



PROJECT
EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP:
FROM POLICY TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE THROUGH QUALITY ASSURANCE
(EDC-QA PROJECT)

Stocktaking in Southeast Europe

Country Report:

C R O A T I A

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The project on Quality Assurance in Education for Democratic Citizenship was carried out in Croatia by the Research and Training Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship of the Faculty of Philosophy University of Zagreb from May to July 2003. Its aim was to collect data on policy, legislative, theory and practice of key aspects of quality assurance system in education for democratic citizenship in the context of education reform. The task was performed through interviews and focus-group discussions with the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES) and local governments, national advisory and research institutions, faculties and teachers' colleges, teacher professional organisations and trade unions, elementary and secondary school principals and teachers, and relevant NGOs. A total of 70 persons from Zagreb, Slavonia and Istria were contacted, 48 of whom accepted to take part in research. Over three fourth of respondents were interviewed in situ individually, in pairs or in a focus-group of four or five, while one fourth responded in written form by fax or email. The duration of in situ individual interviews was between 2 and 3 hours and of the focus-groups approximately 5 hours. The data thus collected make an exquisite 570-page account on how education reform and the introduction of education for democratic citizenship, in general, and the emergence of quality assurance system, in particular, are understood and practiced by a wide range of stockholders in the field. Their answers were in the present report combined with the results of analysis of legal, policy/strategic and other relevant texts so as to ensure better understanding of a dynamic nature of relations between the priorities (should) and realities (is) of contemporary education changes in Croatia.

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1. Current interest in “Quality in Education” in the country

- a. Is there evidence of public or professional interest in “Quality in education” in your country – particularly within government? What form does that interest take? Is there awareness of the current international interest in this field?

Interest in education quality has been slowly emerging in Croatia especially since the beginning of 2000. Although the use of the term still reflects a mis-match of more or less clear conceptual, strategic and practical approaches, some of which are still deeply rooted in a long tradition of understanding quality in terms of acquiring factual/descriptive knowledge along with vague criteria, there are explicit signs of mass dissatisfaction with the efficiency of education and a growing pressure to cease a long search for “quality solution” in the country. Problems in education that are now reaching the level of national crisis are the outcome of devaluation of the role of education, training and information in promoting social and individual well-being. Such neglect was particularly pronounced in the first decade of Croatian transition when several attempts to “restructure” the system were actualised in form of arbitrary “cleansing of inadequate” aims, contents, organisation and management of teaching and learning. Instead of strengthening human potentials through quality education, i.e. knowledge and skills that are relevant for contemporary citizens, Croatian political elite created an ever widening gap between urgent needs of the society in transition and actual services provided by educational institutions. Behind political rhetoric of advancement, the regulatory and self-regulatory mechanisms almost vanished and the system has, ever since, been staggering between, on the one side, the requests from the society and, on the other side, impoverishment in terms of analytic data, legal provisions, policies and resources, curriculum contents and methods, theoretical insights, as well as productive knowledge and skills.

The system is still autistic and centralised in the majority of its vital dimensions. The issue of quality, understood in terms other than complying with framework plan and programme has been rarely dealt with consistently. Quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement in the sense of efficiency, productivity or the promotion of human potential are still underdeveloped in policy, theory and practice. Institutional control is performed by national inspectors who exercise their power through an administrative-type surveillance of implementation of legal provisions, including the framework subject-matter plan and programme, while evaluation of students’ performance is entirely handed down to individual teachers who, apart from the programme and textbooks, have no quality indicators nor autonomy to make their evaluation and assessment more relevant.

However, the issue has come to the surface and it may soon be mainstreamed in political, professional and public discourses. The search for “a proper location and meaning” of education in the context of social and economic development may be traced in all documents that were, from 2000-2002 issued as discussion papers or strategic texts for reforming Croatian education by the MoES Education Council (Prosvjetno vijeće) and the Expert Group on Education of the Government Office for the Strategy of the Development of the Republic of Croatia. The review of these texts and the data from our research demonstrate an increase in awareness of quality in education characterised by diversity in its conceptualisation and implementation patterns.

In reference to the government’s interest, the MoES’ document *The Basis for Structuring Croatian School System (Osnova za ustroj školstva Republike Hrvatske)* that was launched in 2000 as a contribution to professional and public debate on the priorities of education reform explicitly states that Croatian education system fails to fulfil its social role. The document refers to quality in the context of promoting internal and external “evaluation of work, achievements and quality” of students, teachers, schools and the system as a whole.

The 2001 *White Paper on Croatian Education* of the Government Office for Strategic Development Expert Group on Education is the first document that explicitly establishes the

improvement of quality as the main goal of education reform. The document was written with a view "to conceptualise education as a factor of national development". It relies, on the one hand, on "the European developed countries, our educational tradition, the present-day state of the Croatian education system and the estimation of the existing and conceivable developmental limitations" and, on the other hand, on the concepts of lifelong-learning and "learning society". The main mission of education is associated with the improvement of the quality of life of the society and the individual. It is argued that Croatian school and out-of-school education do not meet the needs of a transition society, that primary and compulsory education are, in terms of structure and content, incompatible with European standards and that the system lacks in-built mechanisms for structural changes, all of which hinder education quality.

The MoES Education Council's *Conception of Changes in the Education System of the Republic of Croatia (Konceptija promjena odgojno-obrazovnog sustava u Republici Hrvatskoj)* of 2002 basically states the same and, following its earlier paper (*The Basis*) refers to quality in terms of "evaluation of work and achievement", including "the whole school work".

In the most recent paper *The Project on Croatian Education System for the 21st Century (Projekt hrvatskog odgojno-obrazovnog sustava za 21. stoljeće)*, which appeared in 2002 as a compilation of the Government Office's *White Book* and the MoES' *Conception of Changes*, the improvement of quality was made the basis for a set of urgent reform measures. These were further elaborated in the *Priority Measures in Education System for 2002-2004 (Prioritetne mjere u odgojno-obrazovnom sustavu 2002.-2004.)* launched by MoES in November 2002, most of which are directly financed from the MoES' budget.

Some of the changes initiated by the central government or the ministries that may be used as the evidence of the rise of political interest in quality of education are the following (for details see 1b, 1c and 2 below):

- In 2001 The *Law on the Changes and the Amendments of the Law on Primary Schooling* and the *Law on the Changes and the Amendments of the Law on Secondary Schooling*, were adopted with a view to start the process of financial and managerial decentralisation. The laws define the rights and responsibilities of local government and self-government in education, the role of school committees, and parent and student councils, etc.;
- In 2001 Croatia assessed to the Bologna Process; by 2003 out of six European goals the three received particular attention, such as the adoption of the ECTS system, enhancing the mobility of teachers, students and researchers, and the promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance. The issue of quality assurance was dealt with through peer-evaluation of the Zagreb University and the development of the paper on Development Strategy of the University of Zagreb known as the *Step Forward 2001 (Iskorak 2001)*. The paper defines the system of quality assurance in higher education in terms of accreditation, monitoring and evaluation. Evaluation relates to the assessment of higher education institutions (organisation, management, teaching and scientific work), as well as of teachers and students. Besides, MST financially supports several scientific projects carried out by the University of Rijeka and the University of Zagreb that directly or indirectly address the issue of quality (in teacher education and training; national curriculum; school self-evaluation); MST also encourages higher education institutions to join international programmes/projects in this field (e.g. through TEMPUS);
- In 2001 the Institute for Development in Education launched the project on disburdening of students as a contribution to the curriculum reform. Until 2002 the Institute functioned as the MoES' special agency for school supervision (separated from the National inspectorate) when it became independent and is now in the process of restructuring its priorities and activities;

- In 2001 the national strategy for reform of vocational education was drafted by the Croatian government and the European Commission following the European Training Foundation's (ETF) assessment in this field. The reform has been coordinated by the National Observatory in the framework of the CARDS Programme and since 2002 it has been focused on the reform of vocational education curriculum, decentralisation and financing, and teacher training;
- In 2002 the Centre for Research and Development in Education (CERD) was officially established on the basis of agreement between MoES, Ministry of Science and Technology (MST) and the Open Society Institute – Croatia. The mandate of the Centre is to support the reform by conducting four quality-oriented projects: feasibility study on the duration of compulsory education; the development of the national curriculum and the catalogue of knowledge and skills; the improvement of teacher training; and the development of the system of internal and external evaluation in education;
- In 2002 *The National Programme of Action for Youth of the Republic of Croatia* was launched by the State Institute for the Protection of Family, Maternity and Youth as a means of implementing the Article 62 of the Croatian Constitution relating to protection of maternity, children and youth, as well as to the creation of social, cultural, educational, material and other preconditions for promoting the right to live in dignity. The Programme defines a set of strategic policy goals for youth between 15 and 29 years of age. Its Working plan contains concrete implementation measures and defines the governmental bodies, public institutions and other relevant institutions and organisations, including NGOs which are either individually or collectively responsible for implementation;
- In 2002-3 the MoES has allocated considerable resources for the improvement of school life, in particular for the establishment of professional (teachers) councils at the county/town level and for the establishment and operating of the National Council of School Principals. It has also increased the budget for teacher in-service training and the renewal of school advisory services encompassing pedagogues, psychologists and special educators, including the development of in-service training. A considerable attention was also given to the implementation of school security programmes, especially relating to drug and AIDS prevention, as well as to promoting early (from the first grade) and regular (from the fourth grade) foreign language learning and to furthering the computerisation of schools and teacher training in ICT;
- In July 2003 the Law on the Establishment of the Centre for Evaluation in Education was adopted as an independent national agency for promoting external evaluation in education with an initial mandate to set up the state post-secondary school examination;
- For 2003 MoES has increased funds for adult education (basic and secondary education and retraining) in the context of the government's project *For Croatian Literacy: Towards a Desirable Future* which is linked to the UNESCO Decade of Literacy; the new plan and programme has been developed by the MoES and handed over for implementation to the Zagreb Folk Open School;
- For 2003 MoES has allocated extra-resources to NGOs' projects in education and training on the basis of agreement reached between the government and NGOs on the distribution of a certain percentage of lottery tax to civil initiatives in education and training;
- In July 2003 the new Law on Scientific Work and Higher Education was adopted by the Parliament. The law stipulates that scientific activity and higher education in Croatia are "an integral part of the European scientific, artistic and educational area" and that these sectors are based on, among others, the principle of "international quality criteria". The National Council for Science and the National Council for Higher Education are responsible for quality development, monitoring and evaluation of institutions and programmes.

Since the above list clearly demonstrates that education quality is slowly emerging as an important issue in Croatian education reform, it came as a surprise that a considerable number of our respondents did not confirm the change. Their pessimism was based on the fact that, in the last 13 years, several attempts to reform school system in Croatia failed, that no significant increase in the budget has been approved yet, and that teacher individual initiatives are seldom appreciated and rewarded. Some respondents were not familiar with strategy texts; others commented on the lack of information from “above”, while some others argued that quality had nothing to do with the government but with intrinsic motivation and responsibility of the individual. One respondent said that *“the interest for quality does exist but is always conceptualised from “above”, by people who have never spent an hour in the classroom or who had worked in school many years before and who, paradoxically, now feel no need to invite teachers practitioners to assist them in designing school changes.”* However, majority of the respondents reacted positively. They think that interest in quality of education is being increased at all levels. Some of them even referred to such increase in terms of “an emerging quality consciousness”.

Our analysis of official documents and interviews shows a great variety of existing forms of interest in quality among social actors. While the government’s interests are demonstrated by a policy priorities and the level of their implementation, the interests of professionals and/or practitioners may vary considerably as the following list demonstrates:

- teachers seek more and more innovative, skill and team-oriented, as well as alternative in-service training programmes; they consult scholarly accounts more and show more interest in professional associations;
- schools set up higher criteria for enrolment of new students and show greater interest in a wide range of project and exchange programmes at local, national and international level; they also encourage their teachers and students to take initiatives and to participate in out-of-school activities, including school competition and civil initiatives, and they provide counselling and individualised learning for both low- and high-achievers;
- parents, especially urban, pay more attention to selection of schools and put more pressure on teachers and school administration to ensure their children’s success;
- despite its focus on exclusivity and sensationalism, media increasingly hold ministers and their administration accountable for failures in education, including individual school accidents and cases of violence, drug abuse, racism and intolerance among students.

The awareness of current international interest in improving the system of quality assurance is still limited to certain administrative and academic/university circles, in particular to those involved in designing strategic papers on education reform. Apart from them, there are some NGOs, such as Open Society Institute – Croatia, as well as schools that participate in domestic and international projects focused on quality improvement (e.g. Quality School Project) or that experiment with school-based planning or quality assurance (e.g. from Varazdin and Labin). In addition, a considerable number of teachers from vocational schools are becoming aware of international interest through the CARDS Programme and the assistance of the European Training Foundation. University staff is being informed in the context of the Bologna Process. In sum, the number of policy-makers, teachers, researchers and administrators in education who are aware of the current international interest in this field and who see it as the precondition for promoting democracy and economic well-being, is growing.

**b. Is a particular definition of “quality” well developed in the discourse?
Does it include issues of EDC?**

No sufficient normative, scholarly or operational definition of education quality has been provided by the policy-makers, theoreticians or practitioners in Croatia. The concept is used mostly implicitly and indicates the existence of a great variety of more or less traceable approaches to

conceptualising relations between accepted or preferred goals and the outcomes, with or without the recognition of intermediary variables. In some cases it reflects more a content-oriented perspective on education and schooling, while in some other cases it may derive from a student-oriented or a society-oriented perspective. Moreover, it may be more standard/norm-centred or performance-centred or a combination of the two. During the 1970s the stress was on standardised assessment of students' cognitive performance, i.e. on tests or the so-called "objective-type tasks" which were centrally designed by subject-matter specialists and sent to schools for application. The concept also included the issue of counselling but not of school self-evaluation. During the last decade, earlier professional standards almost vanished and, due to permanent failures in attempt to reform education system, no sustainable criteria existed. Assessment and evaluation became "personalised", turning schools into the place of trading and negotiation between, on the one hand, teachers and students/parents and, on the other hand, school principals/teachers and national inspectorate/supervisors.

Official texts related to pre-tertiary education reform mentioned above do not contain any explicit definition of quality. However, since some explicitly state the aims of education, the aims may be used to discuss the approach to quality. The *White Book* states that the main purpose of education is "to contribute to the quality of life" seen in terms of personal and social well-being. Consequently, "objectives of education are those capabilities which make an individual competent for assuming the main life roles", such as learning to know, learning to act, learning to live together and learning to be. Among the "most important objectives of lifelong learning" the paper also mentions "competence for active citizenship and the competence for employment" which is the core of education for democratic citizenship. When this is linked to *Priority Measures* designed with a view to improve education quality, it appears that quality is here associated with the disburdening of students, developing curricula that promote productive knowledge and skills (life literacy), the establishment of external evaluation system, including international assessment (e.g. PISA), and the like.

However, this is only one side of the coin while the other side, i.e. school development planning and self-analysis, only appears between the lines. The focus on establishing external criteria and procedures may be the reason why the principles of democracy, human rights, equality, pluralism and civil society, all of which are officially recognised, especially in the *White Book*, as the foundations for the "improvement of the quality of life", are not firmly rooted in either of the documents. Apart from external standards, such as constitutions, international agreements, laws etc., these principles are primarily developed and experienced in situ, which means that their quality may primarily be assessed through school code-of-conduct and self-analysis. Thus, to reach the objective of developing "the competence for active citizenship" as stated in the *White Book*, teachers, students and school administration must develop a great number of competencies that may not been recognised by external evaluation.

This dilemma is well elaborated by a representative of Croatian academic community: "*The most important task is to develop an organisational model for entire evaluation process. External evaluation from preschool to university, including international assessment, is necessary, but I prefer to focus on quality assurance that includes internal monitoring and evaluation. In order to implement such system school needs to establish new internal and external communication styles and be well equipped with specially trained advisory team. I am afraid that nothing of this has been recognised by policy-makers yet.*"

Self-analysis and internal evaluation are important dimensions of the discourse on education quality due to the fact that different groups understand the term "quality" in different ways as our sample demonstrates. Namely, our respondents associate quality with the following:

- the introduction of a comprehensive scheme of disburdening of students, including interdisciplinary knowledge, the reduction of teaching contents, as well as of extra-school activities imposed on students by their parents;
- action-oriented and cooperative methods of teaching and learning, including team and project-work;

- compliance with international/European standards of knowledge and skills, and promotion of external evaluation;
- well equipped learning environment, including proper space and new information-communication technologies.

The differences in understanding quality were frequently pointed out in our research. The following account summarises the discussion: *"Different matrices for quality exist in professional and public discourses. Parents relate quality to their children's satisfaction with the school and school marks; school principals are more focused on good organisation and management of an entire school life; school inspectors require accurate documentation, compliance with legal and professional norms, etc. Teachers think of quality in terms of a positive school and class climate, successful teaching, students' high achievement, and in terms of solving students' personal problems. Sometimes, when they wish to pull the best out of their students, they have to break the rules what school inspectors would hardly, if ever, approve."*

One NGOs representative argues that *"an efficient discussion on quality necessarily includes the link between clearly defined goals and the level of their achievement. Our main problem is related to goals based on an outdated approach to knowledge that stresses quantity of information instead of intellectual, social and communication skills or competencies by which learning is set free from the school and connected to life."*

There was a strong consensus that the definition of quality necessarily includes EDC, in particular the awareness of human rights and freedoms, participation, equality of treatment, respect for diversity, environmental awareness, individual responsibility etc. One of the respondents put it briefly: *"Education quality without human rights is problematic."*

Croatia is among a few countries in the world with the *National Human Rights Education Programme* which has been developed from preschool to secondary school level, including adult and media education. Its aim is to assist children, young people and adults in learning the basic principles and values of democracy and plural society, as well as to develop intellectual and social skills for their productive participation in such environment. The programme defines human rights education as a synergic and life-long process of the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and perspectives which are indispensable for the promotion of personal dignity and social well-being, and relates the efficiency of such education to a set of structural and contextual prerequisites, including school institutional processes. The implementation, monitoring, evaluation and development of the National Human Rights Education Programme, as well as teacher preparation for its implementation, are co-ordinated by the Human Rights Education Committee, now under the MoES. In 1999 the Elementary Human Rights Programme was officially included in the Framework Plan and Programme for Primary Schools with a view to be implemented cross-curricularly, as an optional subject or as an extra-curricular activity (projects etc.). Since 1999 a series of teacher in-service seminars in human rights and democratic citizenship education have been organised by the MoES' Institute for Development in Education and coordinated by 2 national supervisors and 21 county human rights education co-ordinators.

Notwithstanding, the National Human Rights Education Programme is in no way referred to in any of the policy/strategy documents despite the fact that some of them explicitly define democracy, human rights, equality, pluralism and civil society as the prerequisites for the "improvement of the quality of life" which is adopted as the main goal of education reform.

c. Is there interest in building this approach into the actual processes of education reform? Are there any actual steps being taken to that end?

The "approach" described above is the framework of educational reform which directly influences action at national and regional level, including the (re)distribution of financial resources. However, implementation measures should be better balanced with overall educational priorities and better co-ordinated. They should also be accompanied with clear distribution of

responsibilities from schools to the government and have reliable and sustainable in-built mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, the function of which is further improvement of both education policies and practices.

As noted above, the first paper which more or less reflects concern for quality is *The Basis for Structuring Croatian School System* launched by the MoE's Education Council in 2000. The document opts for improving internal and external "evaluation of work, success and quality" of students, teachers, schools and the system as a whole. It also explains that improvement means depend on assessment which goes beyond mere knowledge; it should promote school autonomy and self-adaptation to society's changes, parents' involvement and school-community partnership, as well as development of education standards as means for achieving equality (education for all). In *The Development of Education*, a national report to UNESCO prepared by the MoES' Institute for Development in Education in 2001 "a continuous upgrading of quality and excellence in education" is equated with computerisation of primary and secondary schools, improvement of teachers' professional knowledge and school counselling services, as well as with spreading of the Quality School Movement based on the Glasser's theory of choice.

The Government Office for Strategic Development's *White Paper on Croatian Education* of 2002 proposes the following systemic changes:

- development of a curricular subsystem (promotion of knowledge and skills with the most optimal transfer value; interdisciplinary and innovative programmes; open, democratic, inclusive, coherent and the European dimension-related curriculum);
- development of a technological subsystem (understanding-oriented and diversified learning opportunity; non-authoritarian and supportive school climate; improvement of professional information and counselling; improvement of teacher education and their professional status; development of the system of recognition of competencies);
- development of links between education and its environment (partnership between schools and out-of-school organisations and interest groups; decentralisation and deregulation of the school system; promotion of an equitable, accessible, passable and flexible system which is well co-ordinated and adequately financed).

Apart from curriculum development, the *White Book* takes account of teacher pre-service and in-service education and training, the development of R&D institutions and advisory services, the training of school principals for a decentralised management, as well as the increase in financing, as integral aspects of education reform. Among the short-term measures for the strategy implementation, the following are proposed:

- conducting feasibility studies on the introduction and duration of compulsory education;
- empirical evaluation of existing programmes and the development of new skill-oriented curricula for primary and secondary schools;
- external evaluation of educational achievement at the end of primary, compulsory and secondary education;
- introduction of the state post-secondary school examination;
- development of pedagogical standards for reformed primary and secondary schools;
- revision of legislative in education and introduction of new laws on education, national inspectorate and counselling service, etc.;
- promotion of financial and managerial decentralisation, as well as the decentralisation of curriculum in line with the principle of "disburdening" of contents.

In the 2002 MoES Education Council's *The Conception of Changes in the Education System of the Republic of Croatia* the following immediate reform tasks are suggested:

- development of national curriculum with clearly defined aims, contents, methods and evaluation procedures, including textbook standards;
- development of a "catalogue of knowledge and capabilities" (ISCED level 1-4), as well as a pedagogical standard;
- development of an information system (data base);

- reform of teacher training and the establishment of the system of training of school principals;
- improvement of education legislative;
- establishment of professional institutions, bodies and working groups, especially in R&D field, vocational education and training, external evaluation, life-long learning and gifted children.

The fourth document - *The Project on Croatian Education System for the 21st Century* which was issued by MoES in 2002 as a compilation of *The Concept* and the *White Book* – became the basis for designing the *Priority Measures in Education System for 2002-2004 (Prioritetne mjere u odgojno-obrazovnom sustavu 2002.-2004.)*. The paper sets the improvement of education quality and increase in the level of education of Croatian population at the top of priority list. Among other priorities are the following:

- structural and internal adjustment of Croatian system to the European models;
- removal of factors that restrict access to education and mobility inside the system, and the advancement of the system's efficiency in relation to users;
- development of national curricula oriented towards the achievement of productive knowledge, basic skills and literacies, including the promotion of links with labour market.

In 2002 the priority was given to designing a disburdening scheme for elementary and secondary school students by reducing and restructuring framework plan and programme for elementary school and gymnasium programmes. The task was carried out by the expert group from the MoES' Institute for Development in Education that worked in co-operation with teachers. They have applied the principle of integration and coordination of school subjects and, instead of teaching subjects, established the so called teaching areas in which different contents are linked and coordinated. The results were published during 2002-2003 in a series of publications (5 for elementary school and 3 for gymnasium) entitled *A Curricular Approach to Changes in Elementary Schooling/Gymnasium: Detailed Working Out of the Framework Plan and Programme in the Function of Disburdening of Students*: (Kurikularni pristup promjenama u osnovnom školstvu/gimnaziji: Razrada okvirnog nastavnog plana i programa u funkciji rasterećenja učenika).

The 2003 *Priority Measures* include: pilot implementation of the state post-secondary school exam; initiation of the process of students' international evaluation (PISA); the development of educational standards and the School for School Principals. The priorities for 2004 are: the evaluation of existing programmes and development of curricula from preschool to secondary school; the development of life-long teacher training model and improvement of self-evaluation and external evaluation "in the function of improving the quality of education".

"Quality awareness" has been, until recently, almost solely associated with the development of higher education. The process was initiated by the 1993 Law on Higher Education which set up a procedure for quality assurance based upon institutional self-analysis and external peer-review. Despite the fact that its implementation failed, the idea began to attract more attention of the academic community after the three external review reports had been made public and, especially after Croatia signed the Bologna Process in 2001. The 1995 "Report of the Advisory Mission on Quality Assurance" of the Council of Europe's Higher Education Committee offered the ground for improving the quality assurance procedures by clarifying the division of responsibilities of the MoES' Education Council, MST, Rector's Conference, and the universities and faculties in relation to granting of minimum standards (accreditation) and to quality assessment (self-analysis and peer-review). Two other reports appeared in 2000 as the result of an external institutional evaluation of the University of Zagreb made by the CRE European Universities Association and the Universities Project of the Salzburg Seminar's Visiting Advisors Programme. A year later the University of Zagreb finalised its development strategy known as the *Step Forward 2001 (Iskorak 2001)*. The paper defines the system of quality assurance in higher education in terms of accreditation, monitoring and the evaluation of institutions (organisation, management, teaching and scientific work), as well as of teachers and students. Since the

accession to the Bologna Process in 2001, the changes in higher education have been carried out in line with the six European goals of the Bologna Process. By the middle of 2003 the ECTS system, the mobility of students and teachers, and the European co-operation in quality assurance have been particularly promoted. However, the process is handicapped due to the lack of appropriate resources since Croatian universities are still left, apart from Tempus, with no assistance from the main European programmes in this field, such as Erasmus and Socrates.

2. Current interest in QA systems in education in the country

a. Is there any evidence of government interest in QA systems in regard to schools in your country? What form did it take? Is it systemic in approach? What stage is it at? Does it appear in any policy papers?

There is no official document that deals with this issue. Although there are some changes in practice, it seems that schools are still perceived as the “receivers” of quality standards developed from above and not as partners in promoting education quality. As mentioned above, no policy/strategy text brings lights to this issue. While referring to the improvement of education quality, all documents on primary and secondary education changes focus primarily on quality control through external evaluation of student achievement. The term “quality assurance” is, as stated above, consistently used only at the level of higher education.

Since these two approaches differ, it may lead us to conclude that Croatian policy-makers actually promote a dual approach to quality in education, in which the quality of pre-tertiary education sector is seen as being more dependent on external regulatory mechanisms (external standards, monitoring and evaluation) than it is assumed for the level of higher education. On the other hand, it may reflect a serious misunderstanding of the entire process of quality improvement that may affect the allocation of national resources for education in the near future. Namely, if our conclusion is correct, schools and teachers may easily be left unassisted (financially, consultatively) in assuming their vital roles and responsibilities in developing the system of quality assurance other than mere “local implementation” of the national curriculum, as is still the case. And again, if our conclusion is correct, it means that policy/strategy papers must be critically reviewed with this issue in mind. They have to give more “space” to the main actors of reform (schools, teachers, students and parents/community) and aim to better balance the need for quality control with the imperative of quality assurance in order to comply more with the principles of decentralisation. If schools and teachers would be left unrecognised and, moreover, unprepared for taking their responsibilities in a decentralised system which is now being developed in Croatia, it might create more problems than assets since the exercise of autonomy and accountability in education essentially depends on them.

A basis for balancing these two approaches may be found in the project on “Self-evaluation of Schools as a Means of Improving Education Quality” which is being launched at the county level and supported by the MST. The aim of the project is to establish a network of self-improving schools that promote internal evaluation and partnership. It is expected that the Institute for Development in Education would take a part in the process of implementation and use the model for introducing similar changes in other counties. Another example is the Varazdin Gymnasium which operates as one out of five Croatian citizenship sites established in the framework of the Council of Europe’s EDC Project.

Another initiative comes from vocational education sector where the changes of this kind have been introduced on the basis of ETF’s report on “Initial Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Croatia – Assessment and Options for Development: Report by the International Peer Review Team” and coordinated by the National Observatory that works in cooperation with the Institute for Development in Education.

Several relevant projects and/or programmes are also implemented at the level of higher education. The "Programme of Quality Promotion Initiatives in Higher Education" of the University of Rijeka aims at establishing an Office for Quality Promotion on the basis of self-evaluation. The main objective of the TEMPUS project "The Development of Quality Assurance System in Higher Education" is the promotion of culture of quality at the university and is carried out by the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology of the University of Zagreb in cooperation with the University Extension Centre from Vienna. Another TEMPUS project, "The Improvement of Teaching Quality in SEE" deals with quality assurance in the context of teacher training and is coordinated by the Zagreb Teachers' Academy and the University of Erlangen – Nuernberg, Germany.

- b. Does the interest/statements contained in policy papers represent a developed understanding of the power and utility of a QA approach? Is it sensitive to the difficulties involved? Does it reveal an understanding of the QC/QA dichotomy? Does it reflect an awareness of the problems involved in developing such an approach?**

As demonstrated above, the concepts of quality, quality assurance, quality promotion, quality improvement, quality consciousness and quality culture, let alone quality assurance system, are still unclear to the majority of Croatian policy-makers, theoreticians and practitioners. A somewhat more understanding may be found in higher education sector due to the fact that university and college staff has been, from 2001, engaged in reforming their programmes and the organisation of studies in accordance with the Bologna Process and, especially, with the ECTS system. Notwithstanding, the implementation of the system approach is still rather underdeveloped even at the higher education level.

- c. Apart from issues of interest in a complete QA systemic approach, is there any evidence of government interest in any of the particular elements listed in the introduction? (For example, the development of a National Assessment agency, or the reform of a National Inspectorate, or the commissioning of researchers to work in this field?) What form does this interest take? Is it explicitly linked to QA? Could it be so linked? Are any actual developments taking place?**

According to the policy/strategy documents, priority measures and the allocation of MoES' resources for 2003 the government's primary interest is focused on establishing the system of quality control. Two institutions have recently been established for such purpose: the National Centre for External Evaluation in Education and the Centre for Research and Development in Education. The mandate of the former is to set up a system of standardised evaluation of primary and secondary students and of the latter to design national curriculum and establish educational standards (indicators) of knowledge and skills for primary and secondary education.

The Parliament has also passed the law on the Institute for Development in Education of the Republic of Croatia as an independent institution. Until 2003 the Institute was an integral part of the MoES responsible for R&D, as well as for providing professional (subject-matter) and pedagogical/methodological counselling services for schools.

The National Inspectorate which is responsible for legal and administrative dimensions of school work, has not been reformed yet and it is still an integral part of the MoES. Several attempts to reform the service have failed.

Three recent initiatives may soon turn to be important for the development of quality assurance system in the country: the establishment of the National Council of School Principals; county professional (teacher) councils and the National Youth Council.

d. Is there any significant evidence of expressed interest amongst schools/school principals/ teachers associations? What form does it take? Does it appear in any publications? Is there any “network” operating? Is government aware of such interest? Are they supporting/encouraging it? How?

Our research could not confirm such interest. What it did confirm is a high level of concern of teachers and school principals about the lack of autonomy in designing school curricula and in school development planning. There is still little awareness among them about their responsibility for contributing to the development of the national curriculum and standards. Although they frequently disapprove framework plans and programmes, most of which are designed by university professors or experts employed by the MoES, most teachers and school principals somehow think that the development of national curricula and standards requires special knowledge and skills which they do not possess.

Some basic initiatives related to establishing quality assurance system exist at the level of individual schools which take part in research or action projects in this field (e.g. the Labin secondary school; the Gymnasium of Varazdin). However, their initiatives are still rather unrecognised by authorities and unknown to other schools.

Most teacher associations are in the process of reorganisation and reactivation after years of stagnation. One important impetus to their renewal came from the Open Society Institute – Croatia. In 2002 the Institute set up a modest fund for their empowerment with a view to assist them in playing the role of partners to MoES in the process of designing and implementing education reform. Among the most active associations are those in foreign languages and natural sciences but, according to a few data from our research, they deal solely with evaluation in the framework of their specific school curricula. Such practice may be soon changed due to the process of reactivation of teacher councils at national and county levels.

e. Are there any academics in your country publishing in this field? What is their area of interest? What are they saying?

There are very few scholars and researchers, mainly from the University of Zagreb and the University of Rijeka, and even less practitioners, who publish systematically and comprehensively in this field. Several accounts on monitoring and evaluation in primary and secondary schools are available on the market but these texts do not deal with the issue of quality assurance system in the way here presented. However, there are well known writers who publish articles about internal evaluation, especially in relation to the so-called school development service (consisting of pedagogues and psychologists), or about school climate, teacher-student relations etc.

f. Are there any NGO’s working in the field to develop interest in/skills in QA? Do any NGO’s presently interested in EDC fall into that category?

Most Croatian NGOs that are active in education and training, including education for democratic citizenship, are neither equipped nor specialised for assessment and evaluation which goes

beyond their own programmes. However, some of them have developed broadly conceived models for programme and performance evaluation. The Step by Step association of parents uses an efficient model of internal evaluation. The Small Step is well known for its peer-mediation programme which has lately been enriched by external (peer) evaluation. Recently, the Open Society Institute – Croatia has given significant attention to the development of a number of dimensions of quality assurance by providing financial support to NGOs projects.

At the level of higher education several professional associations have recently been enhancing their expertise in this field. The most pronounced among them is the Universitas from Rijeka - an association for the promotion of quality teaching at the university – which has established close cooperation with the University of Rijeka. The Croatian Pedagogical Society (Hrvatsko pedagoško društvo) - recently established at the Department of Education of the Faculty of Philosophy – is focused on management in education. Several initiatives have also been taken by the largest and oldest teacher professional organisation in Croatia - Croatian Pedagogical and Literature Assembly (Hrvatski pedagoško-knjizevni zbor). It organises seminars and professional meetings on the issue of quality improvement understood in terms of monitoring, evaluation and assessment.

3. Empowerment and devolved responsibility

a. Are there any national statements of policy, setting out intentions to devolve responsibility/decision making to schools?

The Law on the Changes and the Amendments of the Law on Primary Schooling and the Law on the Changes and the Amendments of the Law on Secondary Schooling were adopted by the Parliament in 2001 with a view to promote decentralisation processes in education, especially in relation to property rights (counties and towns), finance and management. Teachers' salaries and their in-service training which consume more than 85% of the MoES budget, as well as computerisation etc. are still under the responsibility of the central government. Financial participation of local self-government is still minimal and limited to schools' material expenses and equipment.

The school statute determines its organisation and governance. The main governing body is the school committee which consists of 4 teachers' representatives, 3 representatives of local (self)government and 2 representatives of the parents' council. In the secondary school, the representatives of the students' council may participate in decision-making (the school committee) but have no right to vote.

All policy/strategy papers promote the idea of decentralisation and deregulation as such but do not explicitly and consistently deal with these processes, leaving the issue of decision-making largely undefined. A direct top-down control still prevails in the government-school relations, especially in the area of curriculum development. Majority of our respondents stressed the importance of defining relations between national (framework) and school-based (applied) curriculum. One teachers' representative has described it as follows: *"Despite all that noise about decentralisation and school autonomy national inspectors exercise their power as they did before. They come to schools and check documentation. Their only interest is in whether a teacher complies with formal requirements, i.e. whether he/she has the papers properly written. They do not show interest in what is going on in the classroom. Administrative matters are a great burden to teachers."*

Some of our respondents have expressed their concern about decentralisation by pointing at a rather unexpected problem. They say they have an impression that decentralisation in school management is not properly conceptualised since it allows the school principal to concentrate too much power in his/her hands and thus to make teachers too dependent on his/her arbitrary decisions.

b. Have there actually been developments in this field? How are schools reacting? Have the results been evaluated?

In order to be able to answer this question properly much more empirical data are needed. In Croatia there is no systemic monitoring and evaluation of decentralisation processes except for pilot evaluation of the process of students' disburdening conducted by the Institute for Development in Education. Our research data demonstrate that there are some schools (e.g. elementary school in Kastav; several schools in Zagreb, Gymnasium in Varazdin, secondary school in Labin, etc.) that perform their tasks successfully under the decentralisation of management scheme and that there are some schools with important problems in decision-making, as well as that almost all schools face the problems of decentralisation of financing. The reaction of one interviewee is very convincing: *"Contemporary system of decentralisation is nothing but a handing over the administrative responsibilities to lower levels of the same central system of administration. Everything else is the same. Now local administration controls the system in the name and for the benefit of the central administration. Schools are less autonomous than before. The changes are neither monitored nor evaluated"*.

c. How far do these developments extend? To hiring staff, changing timetables, choosing books, buying in-service training (IST) or consultancy support? Managing budgets? Flexibility in curriculum provision? Local involvement in selection of Principals?

School committees (the main governing body of the school) are responsible for hiring the staff (some limitations exist related to the provisions of the collective agreement signed between the teacher unions and the government) and for electing school principals. Schools may not alter the timetable for regular teaching (number of hours per subject-matter per day or week) although they have some other possibilities to adapt the curriculum to match the local needs. They are not fully independent in choosing optional courses mainly because the fact that computer technology, religious classes and second foreign language learning, which are prioritised by the MoES consume major part of optional time available. However, schools are free in planning extracurricular activities, and many schools use this opportunity to run projects in the field of human rights and democratic citizenship. Schools are also free in deciding about purchasing books and journals for students and teachers.

In principle, schools are free to choose in-service training programmes for their teachers but in reality they are highly restricted in their decision due to the fact that only a very small amount of the government's resources allocated for teacher in-service training actually reaches schools. The main direct beneficiary of the resources is the Institute for Development in Education, which organises regular and optional seminars and workshops for teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and school principals in co-operation with teachers' academies, colleges, and faculties, as well as with NGOs. These seminars are listed in the Catalogue of Professional Meetings that is published twice a year by the Institute and disseminated to all schools.

d. Are there arrangements for local governance? Involvement of local people outside school? What decision-making powers are devolved to this local body? Is there student/parent involvement? School development planning?

Formally, there are several possibilities for the involvement of local self-government and the community, in particular through school committees (the main governing body of the school) which consist of 4 teachers, 3 local representatives and 2 parents; parents' councils; students' councils (in secondary schools) and through different commissions and other bodies. There are also teachers' associations organised on the county or town level as well as the branches of the National Youth Council that may have an important role in the near future.

e. Are there local sources for fund generation for school development? Who is responsible? Who manages funds so raised? What accountability for their use exists?

According to the laws on primary and secondary schooling, local self-governments and their departments of education are responsible for covering material expenses and the equipment of schools on their territory. They may also approve additional resources for programmes of common local interest performed by schools. Other types of funding are: projects and activities supported by international and domestic donors; individual donations (tax deductible), gifts in goods from business firms, parents, former students etc.

The only two funds for school/faculty development that we know of are the Fund of the University of Rijeka created by the local community, county and the City of Rijeka and the Fund of the Varazdin Gymnasium recently set up by the former students. The establishment of such funds is a novelty in Croatia and the existing two may function as models for other educational institutions.

While referring to financial problems faced practically by all schools, some of our respondents suggest that schools should be allowed to increase their resources by selling their services to local community (computer classes for adults, etc.).

f. Are your respondents able to describe a pattern to local practices in school management and how they are developing? What accounts do they give of how such developments are perceived and how they are progressing? Is there evidence of the emergence of participative styles within a school?

There is evidence on the development of participative styles of governance (Varazdin, Labin, Opatija, Osijek). However, many of our respondents argue that all partners (principals, teachers, students, parents and local representatives) should receive some training to be prepared for participation in decision-making and team work, especially parents. In some cases there is a lot of dissatisfaction with parents. One teacher has argued that *"parents come to school, claim their rights but ignore their responsibilities. They teach us how to teach, behave and give marks. Sometimes they directly ask the teacher to give better marks to their children and, if he/she refuses, threaten with inspectors. In the end, in order to avoid inspector's surveillance, some teachers or principals give up."*

g. Is there evidence of staff accepting "corporate" responsibility for school performance/planning? Are there whole-staff meetings in schools? What kind of matters do they deal with?

Development planning is not recognised in laws on pre-tertiary education. Schools are responsible for drawing annual plans and programmes in line with the framework (national) plan and programme. In most cases it is done by the principal or school pedagogue (school

counselling service). One comment from our sample is indicative in this respect: *"Schools do not have development plans. In a centralised system one cannot expect institution-based development planning. Awareness about such need does not exist among practitioners."*

However, at least in Varazdin gymnasium and Labin secondary school all teachers, students and parents participate in drawing annual and development school plans and programmes and are equally responsible for their implementation. In the Varazdin Gymnasium the tasks are performed by teams. Twice a year there is a whole-staff meeting. In both schools the focus is on curriculum and management issues.

h. Would current practices in schools (related to the role of the teacher as a member of a larger body – the school staff) present obstacles to such developments? Would teachers' contracts and current work practices allow staff to develop corporate work practices?

In compliance with the laws on primary and secondary education as well as with the collective agreement, teachers' contracts do not refer to corporate work practice. The contracts mainly define teachers' responsibilities related to teaching regular subject-matters, organisation of extracurricular activities, preparation for teaching, in-service professional development, participation in commissions and other school bodies, as well as to participation in the organisation of school cultural activities. However, corporate practices are made possible in the framework of the process of disburdening of elementary and secondary school students. The disburdening scheme is not solely based on the idea of elimination of unnecessary teaching contents but on the principles of their integration and coordination. It presupposes three types of curriculum: framework (national); regional and individual. In order to prepare the school staff for the implementation of this approach the Institute for Development in Education has set up a series of seminars for teachers, school principals and school counsellors throughout the country.

i. How far are schools free to develop good practice or take initiatives in matters of management/curriculum/teaching and learning/ assessment?

Schools are free to develop good practices or take initiatives almost solely in relation to extracurricular activities and especially through projects. It seems that the greatest possibilities of this kind emerge through the implementation of the National Human Rights Education Programme if the programme is seen as the framework for developing specific school-based programmes in which various projects, initiatives and activities that focus on improving knowledge and skills for participation, civil action, teamwork, peaceful conflict-resolution etc., are coordinated and carried out in cooperation with NGOs and local experts. There are schools with more than 20 projects in the field of EDC and HRE (e.g. elementary school from Opatija, Cabar, Osijek, Slavonski Brod, Zagreb; secondary school from Labin, Varazdin, Zagreb etc., some of which are the citizenship sites and the UNESCO Associated Schools).

4. "Self improving schools"

a. Are your respondents able to give you accounts of any evidence of schools adopting a "self improving/self evaluation school" approach? What form does it take? How widespread is it? Is government interested/involved?

The process of decentralisation that started in 2001 in form of financial and managerial decentralisation will, in a year or two, be extended to curriculum development. Schools will be responsible for developing their own curricula which correspond both to local needs and to national standards. The process of students' disburdening (reduction of existing plans and programmes) is seen by MoES as the first step towards such goal.

Several schools that have already been mentioned above also engage in development planning and in practicing corporate responsibility. Gymnasium from Varazdin is among a few schools that apply self-evaluation approach. Teachers and students draw development plans, work in teams and are responsible for the outcomes. The implementation is monitored, evaluated and reported by teams and discussed at school meetings. The process is challenging and extremely demanding. It seems that teachers easily get accustomed to corporate planning and teamwork but have difficulties with evaluation and self-evaluation as both are time-consuming and demand the acquisition of new skills and competencies.

b. Is there a consciousness/awareness in government or amongst schools of the importance of issues of school “ethos” or “school culture”? What form does this take?

School culture, school ethos, school identity, school climate, school markers etc. are newly emerging concepts in Croatian educational theory and practice and are not dealt with explicitly in official papers. Apart from a few private secondary schools, in particular the Classical Gymnasium in Zagreb, our respondents mention several elementary and secondary schools whose students and teachers demonstrate strong sense of belonging to the institution (Zagreb, Varazdin, Labin, Osijek, Opatija, Cabar, Bjelovar, Slavonski Brod). It seems that active participation in human rights, democratic citizenship, peace and environmental education projects and activities have the greatest impact on developing specific school culture to which students and teachers feel committed. *“It is all about clear mission, participation and respect for the opinions of others”,* said one teacher respondent in our research, *“as well as about the recognition of school by the community. School produces citizens through visions, concepts, values and behaviour and all of that is a matter of exchange.”*

5. Training and consultancy support for schools

a. What are the arrangements for in-service teacher training in your country? What kind of institutions are involved? How effective are they in determining and responding to the needs of schools?

In-service training is obligatory for Croatian teachers. For those with a two-year college diploma the upgrading is also obligatory. At the beginning of each school year every teacher draws his/her own plan and programme of updating his/her knowledge and competencies (self-evaluation or informal training), which should be confirmed and approved by the school counselling service or the principal. The paper usually contains the following areas of activities: individual activities related to professional and pedagogical in-formal training; in-school teacher training activities (teacher councils and class councils) and out-of-school teacher training activities (meetings of teacher actives and professional councils).

The most common forms of in-service teacher training in the country are seminars; workshops; thematic meetings of teachers of one subject-matter or a teaching area; individual and collective

consultation provided by national and school counselling services; guest expert lecturers (mostly university professors); conferences; and self-education.

The major part of teacher in-service training is organised by the Institute for Development in Education, the institution that was, until recently, part of MoES. All seminars and workshops during one school year are listed in the Catalogue of Professional Meetings, which is published twice a year by the Institute. The Institute organises teacher in-service training in cooperation with teacher training colleges and faculties; professional county councils; professional associations; selected NGOs; individual experts and, sometimes, private firms. These seminars are directly financed by MoES and are officially recognised which means that they serve as the basis for teachers' upgrading to the status of mentors and advisers. Teacher training faculties and colleges, as well as organisations from the civil sector also run teacher in-service training but their seminars and workshops are seldom recognised by the MoES, which is especially true for those organised by NGOs.

The capacity for in-service training in Croatia is limited in terms of specialised trainers and in terms of resources. There is an urgent need to reorganise and expand the service, as well as to link it to pre-service education programmes and international exchange programmes with a view to establish an efficient national system of permanent and life-long professional training. Apart from a limited number of seminars and workshops and scarce resources received by schools, major dissatisfaction expressed by our respondents in respect to quality of teacher in-service training was directed towards the Institute for Development in Education. Teachers think that the Institute's services in this field are *"inadequately conceptualised, disconnected, authoritative and outmoded in its methods and approaches."* One teacher from our sample describes it in the following way: *"The purpose of in-service training is not always clear. We know that we are legally obliged to update our knowledge but sometimes you are just not assisted properly. There are trainers who are incompetent but we do not comment it openly. Some of them are national supervisors who evaluate our work!"*

However, their sharpest criticism was related to the Institute's monopoly in this field and to the cases of the conflict of interest. *"There are supervisors in the Institute who are the authors or co-authors of a number of textbooks. They use in-service training to train teachers how to work with their textbooks. Since teachers are now free to choose among several textbooks, they get a clear message at such seminars about what is the 'right' choice. When these trainers also perform the role of national supervisors, you have no choice at all."*

b. To what extent can schools make specific requests for help to institutions or the system? What are the different perceptions of how well these are met? Are there accounts of institutional or procedural difficulties?

Schools are free to seek assistance from different institutions, organisations and bodies inside and outside the system, such as the supervisors from the Institute for Development in Education; teacher training faculties, teacher academies and colleges; teacher associations, professional councils at the county and the state level; individual experts (usually university professors and experts from the MoES); NGOs; school counselling service etc.

National supervisors from the Institute for Development in Education assist schools in professional, pedagogical and methodological matters, as opposed to national inspectorate, which is responsible for administrative side of the school work. Supervisors perform monitoring-counselling missions to schools, organise and participate in teacher in-service training seminars and provide advice when requested by schools.

School counselling service (also known as the school development service) is an integral part of educational institution from nursery to secondary school level. The counsellor's programme is an integral part of the institution's annual plan and programme. In an ideal situation, the school counselling service consists of a pedagogue, psychologist, special educator and social worker.

However, this is never the case in practice. During 1990s the number of pedagogues and psychologists in schools was reduced and the service is now in the process of renewal. In order to overcome the shortage, the MoES has decided to include the staffing of school counsellor teams on the priority list for 2003.

Our respondents think that, in general, counselling (pedagogical-psychological) services do not provide adequate support to schools working in a decentralised system and that they need retraining in form of various interdisciplinary specialisations other than the existing in-service provided by the Institute for Development in Education and some university/college departments.

c. Are there other, non institutional providers? (NGOs, Independent consultants?)

Among non-institutional providers, there are some 30 professional associations and more than 50 NGOs that have expertise in education and training. Private consultants are almost non-existent on the market although some schools, mostly private, are served in this respect by university and college professors and/or expert researchers. Some of the best known NGOs in teacher in-service training are: Forum for Freedom in Education (Forum za slobodu odgoja); Small Step – Centre for Culture of Peace and Non-violence (Mali korak – centar za kulturu mira i nenasilja Zagreb); Step by Step (Korak po korak); Croatian Red Cross; Centre for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights - Osijek (Centar za mir; nenasilje i ljudska prava – Osijek); Centre for Peace Studies (Centar za mirovne studije); Centre for Women's Studies (Centar za zenske studije); The Society for Psychological Assistance (Društvo za psiholosku pomoc), etc. Some NGOs projects, such as Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking and Debate Clubs of the Forum for Freedom in Education, as well as Peer-Mediation of the Small Step, are licenced and extremely well-accepted throughout the country.

d. Are there arrangements for the provision of training and support to school principals which could be used to support a QA approach?

The School for School Principals was established by MoES in 2002 for potential and contemporary principals of preschools, elementary and secondary schools, special education institutions, students' boarding houses and other similar institutions. It is organised twice a year during summer and winter holidays. The courses encompass the issues of decentralisation, guidance and management; the selection of staff and their professional development; planning, monitoring and evaluation of programmes, teaching practices and students' achievement; legislative, financing, etc. The school has not been fully equipped yet. It is assisted by the university guest lecturers and trainers. The training is monitored and evaluated internally.

School principals have their own local professional associations which are at the central level represented through the National Association of Elementary (or Secondary) School Principals. In addition, the Institute for Development in Education established in 2002 the Professional Council of School Principals with an aim to develop their knowledge and skills for a decentralised management of human resources in education, especially through projects, visits abroad, international exchange programmes, discussion-groups etc.

The need for the establishment of a postgraduate specialisation programme for school principals (e.g. in school management) has also been discussed recently.

e. Is there experience in QA amongst current providers of Teacher Training (TT)?

Several institutions and organisations provide training for teachers, school counselling services and school principals (Institute for Development in Education; teacher colleges and faculties; NGOs and private firms) but very few have adequate expertise for developing a comprehensive system of quality assurance as it is defined in this research. A small number of experts from the University of Zagreb and Rijeka are probably more advanced in this respect.

f. Is there also expertise in EDC in TT providers?

There are national supervisors and county coordinators who are responsible for the implementation of the National Programme for Human Rights Education, as well as for monitoring of, and assisting in the implementation of other similar programmes and projects (civic, environmental, intercultural, peace etc. education). There are also EDC/HRE experts at teacher training colleges and universities or international experts who participate in seminars, workshops and conferences for school practitioners. In addition, there are numerous teacher multipliers and well-known foreign and international NGOs that organise in-formal teacher training. Some teacher training faculties and colleges have optional pre-service programmes in this field.

g. How are formal TT providers presently funded?

Teacher training providers are mainly funded from the state budget and far less from the budgets of local self-government offices. Non-formal programmes, especially in the civil sector, are supported by international donors and, recently, by the government.

6. School development planning

a. Is there any evidence of a formal system of school development planning in the school system? If so, who is responsible for the generation of school plans? How are they to be produced? Who approves them? How are they resourced? How is the process supported? Is there any understanding of potential links to QA?

The system of development planning does not exist in the country, apart from several schools described above which experiment with new forms of school organisation and learning. Schools are responsible for drawing annual plans and programmes in which they define activities related to instruction, counselling and administration. The annual plan and programme for regular instruction (obligatory subjects) is an operational or implementation document which shows how the (national) Framework Plan and Programme is to be carried out by the school. It also contains plans and programmes for optional subjects, extracurricular and out-of-school activities. This school's operational document is usually finalised by the school principal or school counsellor (pedagogue or psychologist) on the basis of annual plans and programmes developed for the lower grades (class teaching) and upper grades (subject-matter teaching) of elementary school. The document is approved by the school council and submitted to the county educational department. It is financed from the state budget and local self-government according to the law

on elementary and the law on secondary education. It may also be supported from other sources, such as business companies, international projects, NGOs, individuals, etc.

b. If there is no evidence of a formal system, are you able to detect signs of less formal, less developed, general interest in such an approach?

There are very few such incentives that link schools and local education departments. A few elementary and secondary schools that experiment with development planning have already been mentioned above (Varazdin, Labin, Opatija, Zagreb etc.). Our respondents argue that development planning *"would only be possible when schools get more autonomy in performing their basic function, when local (self)government assumes that education is more important than a local football team and when students' competencies and school achievement become crucial on the labour market and in social positioning."*

c. Is there any evidence of the availability of a national or locally developed school performance evaluative instrument which could support such an approach?

Teacher and academic community representatives could not name any instrument developed at national or local level that was relevant for development of quality assurance system. Evaluative instruments are designed and applied in the framework of particular scientific or action research projects or training programmes. Internal evaluation has become an integral part of many seminars and workshops organised by formal or non-formal education institutions and organisations but they seldom disseminate their instruments. There are different tests on knowledge, skills and attitudes which are developed and applied by researchers from the universities, as well as number of the so-called "objective type of tasks" for particular school subjects which are designed by the Institute for Development in Education or professional associations.

d. What support is (could) be available to schools in the task of acquiring the skills to develop such an approach?

Among other things, school counsellors and teachers should receive more training in this field through focused in-service programmes which are implemented by institutions and organisations that have expertise in this field or which are in a position to guarantee such expertise through international cooperation. Successful schools that experiment with such approach should be (self)monitored and (self)evaluated and used as models for other schools.

e. Is there any evidence of individual schools, or networks of schools, using such an approach? How is it approached? How widespread is it?

Schools that experiment with quality assurance approach, corporate responsibility etc. (Labin, Varazdin, Kastav, Slavonski Brod, Osijek, Zagreb).

7. National/international benchmarks and assessment processes

- a. Are there arrangements for a national assessment and certification process in your country? Are there arrangements for any form of national testing?**

National testing is still non-existent. The development of the system of national evaluation is in preparation. In July 2003 the Parliament adopted the Law on the Establishment of the National Evaluation Centre which is responsible for developing concepts, methods and instruments for reliable, objective and impartial external evaluation of students' achievements (knowledge and competencies). In the first phase the Centre will prepare the state exam for the secondary school students.

In April 2003 the MoES prepared the proposal to the government regarding the accession of Croatia to the PISA Programme for the year 2006 and requested the government to ensure resources throughout the preparatory period.

- b. What areas of the curriculum do these cover? Do they include EDC or any related area? What stages of schooling are involved?**

This is an issue that will probably be discussed soon in the National Evaluation Centre upon finalisation of the national curriculum by the Centre for Research and Development in Education (CERD). What has already been known is that evaluation will, initially, be designed only for secondary schools. The development of evaluative instruments for compulsory and/or elementary level will follow afterwards. Evaluation will probably include concepts and skills related to education for democratic citizenship in the extent determined by the new curriculum. Since human rights and democratic citizenship education and related fields are recognised in form of a cross-curricular, optional or extracurricular activity, a new regulation would probably be needed to assure the integration of these principles in the regular curriculum.

- c. Are the results of this testing available to schools in a form which could assist their evaluation of quality performance and their development planning?**

The results of national evaluation will be available to schools as a means of improving their work.

- d. Is there a danger that the assessment of only a sub-set of curriculum goals could distort the balance of curriculum goals in practice?**

The danger is real if a chosen approach to assessment does not take into account the system as a whole. Evaluation is successful if it provides information to the system on its efficiency, i.e. about the extent to which the aims match the outcomes in a particular context. This means that misbalances in evaluation may actually be the outcomes of the misbalances in the curriculum.

8. National Inspectorate

a. Is there a national inspectorate? What is its current role? What do respondents describe as its strengths and its weaknesses?

National inspectorate is an integral part of the MoES. Before its separation from the national professional and pedagogical supervision service (of the Institute for Development in Education) in the middle of 1990s, it was also known as the "national education development service". According to the Law on School Inspectorate, of 1995, the inspectorate supervises formal/administrative dimensions of school work. Apart from regular inspections, inspectors visit schools upon complaints or request received from parents, students, teachers, local offices and other national or regional bodies. Their inspection encompasses statutory provisions, school's annual plans and programmes, school principal's election procedure, the hiring of new staff, class registers, daily workload of teachers and students, documentation related to cooperation with parents, the activities of students' clubs and associations, the implementation of pedagogical standard, the selection of textbooks, etc.

Neither the MoES nor schools are fully satisfied with the way the inspectorate performs its duties. Although part of the problem is related to staff shortage since less than 30 inspectors and senior inspectors supervise more than 2,000 educational institutions (preschools, elementary and secondary schools and students' boarding houses), it is the content and method of inspection that is mostly criticised by practitioners. Inspectors are usually perceived as state's bureaucrats whose only interest is in quantity, not in quality. Majority of our respondents think that inspection is important for the improvement of quality in education but they also stress that it should be entirely reformed so as to encompass school monitoring, information-giving and counselling. One respondent has pointed out that *"the service is too formalistic, autocratic and outmoded. Inspectors are not interested in good teaching but in correct teaching. They now come to school unannounced to investigate about parents' and students' complaints. In most cases these complains have to do with the student's bad marks. Parents manipulate with inspectors and make pressure on schools to give up their criteria."*

b. Do they have international links to SICI?

No.

c. Is there a perception of professional/public confidence in the skills/approach/independence of the Inspectorate?

The most common understanding is that the service needs profound changes in its structure, organisation and methods of inspection.

d. Are they independent? Do they publish a "State of the Nation" report (annually/biannually/etc)?

According to the Law on Inspection, the inspectors are independent in their work which, since they are actually part of the MoES, reflects basic legal misunderstanding of their role. They write annual reports as part of the MoES' annual report which is submitted to the Parliament.

e. Is the inspectorate presently aware of/ involved in issues of QA nationally?

Our research data confirm that the inspectors are well aware of the need for improving quality in education. However, they have not been directly included in the process of reform as are the supervisors from the Institute for Development in Education.

f. Is there a formal public statement of quality indicators used by inspectors? Are these related to national education goals, standards and definitions of quality? What is their status? (Incorporated within a law on education, set out in an official government paper, or offered as guidance for schools and teachers?)

No. The indicators used by the inspectors are the provisions of the Constitution, relevant laws and other legal and administrative texts that regulate school work.

g. How public are inspection processes?

The representatives of the inspectorate who participated in our research confirm that inspection is *de iure* public. The protocol and decision are submitted to the school in question (school principal and school council) as well as to the office of local government. The final report on inspection is also submitted to anyone who is in any way connected to the case (parents, teachers, students, teacher associations and trade unions, ombudsman, Croatian Helsinki Committee) and the media.

h. Do inspection processes include EDC?

Only indirectly, since the inspection is, at least partly, related to the issue of human rights violation in education.

9. Curriculum and definitions of "Quality"

a. Is there a national body with responsibility for the national curriculum? In what form is this curriculum stated? How do teachers use it?

Croatia does not have national curriculum in the proper sense of the word. At present, the Institute for Development in Education contributes to the process of 'curriculum reform' through the implementation of the project on students' disburdening. The approach is based on the principle of integration and correlation of teaching contents. It aims at developing three types of disburdened curricula: national (framework), regional (framework) and individual (operational) following the same methodology. At the same time, the Centre for Research and Development in Education (CERD) is designing the national (framework) curriculum and quality indicators or

standards of knowledge and skills. The task is being performed in co-operation with number of experts and practitioners.

b. Are there standards, or quality indicators of any sort incorporated in the National Curriculum statements?

The indicators will be designed together with the national curriculum by the Centre for Research and Development in Education (CERD).

c. Does the government have targets based on such standards for school performance? Are they national/school based?

Each school will be responsible for its own curriculum and will reflect local needs and interests.

d. Do such standards also exist for EDC?

It is expected that EDC standards will be incorporated in the overall education quality standards. National Human Rights Committee is prepared to assist in the process of development of HRE and EDC standards, as well as in the process of designing the implementation approach to HRE and EDC.

10. Accountability

a. Are there any arrangements for accountability of schools in the present system? How formal is it? Is it public?

Generally speaking, the accountability of school principals, teachers and school counsellors, as well as of local offices, is established by laws. However, sanctions are seldom fully used either because they lack clear definitions or because they are ignored by school personnel, especially if power relations are misbalanced in the school or local community and if different levels of accountability are intentionally blurred. Some schools have developed their internal codes of conduct which contain basic elements of the arrangement of accountability of school personnel and students but they do not refer to accountability of, e.g., local authorities.

One teacher has commented on the lack of accountability in administration in the following way: *"Accountability does not exist in our society. I doubt that many people understand what it means. We do not know what it is and we do not have procedures and mechanisms to identify accountability and control it. E.g. public servants do not understand what public service means. Majority of them think that it is an excellent opportunity to serve oneself, some think that it means serving the profession and only a very few believe that their duty is to serve the public."*

b. On what matters are schools held accountable? Is quality of performance a factor?

Schools as institutions are not held accountable. School principals and teachers are accountable for the realisation of the annual plan and programme; the security of students and staff, as well as of school building and equipment; equality in treatment; decency and the like. Education quality is not included in the definition of their accountability. The issue has been commented by one of our respondents in the following way *"A low quality school is just a low quality school; it may have bad image but its funding remains equal to that of a high quality school."*

c. To whom do the lines of accountability extend?

Whoever is involved in education process is accountable for something at some point, including local administration, parents and local community members, as well as the media.

d. What are the incentives/sanctions in the system? And how effective are they?

There are different types of rewards and sanctions in the system. It seems that with the advancement of decentralisation, the number of sanctions has increased, while the number of incentives has decreased. *"For a school principal",* one of the respondents noted *"sanctions are the easiest way to remove the problem if he/she does not want or does not know how to deal with it."*

e. What is the effect (likely effect) of the presence/absence of such accountability on the functioning of the system?

The consequences of the absence of accountability are devastating and long-lasting. The outcomes of the lack of accountability in education in Croatia during the 1990s are the best example.

f. Can other major actors (Local education Authorities/Ministry Officials/Politicians) also be held accountable? What are the mechanisms?

They are still vaguely held accountable by the public. However, no proper mechanisms exist or – better – no mechanism works generally probably due to the fact that education is still not fully perceived as a vital factor for individual and social advancement.

11. The way forward

a. What institutions or processes external to schools would have to be created?

The following institutions etc. are most needed in Croatia:

- An integrated Ministry of Education that encompasses all school levels from preschool to higher education, including adult education and teachers' training
- Centre/Institute for fundamental, developmental and applied scientific research in education
- National centre for information and documentation in education (data-base)
- Independent national counselling/advisory agency
- Independent national agency for accreditation in education (institutions, programmes, staff)
- Centre/Institute for curriculum development or Centre for development, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in education
- Centre for teacher development (permanent in-service training)
- Centre for European integration through education.

b. What are the main lines along which reforms would have to be undertaken in existing institutions other than schools? (You may wish to refer to the elements described in the introduction as a broad checklist.)

It is necessary to establish institutions, bodies and services which are compatible with Europe. Others aspects encompass: adequate staffing and equipment, urgent in-service training, information dissemination and networking, efficient links to schools.

c. Would any new curriculum documents (with standards and targets) have to be produced? What sort, at what stages?

Curriculum is the top priority but there are many additional documents that go with the curriculum which are not drafted yet.

d. What would be the most important new sets of institutions or procedures which would have to be created to make a QA system work in your country's school system?

- Strengthening decentralisation, autonomy and corporate accountability in education
- Promoting permanent external and internal evaluation of schools and non-formal education institutions as an integral dimension of quality assurance system; promoting quality consciousness and the culture of quality in education
- Promoting short-term and long-term school development plans based on self-analysis and self-evaluation
- Involving local community, including media, in discussions on school quality
- Strengthening students' self-government.

- e. What would be the most critical skill shortages in key players, or groups of players, which would have to be overcome if a Ministry is to develop and implement such an approach?**

Understanding the overall structure and functioning of the system; planning, monitoring, evaluation; participation and teamwork; leadership and management.

- f. Who might be able to undertake to meet these shortages?**

Croatian Parliament must clearly demonstrate its readiness to support education as one of the most important human development resources. Other possible resources are: existing experts, foreign experts, NGOs, teacher multipliers.

- g. What would have to be done in order to create the capacity (if it does not already exist) to meet these shortages?**

Post-graduate specialisations in developing education quality assurance system, as well as in promoting other relevant aspects of that system; expert exchange on international and regional level; training of young specialists abroad etc.

- h. What would have to be done before all schools could develop their own school development plan? Could this procedure be usefully piloted in the field of EDC?**

Dissemination of good practices from experimental implementation; training in development planning; self-evaluation, self-analysis on assets and weaknesses (expertise, resources, expectations).

- i. What kinds of support will be needed? How could that be provided?**

We believe that various kinds of support are needed: professional (clarification of concepts and the role of quality assurance system for efficiency in obtaining society's goals through education); legal (an integrated law on education and explicit legal provisions); administrative (trained and accountable staff); financial (adequate and sustainable funding); public (belief that quality matters); political (commitment to quality-centred changes).

12. Conclusions and Next Steps

Transition in Croatian education is still characterised by a number of unsystematic and disconnected changes. Education is often misused to serve short-term political interests; the link between acquired knowledge and skills, on the one hand, and market needs and social rewards, on the other hand, is still blurred, while the awareness of the importance of education for the promotion of human resources is still low. The issue of quality in education is understood in terms of an adequate implementation of the framework plan and programme with no standards

of achievement, no clear procedures and no efficient monitoring and counselling mechanisms. Accountability is lost in outdated and disconnected laws, ever-changing policies and disparate contents of education. The control is exercised only formally; it is not geared towards developing a dynamic and open education system based on creativity and incentives but to removing the “non-adapted”.

Recently, partly under the pressure of the European integration and partly as the result of public discontent, the signs of recovery have emerged. However, the data from our research demonstrate that the puzzle is still far from being completed.

Quality is mainstreamed into the most recent strategic paper on education reform. It is defined as a bridge between the goals and the outcomes. Consequently, the focus is shifted towards quality improvement. Notwithstanding, it is understood more in terms of quality control than in terms of quality assurance. The main line of conceptualisation is that education changes will be promoted by means of the following:

- improvement of decentralisation in financing and management;
- development of national curriculum and quality indicators;
- establishment of independent national agencies/institutions for external evaluation and for counselling;
- reform of teachers' and school specialist/counsellors pre-service and in-service training, as well as setting up of special training for school principals.

It is also said that schools have a crucial role in the process of quality improvement. However, very little has been said on the nature of their role and the ways how to play it. The balance between the two crucial dimensions of quality assurance has not been achieved yet. The focus on standards and central institutions indicates that quality improvement is still deeply rooted in the concept of quality control instead of quality assurance. Even with discourses that reflect bottom-up approach, school is still seen in terms of individual (professional and students') roles and not in terms of their mutual relations.

Consequently, it is our belief that Croatian policy-makers should pay more attention in the future to “the other side of the coin” and focus more on empowering the school not to be a mere receiver but a creator and partner to central institutions in developing an efficient and sustainable system of quality assurance.