had divided feelings about adapting to a new social environment and communication. Ivan and Mateo thus indicated that it had been more difficult for them to fit in with their new colleagues. They stated that the reason for this lay in the fact that state school students had a fundamentally different mentality than Waldorf students. On the other hand, Slaven and Linda

were well accepted among their new colleagues. The ride to school was the least awkward thing to adapt to for all participants. The majority of them adapted to new social relations and communication. Admittedly, the change in the school environment in the fourth grade was too difficult for Ivan, so he asked his parents to re-enrol him in a Waldorf school. He explained that the reason for that had been different relationships, as well as the fact that he believed that the students and the teacher in the state school were dishonest. Another reason for returning to Waldorf school was a different approach and methods of learning and teaching. Ivan's parents re-enrolled him in a Waldorf school. Ivan was, therefore, the only one of the four participants to finish the eighth grade of a Waldorf school. That shows that the Waldorf school practices a pedagogy based on a fundamentally different philosophy and anthropology of education than the state school, i.e., the school is fundamentally different determined by values than a state school (Carlgren, 1990; Seitz & Hallwachs, 2011).

Furthermore, all four siblings stated that other children had not been teasing them because of the Waldorf school. Everyone except Ivan was well received in the unfamiliar environment at the state school. The older siblings, Ivan and Linda pointed to significant distinctions in educations comparing the students of both schools. They both claimed that public school students were more competitive and wanted to present themselves as better than others (standing out in grades, material goods, social relations, etc.), in contrast to the Waldorf school, where cooperation and relaxation in communication between children dominates. On the other hand, Mateo and Slaven say that children were equal in character in both types of schools.

"It was mostly the same because we are all people. I did not notice a difference. We socialized more with each other in the state school than in the Waldorf school, because in the Waldorf school we were all from various parts of the city, so we saw each other much less. There were also fewer people, so you're in good terms with fewer people. In the end, I had four friends because at the end of the sixth grade there were not even fifteen of us in the class." (Slaven)

"It was pretty much the same in both schools. The Waldorf school has one class per generation and in the larger space of the school's surface, so we didn't have that much interaction except during transportation in the morning and in the afternoon when you went on the school bus - that was the only interaction between generations. Everyone knows everyone because there are many siblings and I had Ivan and Slaven who were in the same school, so you know everybody. In the state school, that relationship was a

bit different because there are more classes and more people, and the area is smaller and you don't have as much interaction because those from first to fourth grades are separate and from fifth to eight are in interaction, but again, there are shifts where 5th and 7th grade are in one rotation, and 6th and 8th grade in another, so you can see some students merely in passing, and you knew the ones with whom you were in the same shift" (Mateo)

They also pointed out that there had been more classes and students in the state school, which resulted in a reduced possibility of better acquaintance and good communication with all colleagues in the school. All four participants agreed that the relationship and communication with teachers in a Waldorf school was closer than in a state school. Likewise, everyone agreed that the relationship between teachers and parents in a Waldorf school was richer in terms of communication than in a state school. These statements confirm that didactic-methodical learning arrangements and classroom climate as well as the role of teachers and parents in Waldorf schools are different from other schools (Carlgren, 1990; Matijević, 2001).

The participants differ in opinions about which school pays more attention to children's feelings. Linda said that in a state school, teachers put more emphasis on students' behaviour than they do on feelings, while in a Waldorf school, the student's feelings were paid more attention to. Ivan believed that it was the teacher's job to care for the student's feelings and that the student's opinion depended on the teacher's enthusiasm and approach. Slaven did not agree with Linda and said that even in the state school, there was a concern for the feelings of the students, as well as the teachers. Besides being an alternative school, Waldorf school is also private, therefore, Slaven claimed that teachers had more freedom and less control compared to state schools, which is the reason they did not try as hard as they might say they did and care about the students' feelings and other employees. Mateo agreed with Slaven to a certain extent, although he said that he personally had not noticed that either type of schools paid too much attention to the feelings of others.

Although some of the participants found it hard to adapt to the way of teaching and the amount of teaching content in the state school, it should be noted that in a brief period of time the participants got used to lessons that is not in epochs. Linda did not have textbooks in the Waldorf school, but the textbooks in the state school were interesting and accessible to her, as confirmed by Slaven and Mateo. The ready-made state textbooks were extremely stressful for Ivan since it was difficult for him to get used to the answer boxes because he liked to write freely. All participants agreed that the amount of homework in the state

school was significantly higher than in the Waldorf school, but they accepted it and did it. The participants indicated that homework in a Waldorf school was designed differently than in a state school. Waldorf school required research and studying for homework, which was much less common in a state school, and which confirms the well-known didactic-methodical differences in the organization of teaching characteristic of a Waldorf and state school (Doutlik, 2015; Seitz & Hallwachs, 2011).

Educational subjects in Waldorf school are different when compared to the state schools. All the siblings gladly accepted physical education because of their physical fitness, the size of the hall and the professor's commitment and enthusiasm. In the state school, the participants got used to art craft being held in a shorter period, since there were no significant differences from that in the Waldorf school. But they stated that in the Waldorf school, art techniques were used more often, and expression was freer. Mateo did not like art as a subject, because he felt that the teacher was imposing his opinion on him. He considered art to be individual and subjective, which in its essence it is. Music subject was interesting to Linda; Ivan, however, could not remember what it was like for him. Slaven and Mateo agreed that teaching and passion for educational subjects depended on the teacher. Music subject was boring and tiring for both of them since there was no individuality and creativity, which should exist in artistic subjects. All the siblings agreed that the focus on art and manual work education was accentuated in the Waldorf school, which confirms the curriculum differences compared to the state school (Matijević, 2001).

All participants experienced equal enrolment in upper secondary school. Likewise, everyone stated that they had the same amount of free time in both schools, but they used it in a different way in relation to their own chronological age and extracurricular activities.

“Definitely in Waldorf school, but it should be taken into account that it was from the first to the fourth grade and I had more free time then. I took advantage of my free time more in the fifth to eighth grade in the state school because I had more responsibility and freedom. Waldorf school is far from our home, so we couldn't hang out after school, but I would come home and play with someone from the neighbourhood. In public school, we could stay on the school playground and free time was used better because you were older and it was closer and we had mobile phones, which was a dose of security for the parents”. (Mateo)

Considering needlework and crocheting, as well as woodworking as types of handcrafts, which is something that is covered from the fifth grade in Waldorf school, the participants differ in opinions regarding the implementation of the handcrafts in state schools. However, they unanimously agreed about loving to do handcrafts and being proud of their final products. Practical skills are crucial for the development of discipline, collaborative work, individuality, and primarily patience, which is necessary for recent generations of children in a fast-paced and technologically advanced world. Linda believed that handcrafts and woodworking should be implemented in state school as mandatory subjects. Slaven agreed with her, and stated that woodworking was more useful than manual work, because the final product was always something new, intriguing, and ultimately useful for further life. He still uses the items he made at school.

Ivan believed that working with wool was extremely beneficial for primary school students, but he was personally ashamed to work with wool in the lower secondary education. Ivan believed that it would be appropriate to introduce handcrafts into state schools, but in the form of a subject where students would develop and practice other skills such as sewing, learning about crafts, crocheting, housekeeping, and gardening. Furthermore, Slaven said that crocheting as a handcraft was interesting and fun for him. However, he would not implement it as a subject in a state school, but instead offer it as an elective subject for the students during their extended stay.

“It was fun and interesting for a while, but now I don’t know if I would introduce it to state schools, maybe to extended stay. I really liked working with wood and I can say that it was useful because you really learn something. I also liked crocheting, but not that it had any purpose, however it was a lot of fun. We all loved the workshops and working with wood, because we would always make something new and useful, such as the spoon for flour that we still use” (Slaven)

Mateo, who believes that handcrafts play a significant role for the student’s self-confidence as well as the further development of personality, also thought that crocheting was fun and interesting. However, he believed that it was not appropriate to implement such subjects as mandatory, but rather as an extracurricular activity. The findings gathered from the participants of the case study confirm the knowledge about the benefits of manual work, especially in the holistic development of a person, which is also confirmed by research of educational neuroscience (Topolovčan, 2023).

When asked if they considered themselves more creative because of attending Waldorf school, all the participants answered positively. The reason for that lies in fact that the Waldorf school is oriented towards individuality and creativity, which is important for the development of these qualities. These statements confirm the well-known theoretical and practical focus of Waldorf pedagogy on innovation, creativity, and divergence (Dubovicki & Topolovčan, 2020; Doutlik, 2015; Matijević, 2001). They stated that the Waldorf school fostered a unique way of solving problems and encouraged the development of the student's talents.

"I wouldn't necessarily generalize because I myself did not complete all eight Waldorf classes and it would certainly be easier for me to free myself and create today had I completed those three final years. We will never know for certain, but I believe that the Waldorf idea, pedagogy, upbringing and schooling can encourage you and teach you how to approach the solution through a more creative way, how to look at some obstacles in growing up and life from another dimension and perspective and unlock that hidden compartment where you think: I can make, extract, produce miracles from it. This is a great treasure that the Waldorf school provides". (Linda)

Linda and Slaven stayed in touch with their friends from the state school, but not with their colleagues from the Waldorf school, because they came from different neighbourhoods of the city. They also said that it had been challenging for them to navigate independently. Ivan, on the other hand, stayed in touch with his friends from the Waldorf school, since several of them went to the same high school and class department with him, while Mateo did not stay in touch with children from either school. A probable reason for such contacts with friends is that the participants graduated from a Waldorf school a long time ago, and more stable friendships were often established at higher levels of education. This is also supported by Ivan's statement about remaining in contact with his colleagues from the Waldorf school who enrolled in the same high school.

All siblings believed that both schools had their advantages and disadvantages. Some of the disadvantages of the Waldorf school was the outdated institution, with not enough financial resources to rebuild the school. Some of the participants believed that spending eight years with the same teacher was a bit too much, because teachers have a great responsibility about forming students' opinions on school and life. The participants stated that teachers should primarily deal with psychology, sociology, pedagogy, and related sciences. Those sciences would really help them understand child development and ensure

the best for the student. Some participants believed that technology should be implemented in Waldorf schools, because the world was developing every day in terms of technology, so students fall behind significantly when they move on to a state elementary or high school. As an additional disadvantage of the Waldorf school, the participants mentioned exactly the freedom it provided. They said that there was no control, and everyone worked in a different way. Therefore, they believed that it was important to state that not everything was always right and that a more realistic approach to further life should have been applied. This confirms the statement that there is no such thing as the best school and that the school is powerful, but not omnipotent (Matijević, 2001).

The participants stated that there was too much control in educational subjects in state schools, which was visible both in grades and in textbooks. They believed that the state schools placed the main focus on grades, which could be stressful for children, and that those kinds of schools should provide more time for the students to play. The participants unanimously agreed that there was a need for more individuality and freedom in public schools, and if a student showed interest and talent for a certain subject or content, he/she should be given the opportunity and encouraged to improve in that direction. They stated that there should be more opportunity and care for spirituality and mental health. The statements confirm that the state school is focused on the global movement of the educational reform with the aspiration of measurability, standardization, and economization (Topolovčan, 2023).

All participants believed that the Waldorf school was suitable for almost all children in primary school. But when it comes to the subject teaching (lower secondary level of education), they concluded that it should be on a higher level of more realistic life and teaching. It is intriguing that three out of four former students of a Waldorf school said that they would not enrol their own child in a Waldorf school. Linda would enrol her child in a Waldorf school, but she would like that child to finish all the years. She believed that there was less stress when enrolling in a high school after a Waldorf school, instead of transferring to a state school. Mateo and Slaven believed that the world would be a better place if everyone behaved in accordance with Waldorf pedagogy. Since this was not the case, then they would not enrol a child in a Waldorf school because children who went to Waldorf school were too isolated from the real world, thus making the adaptation difficult. This was confirmed by previous studies (Bartz & Randall, 2007).

Linda and Ivan were grateful for attending Waldorf school, and they pointed out that they got the opportunity to learn some life lessons, which they would otherwise not have learned, because they were free to create new experiences.

“I really appreciate being able to, in a certain period of my childhood, activate the idea to create, because this is what you return to all your life and you just long to be in that process of free, unhindered, unfettered creation. It is the greatest freedom, the greatest treasure that I could get out of schooling, to be completely yourself and free to express yourself.” (Linda)

“You connect with the idea of researching natural things, which was a natural approach to education because we didn’t have textbooks, you would have to look up for facts using an encyclopaedia and the like. Today I work in a research sense, so maybe I wouldn’t be interested in it today and I wouldn’t be doing it today if I hadn’t attended a Waldorf school”. (Ivan)

Mateo and Slaven remember different experiences. They regretted not fighting for themselves more in Waldorf school. Mateo faced the greatest life lesson in facing the real world upon leaving the Waldorf school. The statements confirm the findings of previous research of this type (Bart & Randoll, 2000)

The diversity of experiences during and after the Waldorf school is visible after the interview with all four members of the family. In other words, what was great for someone, bothered others and vice versa, which was expected because the participants have different personalities. All the participants stated they were glad to have attended a Waldorf school. They agreed that, in theory, Waldorf pedagogy was well designed, but they would like for the Waldorf pedagogy to adapt more to today’s society and the world we live in, because they believed that students in Waldorf schools were isolated from the world. On the other hand, they agreed that state schools lacked creativity and were too strict in pedagogical measures as well as with numerical evaluation, which can be stressful and unclear for students. They also believed that it would be ideal to find a compromise between Waldorf and state schools. This reasoning confirms the findings of some previous studies (Bartz & Randoll, 2007; Paschen, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Rudolf Steiner is the founder of Waldorf pedagogy, which is based on the human science of anthroposophy. Steiner founded the first Waldorf school in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany. Today, there are over a thousand Waldorf primary

and secondary schools in the world. This school belongs to the category of free schools, so apart from not being state-run and working alternatively according to the didactic-methodical conception of Steiner's pedagogy, it does not follow the national curriculum either. It differs from state schools in terms of the curriculum, didactic-methodical teaching arrangements, organization of the school administration, school and classroom climate and forms of evaluation of student achievement. However, it should be pointed out that, like the state school, the Waldorf school has its good sides as well as its challenges.

Qualitative *ex post facto* research of a case study through reconstruction of the biographies of four siblings was used to examine the experiences and understanding of the significance of the Waldorf school and later education in state schools on the level of completed formal education and lifestyle in adulthood of four children of one family. School is important in different ways for the later life of an individual according to the experience gained during the schooling process. The participants got used to some things later in the state school. This refers to ready-made textbooks, proximity to the school, equality in enrolment in upper secondary school, etc. On the other hand, they adapted differently to some aspects, such as social relations with schoolmates, acceptance of educational subjects, etc. However, all the participants agree that handicrafts should be introduced in state schools, at least in some form. The reconstruction of the educational biographies of the research participants showed that the Waldorf school had an impact on their later education and the formation of their lifestyle in adulthood, but it is not justified to consider the Waldorf school as neither of higher quality nor of lower quality than other state and alternative schools. The participants do lead successful lives and have completed above-average levels of formal education, but so do many people who did not attend Waldorf schools, which is in line with the findings of previous research of this type. It is justified to conclude that the Waldorf school and Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy is well thought out in theory, but it is questionable for how long it can remain indifferent to the contemporary reality. This case study shows how education, the type of school and the pedagogical and didactic concept of the school attended, the transition from a Waldorf school to a state school, as well as internal and external learning conditions pose as significant factors in the functioning of an individual family community as a dynamic social organism. Understanding the attendance at state and Waldorf schools and their significance for later life can be interpreted as a reflection mechanism for improving the working conditions of an individual school. A possible shortcoming of this case study is that parents and the fifth child of a family that did not attend a Waldorf school were not included in the

research. In future studies like this, it would be desirable to extend the research to parents of children who graduated from a Waldorf school.

Ultimately, considering that there is no such thing as the best school and that school is powerful, but not omnipotent, one can point out that the Waldorf school in its hundred years of existence has been positively evaluated in practice and is a relevant theory of school and education.

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WALDORFSKA ŠKOLA. EX POST FACTO STUDIJA SLUČAJA: REKONSTRUKCIJA OBRAZOVNIH BIOGRAFIJA DJECE JEDNE OBITELJI

Waldorfska škola egzistira više od stotinu godina. U državama diljem svijeta postoji preko tisuću waldorfskih škola. Zbog svojih pedagoških i didaktičkih posebnosti te ideja osnivača Rudolfa Steinera intrigantna je, kako roditeljima, tako i (ne)stručnjacima. Budući da je ovo alternativna slobodna škola epistemološki je zanimljivo kvalitativnim pristupom rekonstruirati biografije odraslih bivših učenika waldorfske škole. Stoga je cilj kvalitativnog ex post facto istraživanja studije slučaja bio ispitati i razumjeti ulogu waldorfske škole u kasnijem formalnom obrazovanju te načinu života bivših učenika, tj. četvero odrasle braće iz jedne obitelji. Razvidno je kako waldorfska škola ima značaj na kasnije obrazovanje u državnim školama kao i način života bivših odraslih učenika, ali ju nije opravdano smatrati superiornom ili inferiornom drugim alternativnim ili državnim konfekcijskim školama. Zato, valja rezonirati kako je waldorfska škola u svojoj stogodišnjoj egzistenciji pozitivno vrednovana u praksi. Ova se konstatacija verificira u etabliranoj perspektivi odgojnih znanosti kako ne postoji najbolja škola te kako je škola moćna, ali nije svemoćna. Teorijske premise i rezultati studije slučaja prikazani su i raspravljeni u radu.

Ključne riječi: kvalitativna metodologija, obrazovanje, reformna pedagogija, Rudolf Steiner, waldorfska pedagogija.