

Being a 'good' teacher in changing times: the example of (North) Macedonia

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents results regarding teachers' situation in the school system of North Macedonia, a recent country; it has existed only for 30 years as a national state in its own right. There is a huge research gap with regard to (North) Macedonia in many respects. As in other European countries, the school system is transformed through neoliberal developments, but also through the many changes happening after the end of Yugoslavia. As politics have a strong effect on schooling in bureaucratic systems, it is important to look at the situation now, in the modern national state, compared to the situation before, as a region of the SFRY (Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). In order to research the role of teachers in implementing educational policies, teachers who had studied (and worked) at the time of the Yugoslavian Macedonia were interviewed. The qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. The recent transformations through New Public Management changes and through global pressures on education become visible. Particularly visible are the erosion of trust and a declining social recognition of the teaching profession.

Keywords: Educational policy, educational population, Macedonian, neoliberalism, North Macedonia, social change, teachers.

Ser buen docente en tiempos de cambio: el ejemplo de Macedonia (del Norte)

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta resultados sobre la situación del profesorado en el sistema de enseñanza de Macedonia del Norte, un país reciente; ha existido sólo durante 30 años como Estado-nación legislativamente. Existe un enorme vacío de investigación con respecto a Macedonia (del Norte) en muchos aspectos. Como en otros países europeos, el sistema escolar se transforma gracias al desarrollo del neoliberalismo, pero también a los numerosos cambios que se produjeron tras el fin de Yugoslavia. Como la política tiene un fuerte efecto en la escolarización dentro de sistemas burocráticos, es importante observar la situación actual, en el Estado nacional moderno, en comparación con la situación anterior, como región de la RFSY (República Social Federal de Yugoslavia). Para investigar el papel de los docentes en la implementación de políticas educativas, se entrevistó a docentes que habían estudiado (y trabajado) en la época de la Macedonia yugoslava. Los datos cualitativos se analizaron mediante análisis de contenido. Las recientes transformaciones a través de cambios en la Nueva Gestión Pública y por presiones globales sobre la educación se hacen visibles. Particularmente visibles son la erosión de la confianza y un reconocimiento social cada vez menor de la profesión docente.

Palabras clave: Política educacional, profesionales de la educación, macedonio, neoliberalismo, Macedonia del Norte, cambio social, docente.

Ser um bom professor em tempos de mudança: o exemplo da Macedônia (Norte)

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta resultados sobre a situação dos professores no sistema educativo da Macedônia do Norte, um país recente; existe apenas há 30 anos como um estado-nação legislativamente. Existe uma enorme lacuna na investigação relativa à Macedônia (do Norte) em muitos aspectos. Tal como noutros países europeus, o sistema escolar transforma-se graças ao desenvolvimento do neoliberalismo, mas também às inúmeras mudanças que ocorreram após o fim da Jugoslávia. Como a política tem um forte efeito sobre a escolaridade dentro dos sistemas burocráticos, é importante olhar para a situação actual, no Estado nacional moderno, em comparação com a situação anterior, como uma região da RSFJ (República Social Federal da Jugoslávia). Para investigar o papel dos professores na implementação de políticas educacionais, foram entrevistados professores que estudaram (e trabalharam) na época da Macedônia Iugoslava. Os dados qualitativos foram analisados por meio de análise de conteúdo. As recentes transformações através de mudanças na Nova Gestão Pública e as pressões globais sobre a educação tornam-se visíveis. Particularmente visíveis são a erosão da confiança e o declínio do reconhecimento social da profissão docente.

Palavras-chave: Política educacional, profissionais da educação, Macedônio, neoliberalismo, Macedônia do Norte, mudança social, professor.

1. INTRODUCTION

North Macedonia was after World War II the southernmost republic in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). In September 1991, North Macedonia became an independent nation-state and immediately after the democratic system was introduced. It is a young democracy, a state with weak economic strength. Furthermore, as a 'new' nation-state, North Macedonia struggled from the start with foreign policy (i.e. the naming dispute with Greece¹) and domestic policy (i.e. recognition of the Albanian minority) issues (Calic, 2019, p. 318; Popovic, Majsova & Anastasova 2021, pp. 186-208). There is little research available on what this large political and national change meant. What it meant for the education sector, particularly for the teachers of the (new) country, is not really empirically researched. In fact, from the perspective of educational research, North Macedonia is under-researched in almost all aspects.

The educational system can be characterised as bureaucratic: this means that all teachers are civil servants, including the profits in some fields, but also the duties. Teachers cannot freely choose in which

¹ The name has changed from "Macedonia" to "Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia" (FYROM) and now, since 2019, "North Macedonia".

school they want to work, because the council of the municipality allocates teachers to their positions. On the other hand, it is a “safe” job, in which dismissal of teachers with a permanent position is nearly almost impossible. Teachers have to study one subject at university to become teachers of lower and upper secondary schooling. Today, the education system is segregated in two systems, separated by the two languages of education: Macedonian and Albanian.

This study focusses on teachers who had studied teacher education before 1991, when the Macedonian national state was founded. Furthermore, only teachers who had started their teaching activities before 2001² were included. It was difficult to motivate teachers to take part in the research interviews. Furthermore, as the results presented later will show, teachers as public employees are very cautious about commenting on their work. In the end, I spoke to teachers who did not have to worry about their job security (for various reasons), which is explained later on.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to frame the readers’ expectations for this publication, the research questions that are answered in this paper are presented right here at the beginning:

- What does it mean to be a ‘good’ teacher, to keep and show one’s professionalism, in a constantly changing education environment, as in North Macedonia?
- Specifically: What does it mean to be a ‘good’ teacher in a very ‘new’ state, with many different inner and outer political problems, as it is the case in North Macedonia?

For my research about North Macedonia³, I interviewed 16 teachers in cities outside of Skopje. This decision was taken as the school situation is different in the capital because of more private schools, more international inhabitants, etc., and because about one quarter of the MK population lives in Skopje. Furthermore, the little educational research from MK that exists is centred around Skopje, for various reasons (Rizova, Mekar & Velkovski, 2020).

All cities included in this research are of a similar size, as secondary schools only exist in the ‘larger’ of the ‘smaller’ cities⁴. It should be noted that all teachers speak Macedonian as their first language, so no teachers from the Albanian speaking school system were interviewed.

Of the above mentioned teachers, seven specifically fulfilled the criteria for this research focus. They had studied teacher education before 1991 and they had started to work as teachers before 2001. Four

² This was important for the study, as the school systems began to diverge after the segregation in Macedonian/Albanian.

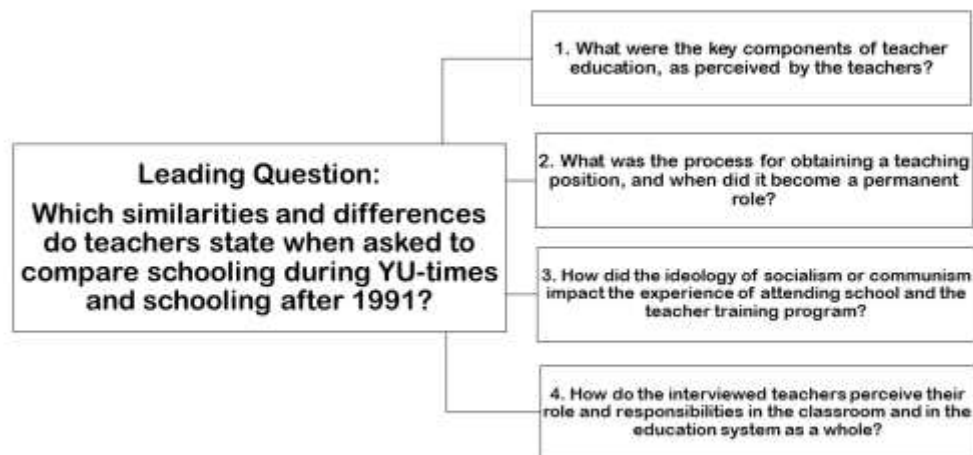
³ From this point on, North Macedonia will be abbreviated as MK.

⁴ The recent population size of the country and of the cities in North Macedonia can be found here: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/macedonia-population/>

of them were still working in 2021, while one was retired⁵. Only one male teacher was willing to participate. These interviews took place between 2019 and 2021, two online (because of Covid-19) and three on site. The other nine teachers had studied and started to work after 2001, but their answers are included if they shed light on the research question, especially for the national state. They were all interviewed on site. In the interviews, the following questions were the leading questions⁶:

Fig. 1:

Leading Questions for the interviews⁷



In order to find teachers willing to take part in my research, I used a modified form of the snowball system (Akremi, 2014, p. 272) which I will explain here. On the one hand, I went to schools and asked teachers whether they would take part in an interview. Via them I got recommendations and tried to motivate further teachers to speak with me. Furthermore, I left an information in book shops that sell school and supplementary schooling literature. Also, students from teacher education that I met at the universities pointed me to possible interview partners which were teachers in the secondary schools they had attended. All in all, it was challenging to motivate teachers that I found to take part in the research. Mostly, it was via personal recommendation that teachers “trusted” me and would take part in the interview.

⁵ This was the only teacher who had not studied and worked in secondary education, but who as the oldest person in my sample could give very interesting insights into education after the Second World War.

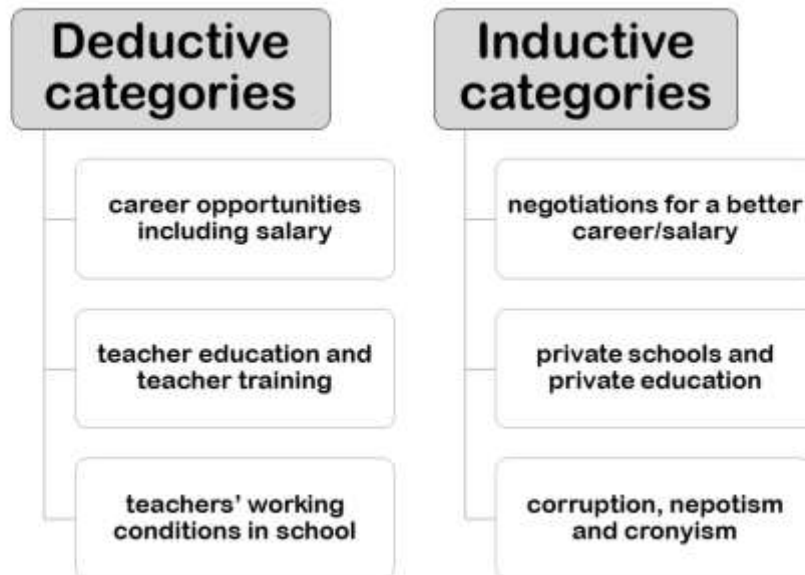
⁶ I followed the ‘problem centred interview’, as explained by e.g. Mayring (2023). The leading questions are the “problems” which the interviews centred around and thus my research focus.

⁷ The measures taken by MK in order to control the Covid-19-pandemic, which led to close schools, etc., were not part of my interviews.

The interviews were evaluated using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2010), with the following categories for analysis:

Fig. 2:

Categories for the qualitative content analysis



As Parreira do Amaral (2015) emphasizes, a comparative study should not only examine changes, but also the constants/similarities of the entities under investigation in order to provide a rich picture in the context of the respective education system/country. The comparison in this publication does not refer to national differences, as the region/area remained unchanged before and after the change. The comparison refers to the changes over time, while Europe, and in particular Yugoslavia/Macedonia, underwent major changes. The “tertium comparationis” in this case is the school system in one specific region in Europe where the major language spoken in schooling was and is Macedonian.

The methodological decision to use teacher interviews lies in my focus on the practice in the individual school (Mensching, 2018), and especially on the micro-level of schooling (for macro, meso, microsystem, see Altrichter & Maag Merki, 2016, Bohl & Beck, 2020). Already in 1997, Gehrman & Hübner stressed that no structural changes reach the schools without an adaptation to the institutional structure of each school and the individuality of the teachers. In line with Ball’s (2012) reasoning, I consider teachers as key players in realizing educational policy. Therefore, only through gathering data from teachers, the microlevel can be analysed. Teachers' stories are expressions of bringing policy into practice and show how the daily life of the school is shaped.

3. THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN MACEDONIA THEN AND NOW

Even before 1991, as a part of Yugoslavia, North Macedonia had independence in many areas, including the education system. The language of instruction in schools and universities was not 'Serbo-Croatian' (the official language of Yugoslavia), but Macedonian, although some textbooks (especially for tertiary education) were not immediately available in Macedonian. Macedonian was officially declared as the official language in Macedonia in 1944 and then the first official grammar of the Macedonian language (by Krume Kepeski) was published in 1946.

Between 1989 and 1991, MK still remained a part of the shrinking Yugoslavia. After 1991 Macedonia was no longer a (quite autonomous) federal state of the Socialist Yugoslavian Federal Republic. It directly started the political democracy which automatically includes the free market (aka capitalism) instead of socialism (Atanasoska 2023b). North Macedonia was only slightly influenced by the war then, but later, at the end of the 1990s, there were internal tensions with the Albanian-speaking minority, including fighting within the state territory. From 2001, not only the Albanian-speaking minority, but also other autochthonous minorities received more rights. For the education system, this meant primarily a segregation into Macedonian -and Albanian- language schools, both at the primary, secondary and at the tertiary educational level⁸.

The educational systems' structure is still quite the same as it was during Yugoslavian times. It is divided into a nine-year primary school⁹ and different types of secondary school (Sharlamamov, Mitevska & Petrusheva 2023, p. 1500¹⁰). The 'high school certificate' (матура in Macedonian) can be obtained after the fourth year of secondary school. Teachers can study teacher education for primary schooling or for secondary schooling (lower and upper). Secondary teachers only study one subject during teacher education¹¹.

MK is a small country with a small population. Individual schools do not have autonomy over curriculum, instructional materials, and personnel decisions. The school administration, the school inspectorate and the Ministry of Education make detailed decisions down to the micro level of teaching. The same trend towards academization and standardized performance measurement can be found as throughout Europe (Atanasoska, 2023a). Furthermore, competition from private education, especially at the tertiary level, began about 20 years ago.

New Public Management, a global education change

⁸ More information about this development can be found at Treneska-Deskoska (2017).

⁹ Since 2005, the preschool year has become a mandatory part of school education, so the duration of compulsory schooling has increased from eight to nine years.

¹⁰ Although this is a very descriptive article about MK, it summarizes some of the changes that have occurred over the last three decades. Like most research in the field of changes in the educational system, it remains at the level of policies and regulations.

¹¹ In some countries, for example Germany, secondary teachers have to choose two subjects in teacher education. They will later teach both subjects at school.

The education system in North Macedonia is clearly of the bureaucratic type. However, all school systems have changed in recent years, and the two main reasons are summarized here:

- a. New Public Management (NPM)¹². Competence-oriented curricula and standardized testing are central for NPM in education;
- b. A globalized pressure on schooling that sometimes is summarized in the "global education reform" (Sahlberg, 2014, Stenlås, 2009). The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are the main influence on education, along with different international testing regimes (see Atanasoska 2019, 2020 -particularly for North Macedonia-, Lohmann, 2014, Fuller & Stevenson, 2019, Posch & Altrichter, 2020, Verger, Fontdevila & Zancajo, 2016, Meyer & Benavot, 2013).

NPM is an approach that transfers economic and administrative models to school, which originally were introduced in modern bureaucracies. Originally, NPM emerged in the spirit of the "New Rights Movement" in the 1980s. There was a desire to create efficiency and control by introducing business-like management measures in schools (Vigoda 2003). Furthermore, NPM emphasizes leadership, decentralization, goals and results-oriented management, privatization, free school choice and accountability (Lubienski, 2009).

The goal of NPM is to improve quality, efficiency and fairness in schools, but after years of NPM-changes in educational systems, research results show that something different was achieved: education systems focus on cost reduction and view students/parents as economically driven, as 'customers' for the educational system. Like all other goods in a capitalist system, education shall lead to an increase in capital. Certificates can be seen as the currency in the education market, just like results from standardized assessments. The 'economization of education' applies also to the state as the main owner of schools, not only to private schools. 'Maximizing capital' means for the state to save money in its school budget and use this saved money in other fields (see Radtke 2019, p. 309; Bellmann et al., 2016, p. 388).

NPM reduces the autonomy of teachers in schools as it demands accountability for the output, not the input (Lohmann, 2014, Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2015, Altrichter, 2019, Ydesen & Andreasen, 2020, Hoyle & Wallace, 2009). The professionalism of teachers makes a difference when they are held responsible for educational success, rather than the state, the market or the political system as a whole. (Besley & Peters, 2007; Moos, 2009). This 'accountability movement' (Hoyle & Wallace 2009) leads to a significant increase in administrative semi- and even non-professional tasks for teachers (Bellmann et al., 2016, pp. 388, Brante, 2009, Stenlås, 2009). As a result, NPM causes deprofessionalization, because teaching is reduced by a technocratic vision (Cochran-Smith, 2015).

Social processes like NPM are particularly susceptible to corruption because of their focus on control through quantitative indicators. Of course, NPM did not intend this (or other) negative effects, but

¹² New Public Management will be abbreviated as NPM from this on.

nevertheless it induced them in many educational systems. Educational research, as policy, has to include those “unintended effects” (Bellmann & Weiß 2009, p. 291; see Bellmann et al., 2016, Radtke 2019). Corruption in the strict sense includes bribery and abuse of power. In a broader sense, it means all processes that violate the professional integrity of teachers (what Bellmann & Weiß (2009, p. 293) call “erosion of trust”).

Law, curricula, and regulations on school organization determine the framework of the educational landscape (see Janík & Porubsky 2020). Many of the legislative changes, however, reach schools later than prescribed by law and some changes occur in schools without the state having foreseen them. NPM places educational governance outside of professional self-control in schools, which diminishes the value of the school's educational missions. (Stenlås, 2009, 17, Biesta et al. 2015). In MK, top-down changes are related to the main political party or parties. When the political leaders change, education is one of the first areas where new changing regulations and laws are introduced. Numerous changes in education regularly begin even before the newest ones have been fully implemented. Rizova, Bekar and Velkovski point this out when they demand “continuity of reforms” (2020, p. 1502).

The school system can be divided in the macro-, meso- and micro-level. With regard to this distinction, Brüsemeister & Eubel (2003) identified the changes of NPM on all three levels. These are specified below with respect specifically to MK.

- Macro level of the school system: At this level, there is a changed relationship of the school system to the state, aka the state takes more ‘control’, even if it happens via the ‘market’.
- Meso level of intra-organizational decision-making in the individual school. The new ‘management’ level gets more autonomy with regard to the individual school. This, in the case of MK, is not true at all, as the management of the school has less power and influence than in Yugoslavia. Already during Yugoslavian times, individual schools had to have control of their budget (except wages).
- Micro level: The role of individual teachers and of other actors in the individual school. On the micro level, the negotiation processes between teachers, but also towards school leaders, students and parents, change. Teachers are confronted with new forms in and forms of organization, with different quality procedures, aka “accountability”. The stronger observation of system outputs, the reduction in autonomy, conflicts with the self-understanding of the profession, etc. In MK, strong control from above and other pressures mean reducing the professional autonomy of teachers.

NPM changes school systems in different areas. As an introduction into the specific characteristics of the North Macedonian school system, table 1 summarizes the characteristics in the four main areas that play a role in this paper:

Table 1.

The school system in MK as a bureaucratic system, influenced by NPM¹³

Areas in school systems	
School Autonomy	The individual school has no autonomy with respect to curriculum, instructional materials, and personnel decisions. The curriculum is the same for all schools. Textbooks are chosen by the state. While school principals have a say in which teacher to hire, the final staffing decision rests with the school administration.
State management authority	As expected from a bureaucratic system, all teachers are heavily influenced by top-down changes and expectations. Directives from the ministry or school administration, of which there have been many in recent years, change schooling constantly. Teachers have few possibilities in making decisions. Punishment of schools or individual teachers is the preferred method of influencing changes and personnel in schools.
School Budget	Although MK can be classified as bureaucratic, the school budget remains under the responsibility of each school, but without many possibilities for autonomous changes. Basically, the school budget does not even cover the most urgent needs, as is the case in many countries with weak GDP. Personnel expenses are not part of the school budget. Salaries are paid by the state and increase according to a predetermined salary scale. The individual school has no influence on this.
Students at school	In MK there is no competition between schools, as you cannot choose between schools. Students are assigned to elementary schools based on their area of residence. In higher grades, students can choose between different types of schools. However, schools do not need to compete for students as in countries with a strong NPM influence (such as England or Sweden). On the other hand, the number of population and students is constantly decreasing, leading to small classes and the closure of very small schools.

4. TEACHERS AS PROFESSIONALS IN AND FOR TEACHING

The teaching profession is a 'special' profession characterized by teachers working for the state, but not directly being subordinated to the state, as state employees are. Being a teacher means becoming part of a 'professional community', with other teachers, and becoming part of a 'school culture' (Helsper, 2008, Fend, 1998). Being able to position oneself within the community of teachers, towards students,

¹³ This table follows the description of the three types of school systems in Schmid et al (2007). A presentation of other areas, also for the type of efficiency, can be found in Atanasoska (2020), with special attention to the German subject.

colleagues, principals, and parents, as a competent and professional teacher, is important for a teacher's satisfaction with their job and workplace. Support within/from the professional community, i.e. from colleagues and leadership, is professionally as well as personally important for them (Rothland, 2013, Deters, 2011, Bigestans, 2015).

Professions are defined by their autonomy, which is the freedom to make professional decisions. This is granted to the profession in exchange for expert knowledge that is expected to be used for beneficial actions. Therefore, the concept is intertwined with other aspects such as trust and professional ethics (Sachs, 2001), but the core of the concept is the freedom of the professional group to plan and carry out their work. Autonomy is not inherently positive, but based on good professional ethics, autonomy constitutes an essential prerequisite for motivation in a context characterized by complexity, uncertainty, unique situations, which is the case for the teaching profession (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2007; Schon, 1991). Sachs (2001, p. 150) highlights a dilemma faced by the teaching profession: teachers are expected to be autonomous on one hand, while on the other hand they are subject to pressure from accountability and performance expectations. The teaching profession is therefore specified by 'authorization' and 'autonomy'. Changes through NPM have reduced autonomy, but also authorization (Colnerud & Granström, 2015, Edelsky, 2006).

Trust is at the core of discussions on professions and autonomy (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill 2004, p. 187). There is a contract between teachers and society, which implies that they are trusted to exercise their profession in autonomy. Trust from the society is considered a precondition for freedom of action and professional decisions (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), while the absence of trust leads demoralization and loss of autonomy, which demotivates teachers (Peck, Gallucci & Sloane 2010, p. 452). Autonomy is associated with governance and the view on how policy is realized in an organization.

One of the effects of the implementation of NPM is that the perception of teachers as professionals in society has changed¹⁴. Research shows that this happens when jobs are seen as 'only' technical. For the teaching profession this means, that teaching needs 'only' a technical solution rather than it is a complex and demanding social task. From the perspective of NPM the focus on the technical aspect of teaching and learning is very practical, as it can be compared and measured (Cochran-Smith, 2015, Biesta et al., 2015, 75). In the end, this means that the state's idea of increased 'professionalization' from such a perspective does not include autonomous pedagogical professional actions.

Autonomy refers to the idea that teachers are free enough in their classrooms to act according to their choice (Apple 2006). Due to the increasing demands from NPM this has led to teachers' work becoming less autonomous. Three frameworks can be named that shape the demands of work in school: 1. the logic of the market, 2. the logic of the profession and 3. the logic of bureaucracy (Freidson, 2001). I

¹⁴ Sharlamamov, Mitevaska & Petrusheva include this aspect in their list of challenges in MK: "The reputation of teachers/professors and the educational system as a whole is damaged" (2023, p. 1502).

would add that, for the study of MK as a former socialist country, the logic of politics should be included separately and not only in the broad field of bureaucracy¹⁵.

5. RESULTS

To begin with, I would like to highlight the special status of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with expanded autonomy, especially with regard to the language used in education. As mentioned above, even before the end of World War II, Macedonian was established as the official and administrative language of the republic. All teachers emphasized that their education was always in Macedonian, both during their school days and in tertiary education. In the case of the “younger” generations (born after the 1970s), this is considered natural, but this teacher (born in 1939) confirms that even her generation always learned and taught in Macedonian:

Teodora P.: From the beginning [of my education] I learned Macedonian, but later, from fifth to eighth grade, we learned Serbo-Croatian as a subject in school. So during the course we only spoke Serbo-Croatian. [During my pedagogical studies], all the [teacher educators] taught in Macedonian, everything was in Macedonian, including the books.

Result I: Socialism vs. Capitalism

Before 1991, teacher education in Yugoslavia always had to be seen and understood in the context of the socialist state. The main idea/ideology of this state was "socialist unity". This idea is mentioned repeatedly by all teachers, and what role/function it had for their own education and for them as teachers. This idea/ideology in Yugoslavia was present in the educational system, from high school onwards. The teachers emphasize the idea of this Yugoslav socialist “unity” that was perceived as the “background” of the school and society. Of course, this idea of socialism and patriotism disappeared when the state of North Macedonia was founded.

In addition to Atanasoska's (2023b) results, interviewees regularly mention the ideal of a socialist “brotherhood” [Daniel P.] during the Yugoslav era. This idea of group cohesion through socialism is also expressed with the word “friendship:”

Mila P.: Slovenes, Serbs, and we [Macedonians] used to do the same things, [when we were on a teacher seminar], the friendship was beautiful. Now, it is not possible to go [like that] and there is great selfishness now. That is what I want to say. It is terrible that people are selfish.

The colleagues in Yugoslavia, the young teachers during the Yugoslavian time, they were all “friends”, working towards quality in education. It could have a relation to the fact that the ‘older’ teachers in my sample were the first ones that had finished educational studies at the university. The teaching staff before them had only undergone some short pedagogical/subject courses.

¹⁵ One reason can be that most critical research on NPM and on school systems is done in democratic and capitalist countries.

In this paper, the economic changes are not in focus, but the teachers themselves speak about 'money' as an important 'player' in the educational market nowadays. Education in Yugoslavian times was always free of charge, even on tertiary level. This is emphasized very positively by the teachers who experienced this. They see this as one of the factors that allowed upward mobility then. Nowadays, many children still belong to a weak socioeconomical class (Rizova, Bekar, & Velkovski 2020), but education opportunities and social mobility now depend highly on the economic investments that parents can grant. There is a broad market for private tuition (to improve grades). Even the tertiary sector has its private universities/courses, where money is the entrance ticket.

One professor summarizes this development as follows: In the modern state, one can advance much and even further with money rather than ability/performance [DP]. This is an experience that all teachers share, regardless of age, and yet they do their best to include all children, regardless of their financial situation.

Olivera D.: [...] there is a children's film festival in Skopje, under the patronage of the Goethe Institute. We have been taking the children to Skopje for three years now, it is their own wish to go, but they have to pay for the ticket themselves. We cannot provide for that. We organize transportation, or at least try to. [...] If the ticket costs 600 MKD, we are negotiating the price down to 400 MKD. The main problem are the limited financial resources of the parents.

The students the teacher is talking about are in compulsory education (lower secondary). The teacher organizes the bus and even negotiates a price reduction. Although motivation arises from students' feeling of importance within the professional role, the professional task here includes many semi-professional and non-professional tasks that the teacher must perform.

Another compulsory education teacher expresses a similar professional position. She buys colored pencils and different notebooks for her students so that everyone can work with drawings, coloring exercises, etc. Otherwise, students would only have the course book to learn from. The teacher does all of this at her expense because she firmly believes that she will improve the learning outcomes of her students.

During the Yugoslavian era, though, all excursions were provided to students and teachers free of charge. Moreover, teachers received an advance for expenses (such as food), and this applied also to teacher seminars across the country.

Mila P.: Imagine, early in Yugoslavia, we go [on an excursion], for example tomorrow. Today, the secretary calls me into her office and pays me the daily allowance. You can feel like a "normal" person: to be able to go somewhere [with the colleagues], to go for dinner, to refresh yourself with a juice. Nowadays, they don't give us money, not even for a small snack, there's no money for a coffee.

On the other hand, teachers did not have fixed working hours. It was more of an 'all-inclusive' contract. Some of the teachers worked more hours than others. Still, in the interviews, the older generation stresses that this extra work was done 'voluntarily'. They were highly motivated to invest their time in and for school. For the two oldest women in my sample (born 1939 and 1958), it meant going back to

school very fast after giving birth. One of them took the baby to class and the other left him with her in-laws when he was less than three months old. Another aspect of the new capitalist free market in MK is mentioned with regard to the literature course.

Olivera D.: We all use the same textbooks in Macedonia. We are a small country, and [politics] want to simply erase some things, for increased profits. We are a small market here, and there are two [textbook] publishers whose interests compete. Quality is not important, only the profit [they gain] from the textbooks.

To increase profits, the ministry decides from the top down which textbooks teachers should use. For Olivera D., the reason is to increase the profits of the textbook publisher.

Of course: being a teacher in MK is not the same as being a student teacher in Yugoslavia. Only the role of “money” is analyzed here. Professor Daniel P. refers to these two perspectives: on the one hand, there was the perspective of socialism in Yugoslavia, the idea of a socialist unity, the socialist worldview, including criticism of capitalism (aka “the West”) . On the other hand, the new perspective of democracy in Macedonia, democracy as a form of government and as the guiding idea of the state, and here capitalism is included automatically, almost “naturally.” In Yugoslav times, in teacher training they criticized materialism together, all students knew Marx and Engels. In Macedonian times, only democracy was considered the ideal form of government. For him, this was a kind of exaggerated idealism. Capitalism was no longer viewed critically, but everyone focused on increasing capital, in all areas of life (social and academic).

Result II: Competence vs. Control

The extent of corruption in the workplace, in finding work, is related to the number of vacant positions. For example, in the 1960s there was a high demand for primary school teachers in Macedonia. Teodora P. worked in a town before finally being able to find work in the city where she lived. However, this did not go well as the position was awarded -illegally and corruptly- to a less qualified colleague, in complete violation of the law.

Teodora P.: A new law came that said, teachers with a degree from the university have to be prioritized. Well, yes, but for the position here [in the city], they hired someone with a high school degree in the school. So, I reported the school [to the inspection], and my complaint was granted. [...] They [aka the people] from the school were friends with this colleague [...]. Later, when the school was penalized, they had to hire me. [...] He then found a position in a store, he had friends there, but they shouldn't have hired him there either because he only had a high school diploma. The law stated that people with a university education must be preferred.

Even in Yugoslavian times there were laws that worked against nepotism and corruption, which could be seen as somewhat surprising. This law was the reason that Teodora P. was able to get the job in the

city. She had a degree from the Pedagogical Academy and was therefore to be preferred over the teacher with only secondary education in the allocation of positions. However, the law was only enforced because she showed initiative and claimed her rights.

Corruption in the strict sense includes bribery and abuse of power (see Mensching 2018). Contrary to the previous example, Daniel P. says that only “corruption” allowed him to finally get a job in his “dream” profession. Daniel P. wanted to be a teacher since he was little to “give back” to his people. Daniel was lucky because, after seven years of looking for work, he met an “influential” person in the school administration. Still, compared to the “real” nepotism in the previous example, he possessed both the officially required qualifications and seven years of “waiting time.” For him, this was finally “fair,” as he was repeatedly ignored due to widespread corruption. People who had more money than him always found work through bribery and/or nepotism.

From the interviews with the teachers, it can be inferred that political views and/or party political affiliation have only played a role in North Macedonia since the mid-2000s. By law, party influence is forbidden, however, the knowledge that there is corruption and partisan influence, is widely known. In the schools, it is known which colleagues were appointed due to their party affiliation. This “secret” knowledge is usually only spoken about indirectly, like in this example.

Georgija S.: Today... well, I'm not sure how well you know all of this, but everything is based solely on party affiliation.

For another teacher, Marija B., the negative impact of this party affiliation, is the 'separation' caused by the different party affiliations. The teacher staff is split, which has negative results. The “widely needed collaboration” – as she puts it – is weakened, the unity within the school teachers is drastically reduced, from the professional perspective. Mira P. is another teacher who points at this ‘problem’:

Mira P: Recently, before I left [for pension], believe me, going to school my feet wanted to walk backwards. There was no one to talk to anymore, because of politics. Some [teachers] were on one side, others on the other side of politics. There was no unity when talking, no friendship [within the teachers]. All started to be worse and worse.

In MK, the teaching competencies and abilities of teachers, including their autonomy in the classroom, are systematically taken away from them by education policy. This top-down control is rarely seen as sensible by the interviewees. As Biljana S. says, how can you learn the German language if the students are not allowed to receive and use the workbook?

Biljana S.: Politics should not interfere in our work. [...] If the school inspection were to come into my classroom, they would penalize me for using more than just the [prescribed] textbook. The workbook is prohibited, only the textbook [should be used], but that's not practical. [...] A colleague [in my city] was penalized for using the workbook at school. There are penalties, but there are no rewards.

These strict rules on textbooks are increased by an additional lobbying tool. Teachers are required to write a detailed annual plan, present it to the school administration, and then follow it in all aspects. The state's favorite tool is financial punishment of teachers and/or schools. But, as Olivera D. says, as long

as “there is no complainant, there is no judge,” teachers will be able to make free decisions for their classes. Teachers criticize that complying with legal formalities is more important than the quality of education that teachers provide. Additionally, teachers' tasks at MK have changed due to the pressure of accountability. They have to keep accurate records and take on many additional administrative tasks, reflecting the results of the investigation.

MK teachers also perceive a social devaluation of their profession. The first issue is the problem of job allocation based on party affiliation. In many cases, only party membership and contacts "at the top" determine whether someone gets a job as a teacher, and these people even get "easy" schools/jobs.

Olivera D.: The situation is, like, it's very demotivating for the young people. [...] Colleagues with low quality are being hired, those with less experience. [...] We teachers are on a low [societal] level, unfortunately, seen as a profession in society. Overall, our profession has a bad reputation in society because of some individuals. [...] Colleagues, who got their positions through political affiliations, don't need to prove any qualifications, whether they can teach, whether they are capable of teaching, whether they want to work with children, how much knowledge they have. I think the entire prejudice that we all are bad teachers arises only because of these colleagues. I don't want to attack anyone, everyone wants to find a job, at least 'for a piece of bread,' but if you engage in a profession, in a job, then you must be professional.

Although most criticism points to political corruption and these "new" teachers being "bad", their lack of knowledge and skills is seen as a result of university studies in Macedonian times. Teacher educators in Yugoslav times had extensive practical experience before starting to teach in teacher education. This was their basis as university teachers, and this was highly valued by the teachers in this sample. These professors were expelled quite quickly from the universities, and in interviews the new professors are described as only theorists. Yes, they had high tertiary qualifications, but their roots in practice to achieve quality were missing.

This quality of teachers in teacher training is also highlighted by Georgija S. On the one hand, the exams were more difficult, because the contents of the entire year were examined, and on the other hand, teacher trainers in Yugoslav times were more strict. However, Georgija S. sees both aspects as a quality feature. These teacher educators demanded “real” knowledge. This “real” knowledge, which also appears in other interviews, is understood as timeless and valuable knowledge. G. S. and P. S. emphasize that this knowledge is what they still apply in classrooms today.

6. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Before MK became a national state on its own, it was part of socialist Yugoslavia. Therefore, teachers were supposed to be socialist role models for future Yugoslav citizens and focus the patriotism of youth on the Yugoslav state. This is in line with the results of research on German Democratic Republic (Dengel, 2005). Particularly important for socialism in Yugoslavia was, in addition to marxism, atheism, collectivism and patriotism, the “brotherhood and unity” of all Yugoslavs (Popovic, Majsova and Anastasova, 2021, p. 204). But, in an important difference, the collectivism of other communist countries was reduced due to the pre-democratic characteristics of Yugoslavia (Calic, 2019, p. 325; Popovic,

Majsova and Anastasova 2021). Yugoslav socialism emphasized patriotism for a united and unifying Yugoslavia. This loyalty to the Yugoslavian state played a unifying role, while in North Macedonia this state loyalty is now only a 'party loyalty'. All teachers that were interviewed view this as very negative. Earlier, in Yugoslavia, the teachers interviewed felt and experienced no differences in terms of someone being active in socialism and the Communist Party or not. All, regardless of their political affiliation, were "equal," which aligned with the idea of socialism. This view was expressed by all of the teachers I interviewed using different words, that the socialist idea of "brotherhood and unity" (Calic, 2019; Popovic, Majsova & Anastasova, 2021) was a lived reality. Unlike Wienecke's research on the German Democratic Republic (2021, p. 215), teachers explicitly declare their responsibility to educate young people in socialism and patriotism.

The big top-down changes did not begin until a few years of political stabilization, around 1995. From 1995 onwards, the importance of "favorable" relationships (i.e. corruption) in the education system did not diminish, but rather increased, which is considered very negative. Therefore, it can be said that from the teachers' perspective, during the Yugoslav period, the bureaucratic principle of merit was stronger, that is, hiring was based on performance (university degree) and/or seniority. In today's North Macedonia, they only see the principle of (partisan political) favoritism. Resisting favoritism requires initiative and perseverance, as in the case of Teodora P. and Daniel P. I would like to emphasize again at this point that my sample contains a bias. None of the people I interviewed got their jobs because they belonged to the party (currently in power).

NPM, as part of neocapitalism, is not against "rewards" for "good" work, also in schools. In addition to a salary increase, there are, of course, other ways to reward appropriate behavior. In MK, to get positions, especially permanent positions, is understood as a "reward". This allocation is usually carried out without any transparency. Likewise, the denial of a permanent contract is a way of punishing teachers. They are eliminated if they do not conform to the management level. Pedagogical quality is not decisive, but aspects such as relationships, political affiliation, corruption (cf. Atanasoska 2023a), which discredit the professional reputation of all teachers. Despite the many trends towards deprofessionalization, pressure and mistrust from educational policy, those interviewed in MK still try to deliver lessons in the best way for their students.

Going back to Brüsemeister & Eubel (2003) analysis of the three levels, I want to summarize the results as follows:

- Macro level of the school system:

The school's relationship with the world has not really changed. The state takes excessive control and reduces the autonomy that was given to schools in Yugoslavia. The free market plays a secondary role, but indirectly influences top-down decisions. Democracy, rather than socialism, is the main principle, although teachers understand it primarily as "capital runs everything." The logic

of the market is intensified with the increase of capitalist features in the educational system (including private education).

- Meso level of the organization:

At the meso level, the school leader and his team have become quite powerless in MK, having much less autonomy and influence than in Yugoslav times. In the end, the meso level has to organize the workplace, but without being free financially and in decision-making, always under close control by the state. All teachers express Radtke's statement about the "structural underfunding of the entire educational sector" (2019, p. 306).

- Micro level in the single school:

Teachers perceive a change in the role they are expected to play, which comes into strong conflict with their professional self (at least in the biased case of my teaching population). They critically identify the evolution of the liberal market in the educational field, especially when the objective is to maximize profits. They view capitalism critically, similar to socialist criticism. "Money" is always in question when authorities want to penalize teachers. The pedagogical aspects remain by the wayside, although they are codified in the laws. Teachers see that non-professional aspects weigh much more than pedagogical-didactic skills, and that they perform more semi-professional and non-professional tasks in their workplace.

It is important to take into account the bias of my sample. All the teachers voluntarily signed up for the interview with me, and express very clearly their discontent with the partisan system of assigning positions and with this corruption. I clearly associate this critical expression with the fact that none of these teachers obtained their position through a political party.

At the end of this article, the general answer to the research question can be formulated as follows. So, according to this analysis, being a good teacher means

- not be influenced by politics and their policies
- not be in favor of one party or the other
- actively work against corruption and nepotism.

Furthermore, good teachers try to live up to their high teaching standards, even when this must go against official state regulations. Some teachers use their private finances to improve the teaching environment for their students in class. Good teachers, as seen in the interviews, means being critical of capitalism and its influences on schooling.

Research is still needed on the former socialist "brotherhood and unity" in Yugoslavia (and other countries). How did teachers experience it as part of the population in practical terms? In this study, all teachers show a very positive picture of this socialist unity and regret that it no longer exists.

Furthermore, my research does not answer how teachers addressed and address ethnic-linguistic segregation. There have been and are different crises in this state "in transition" (Popovic, Majsova & Anastasova, 2021), such as the fight with Greece over the name, the long wait to join the EU, the high rate of emigration or the debate on Macedonian language, culture and identity, etc. Even for these crises, how teachers and education address this, my analysis cannot provide answers. Finding some of them, not only from the perspective of educational research, is not only interesting for Macedonia, but also for other under-researched countries and regions in Europe.

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