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From Gender Segregation to Gender Equality in the School System

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the education of women or female education, as this topic is often discussed separately from the schooling of the other gender. The paper will focus on the opportunities for equal integration of both genders into different stages of education, which only a few papers that otherwise generally touch upon what is described as female education have dealt with in detail.[1] Usually this issue is also overlooked in the more extensive reviews of the Slovene schooling.[2]

The modern Jesuit school system, which reflected the viewpoints of the Roman Catholic Church, was, of course, inaccessible to girls. Even after the state enactment of the elementary education with the Maria Theresa's 1774 reform, the school system provided for the separation by gender. For example, in 1805 it was written into the political constitution of the Austrian schools that in rural schools, where boys and girls sat together in a single classroom, »girls should be separated from boys, partly due to the promotion of morality and partly because of different education with regard to gender«. In the cities separate schools for girls and boys were to be established. Girls could only attend the 3rd year of the main schools in the case that no special schools for girls were located in that city and not enough boys were enrolled that year.[3] At the special girls' schools, women's handiwork was emphasised. The traditional or conservative nature of

1 For more see the two miscellanies on female education: Tjaša Mrgole Jukič et al. (eds.), *Izobraževanje in zaposlovanje žensk nekoč in danes* (Ptuj: Zgodovinski arhiv, first miscellany in 1998, second miscellany in 2000). See also: Tatjana Hojan, »Žensko šolstvo in učiteljstvo na Slovenskem v preteklih stoletjih«, *Zbornik za historiju školstva i prosvjete*, 4, 1968, pp. 47-81; Tatjana Hojan, »Slovenske učiteljice ob koncu 19. stoletja«, *Šolska kronika — Zbornik za zgodovino šolstva in vzgoje*, 7 — XXXI — 1998, pp. 134-149; Mirjam Milharčič-Hladnik, *Šolstvo in učiteljice na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana : Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1995); Mojca Peček, »Feminizacija učiteljevanja 1869-1941«, *Šolska kronika — Zbornik za zgodovino šolstva in vzgoje*, 26, 1993, pp. 61-73.

2 Vlado Schmidt, *Zgodovina šolstva in pedagogike na Slovenskem 1 - 3* (Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1988); Jože Ciperle - Andrej Vovko, *Šolstvo na Slovenskem skozi stoletja* (Ljubljana: Slovenski šolski muzej, 1987).

3 Quoted by: Hojan, »Žensko šolstvo in učiteljstvo na Slovenskem«, p. 53.

individual lands was also evident from the low number or special schools for girls. In the Gorizia and Trieste region, there were 50 such schools in 1851, but Styria only had 14. However, there were only 4 girls' schools in Carniola and 4 in Carinthia![4]

Until the middle of the 19th century, girls' schools – save for rare exceptions – were private. They were partly established by church orders, Ursulines and School Sisters, and partly by wealthier noblewomen and members of the bourgeoisie. Even the school reform after 1848 has not changed these characteristics quickly, and as late as at the end of the 19th century the percentage of public and private girls' schools in Slovenia was about equal. Public schools were also separated by gender, in order to avoid the morally »disputable« association of girls and boys.[5]

After the reforms following the Spring of the Nations, the attitude to the education of girls changed slightly. High schools (i.e. gymnasiums) and universities, which reformed after 1849, were still inaccessible to girls. However, the reform of elementary education according to the Act of 1869 brought some changes, since it provided for the establishment of women's teachers' colleges – the continuation of the education of girls after the conclusion of the people's schools.

Thus teachers' colleges were the first sort of schools where girls could continue their education as men's equals after completing their elementary education; of course, not in the same classrooms or schools, since schools were divided by gender into men's and women's teachers' colleges. This »concession« of the legislators did not take place due to the aspirations for equal participation of both genders in education, but mostly because of practical reasons. After the 1869 school reform, the teaching profession became even less interesting for men, since they had to give up certain sources of secondary income they had had before. Therefore, there was a lack of candidates for teachers' colleges and teachers at the time when all the youth had to be put into the classrooms. The relaxed conditions for the enrolment in the teachers' colleges failed to remedy the problem. However, the solution was to allow girls to enrol into teachers' colleges. This presents yet another proof that throughout history the receding respectability of a certain profession in the society has usually been related to the feminisation of that profession.

It was very interesting that by entering teachers' colleges, girls improved the average education level of the students at this kind of schools. They came from higher social strata than their colleagues, and »it generally held true that girls were better educated than their male peers«.[6] The state took the responsibility for the education of teachers, but due to the lack of staff the establishment of private teachers' colleges was allowed. However, the candidates had to pass final exams

4 Ibid., p. 55.
5 Ibid., pp. 51-58.
6 Schmidt, *Zgodovina šolstva in pedagogike na Slovenskem 3*, p. 243.

at the state schools. Private teachers' colleges for women enabled the Roman Catholic Church to preserve at least some of the influence on the education of the youth that had been taken away from it. Thus, apart from state teachers' colleges in Ljubljana and Maribor, there were also a few private teachers' colleges on Slovene territory, which in a few years acquired public concession.

The establishment of women's teachers' colleges, girls' high schools and secondary schools (in 1896 the municipal council of Ljubljana founded the first public high school for girls on Slovene territory) can be assessed from several perspectives, but the struggle of women for the introduction of gender equality in the school system is definitely among the most important of them. At that time special associations of women teachers, who came to realise that the demands for equality cannot even be implemented within their own profession, were also established.

The possibility of girls from people's schools attending the further education process did not imply that the attitude of the legislators to the issue of equality of genders with regard to the accessibility of education changed significantly. The law may not have demanded that the schooling of girls should necessarily end after the people's school. However, we should not overlook an important fact – until as late as the World War I, teachers' colleges were subject to special legislation and were not included in the legislation on secondary schools! Therefore, officially, secondary education was still the privilege of the male gender. We cannot deem the establishment of women's teachers' colleges, girl's higher primary schools and secondary schools as the efforts for gender equality in the secondary education, since girls were not able to conclude the secondary school with the »matura« exam (the final exam that was the condition for going to the university). Furthermore, the establishment of gender-specific schools did not exactly encourage the equal attitude to the genders.

Only as late as in 1872 were girls allowed to enrol in high schools, but not in order to attend classes but just to pass the exams. According to the instructions of the Ministry of 1877, the school had to evaluate every application of these girls and assess whether »any serious concerns of moral or disciplinary nature existed«. At the end of the schooling they could take the »matura« final exams; but, according to the guidelines of 1878 the documents thus acquired could not be marked as the »matura« exam certificates. According to the regulation of 1896, the certificates stated that these girls had passed the »matura« exam, but left out the statement that they had acquired the maturity necessary for the entry to the university. Only at the turn of the 19th century, in 1897, were the first individual women able to enrol in the Austrian universities.[7] However, even after they had been allowed to peek into

7 Tatjana Hojan, »Naše prve maturantke«, in Mateja Ribarič (ed.), *Od mature do mature : zgodovinski razvoj mature na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana: Slovenski šolski muzej, 1998), pp. 68-70; Alojz Cindrič, *Študenti s Kranjske na dunajski univerzi 1848-1918* (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, 2009), pp. 250-257.

the high school classrooms, a different regime was in use for girls than for boys. A pupil of the high school in Ptuj remembered that girls (occasional students) had to gather in a special room. A teacher came looking for them before the class and took them into the classroom, where they had to sit separated from the boys. After the class was over, the teacher took them back to »their« room, where they were again »picked up« by the teacher of the following class.[8]

Due to numerous restrictions, girls barely managed to struggle through the system in which everything was decided by men, who deemed the schooling of women to be a danger to moral life, an abandonment of the traditional values according to which the women's place was within the inner family circle, and later also an increasingly dangerous competition for workplaces. Girls at high school were few and far between, and, of course, not all of them managed to cope with the final exams. Even less of them continued their education at the university level. According to the information available, the first Slovene woman to receive a university degree graduated as late as in 1906 from the Faculty of Arts in Graz. Her name was Marija Wrigler, born in 1879 in Novo Mesto.[9] Since before the World War I female secondary school graduates were extremely rare, it is obvious that finding any university graduates was even harder.

Even after they had graduated from certain schools, women were not equal to their male peers – we have already mentioned the restrictions with regard to the »matura« final exams. The differences were most evident to those educated women whose numbers were the greatest, who thus »caught« the eye of men as they became the competition in the struggle for income. These were, of course, female teachers. In accordance with the legislation, their wages were lower than those of their male colleagues, since as single women they supposedly did not have the same material needs as their male colleagues who had to take care of their families. Namely, female teachers had to remain celibate, and their marriage without the consent of the competent school authorities was considered a voluntary resignation from their post. At the end of the 19th century, the formal approximation of the wages of male and female teachers began, but in reality the situation of women was still worse. Namely, their male colleagues took better and higher positions as well as advanced faster through the wage grades.[10]

The attitude of men towards the schooling of women in Slovenia generally remained negative, even after more liberal school legislation had been adopted. According to the articles of the teachers in the Slovene pedagogical publications, women should take care especially of morality and religion, and if they had to be educated at all, they should have primarily been schooled in practical things that

8 Tjaša Mrgole Jukič, »V šolo grem, pa pika!«, in Tjaša Mrgole Jukič (ed.), *Izobraževanje in zaposlovanje žensk nekoč in danes* (Ptuj : Zgodovinski arhiv, 1998), p. 113.

9 Aleksandra Serše, »Profesorice«, in Nataša Budna Kodrič and Aleksandra Serše (eds.), *Splošno žensko društvo: 1901 – 1945* (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2003), p. 232.

10 Peček, »Feminizacija učiteljevanja 1869-1941«, pp. 62-68.

mothers and housewives had to know. Even the opposing Slovene political blocs – the clericals and liberals – did not argue for significantly different principles in this context. To put it differently: while the clericals saw this issue through a prism of their narrow ideological viewpoints, according to which women did not have the same rights as men, liberals also failed to step up, since they did not argue for any concrete and clear standpoints with regard to the question of women's education.

Despite the changes in the attitude towards the schooling of women in the last twenty-five years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it has to be emphasised that a vast gap still persisted between the possibilities of boys and girls in terms of education. Any kind of education was available to boys, while few girls managed to overcome the obstacles and attain the education they were capable of attaining. Schooling was, with the exception of the people's schools, mostly separated by gender. Boys were taught by male teachers and professors, while girls learned from female teachers; for them it was rare to be instructed by males. Until 1918, two segregated worlds existed in the field of education (with the exception of the lowest level): male and female. Little of it involved mixed genders.

After the overthrow of 1918, the most important changes of the school system involved the introduction of the Slovene language and the perfection of the school system, while the third novelty – the opening of the whole school system for women – has not been discussed extensively in the overviews of the history of Slovene education. After the change of the state framework, the administrations of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs and then the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes abolished the obstacles restricting the entry of girls into schools without any special statements. Women finally had access to all levels of education. As if they tried to emphasise this symbolically – as a sweet revenge for all the centuries of being pushed away from schools – at the promotion protocol (with registered promotions of new doctors) of the University in Ljubljana established in 1919, a woman was registered under No. 001 as the first doctor promoted in Slovenia; it was Ana Mayer, who received her doctorate at the Faculty of Arts. Of course, there were no women among the first eighteen appointed professors.[11]

Thus women were finally able to attain the highest education possible, which still did not mean that the gender segregation in the school facilities was over. Certain secondary schools and teachers' colleges remained male or female exclusively, which especially holds true of Catholic schools with public concessions and teachers' colleges. However, unlike the situation before the World War I, the »mixed« gender education at all levels of schooling became increasingly prevalent, while gender segregation remained as a heritage of past days and as the consequence of ideological outlook on different requirements in the education of boys and girls.

11 First page of promotion protocol published in Mojca Repež (ed.) *75 let Univerze v Ljubljani: 75 let neprekinjenega delovanja Univerze v Ljubljani: 1919 – 1994* (Ljubljana: Univerza), p. 16.

Initially in secondary schools, i.e. high schools, a percentage of girls allowed in the class was specified, but this was soon abolished. The number of girls at what had once been exclusively male schools increased constantly. Before the World War I, only a handful of female occasional students and those who only took exams were present in the high school classrooms. In the first year thereafter, the number of girls to boys was one to nine. However, before the World War II, already two out of five high school pupils were female.

Number of male and female pupils in the Slovene high schools between the two World Wars[12]

	Total	Girls	Percentage of girls
School year 1918/19	4914	578	11.8
School year 1928/29	6960	1972	28.3
School year 1937/38	12.135	4282	35.3

The percentage of female students at the University in Ljubljana also increased, but more slowly, with more than a ten-year delay in comparison to high schools. This is completely understandable, since the generations of girls allowed to take part in education had to complete their secondary schools first. Despite the apparent equality, women probably still felt certain reservations about studying certain subjects due to discouraging employment opportunities. Thus contradictory peculiarities took place. For example, women could study and graduate in law, equally as men; but they could not become judges, since only men could be judges. Therefore, for women, the possibilities in terms of education still failed to bring all the practical results that graduating in certain studies should entail. At the university level, girls remained restricted from studying at one of the five Faculties of the University in Ljubljana: the Faculty of Theology.

Number of students enrolled in the University in Ljubljana between the two World Wars[13]

	Total	Girls	Percentage of girls
School year 1919/20	695	25	3.6
School year 1928/29	1353	154	11.4
School year 1937/38	1873	346	18.5

After the establishment of the Kingdom of SHS in 1918, the changes in the school politics on gender (in)equality also involved the situation of female teachers.

12 Jože Lavrič et al. (eds.), *Spominski zbornik Slovenije : ob dvajsetletnici Kraljevine Jugoslavije* (Ljubljana: Jubilej, 1939), p. 184.

13 Ibid., p. 306.

They were now equal to their male colleagues, which meant that the regulations on unequal wages and celibacy of female teachers were abolished. However, the 1930s showed that the issue had not been completely forgotten. Namely, during the economic crisis the government wanted to reduce education expenditure. Female teachers were the first that the government thought of: they lost certain cost-of-living bonuses, and in 1937 a partial celibate was even introduced. However, the Ministry soon repealed these thoughtless measures.[14] The Slovene part of the state had a »surplus« of teachers, which caused controversies at the level of teachers vs. unmarried female teachers vs. married female teachers. If some funds had to be saved or some staff laid off, the authorities always turned to the married female teachers.

However, the values still fostered today became increasingly prominent: that just like everyone else, female teachers had the right to choose their profession freely, and that the teachers' profession called for an appropriate wage according to the »equal pay for equal job« principle. The argument inherited since the Austro-Hungarian times that female teachers were first-class pedagogues due to their inherent maternal instinct (which they were supposed to transfer to their pupils and should not get married in order not to waste these instincts on their own children) was gradually forgotten.

The final abolishment of gender separation in the classrooms took place in the communist Yugoslavia a couple of years after the World War II. Already with the nationalisation of all school facilities and the abolishment of private education, which especially involved Catholic schools that kept separating boys from girls, the percentage of gender-specific school departments decreased significantly in the first post-war school year (1945/46). The majority of single-gender school departments were abolished in passing – in the time when the new role of women in the society was emphasised, when women got their voting rights and were also allowed to peek into the world of politics. There were no more obstacles for the education of women in the Slovene school system. The differences in the percentages of boys and girls in individual types of schools were thus a consequence of the traditional division into female and male jobs. Both genders were also more and more equally represented in the teachers' staff rooms, and unlike in the preceding years an increasing number of principals were women.

The authorities also tried to affirm gender equality by appointing women to leading posts. In 1946 the management of education at the state level was taken over by a woman for the first time. Lidija Šentjurc was appointed the Minister of Education of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Before the following school year of 1947/48 began, on 7 August 1947 minister Šentjurc signed the following Decree:[15]

14 Peček, »Feminizacija učiteljevanja 1869-1941«, pp. 71-72.

15 *Vestnik ministrstva za prosveto Ljudske republike Slovenije*, II, No. 11, 28.8.1947, p. 116.

According to the proposal of the Department of Education

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that on all primary schools and high schools where until now gender-separated classes had taken place, joint classes for boys and girls shall be introduced as of the school year of 1947/48.

In accordance with the proposals of the education sections of Municipal People's Departments, the Ministry of Education shall establish school districts and rename the schools.

Thus, gender segregation in schools lasting for centuries was formally abolished. Due to this abolishment the schools also had to be renamed accordingly. However, since exceptions prove the rule, we also have to look at the exceptions which this Decree had not yet dealt with. The Decree was limited to elementary and secondary schools, but it did not refer to the university studies. Therefore the exclusion of girls from the study process continued at one of the faculties – the Faculty of Theology. For the following four decades and a half, when this faculty operated as a private Church institution, this together with two new private Church's high schools that were established later, remained the only educational institution intended for men exclusively.

If we take a look at the proportion of girls and boys at secondary and higher education institutions, we can establish that it corresponded to the traditional outlook on the division into male and female jobs. Apart from students at schools, an increasing number of women also appeared in the teachers' staff rooms and offices, as the percentage of women among secondary school and university professors, where men still dominated, was also on the increase.

Number of pupils enrolled in Slovene high scools in the second half of the 20th century[16]

	Total	Girls	Percentage of girls
School year 1959/60	7,484	4,030	53.8
School year 1969/70	13,416	8,743	65.2
School year 1999/2000	31,426	18,661	59.4

Thus, in the last fifty years women also became dominant in what had once been traditional male fortresses: the high schools ("gymnasiums"). The female majority was stronger in the times when high schools were neglected under the communist rule. However, after high schools had been re-enacted in the 1990s and when professional and technical high school programmes were introduced, the proportion of boys even increased. The female majority became significant

16 Data for this and next table are taken from *Statistični letopis Slovenije* (Ljubljana: Zavod za Statistiko, relevant years).

at secondary schools of certain humanist and social studies orientations, for example at schools for teachers as well as at the administrative, hospitality and tourism, health, textiles schools, etc.

Number of students enrolled in higher education institutions in Slovenia in the second half of the 20th century

	Total	Girls	Percentage of girls
School year 1953/54	5,992	1,763	29.4
School year 1969/70	21,632	9,163	42.4
School year 2000/01	82,812	47,460	57.3

The trends from the former example were also present in higher education. The percentage of female students first became equal to that of boys in the 1950s and 1960s, after which women took over the majority at the humanist-social sciences faculties and high schools, for example Faculty of Arts, Economics, Law, Administration, Social Sciences, etc. At the turn of the 20th century, more than two thirds of all students enrolled in some of these schools were women. At some technical and natural science studies, the percentage of female students was extremely low (mechanical engineering, electro-technology, mining engineering); at others the share became quite significant (architecture, civil engineering, geodesy, mathematics – physics, etc.); while elsewhere the percentage of female students has already exceeded that of male students (chemistry – pharmacy, food technology, biology). At the studies of medicine women have also become more numerous than men, and at the studies of dentistry the percentage difference to the advantage of women has been on the increase.

The last fortress of the exclusively male studies fell after the next political overturn – the democratisation of Slovenia and its attainment of independence. After the reintegration of the Faculty of Theology into the University in Ljubljana at the end of 1992, the administration of this faculty started bringing their regulations in line with the University regulations. One of the more significant changes that took place in the following years was the possibility of women to attend theological studies. The enrolment in the Faculty of Theology soon started following the trends of the other humanist studies; already in a few years time the number of women students there exceeded the number of male students.