New law and reorganisation of elementary schools in Croatia in 1874 – introduction of compulsory PE

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Introduction

The aim of this study is to analyse activities and events that preceded the enactment of the first Croatian law on education: The Law on Organisation of Elementary Schools and Teacher Training Schools in the kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia in 1874, by which the compulsory PE were introduced into elementary schools in the territory of entire Croatia. The efforts of Croats regarding introduction of the compulsory PE in the educational system can be best illustrated by events taking place in the Civil Croatia, i.e. in the region in which Croatian Parliament (Sabor) and Vice-Roy (Ban) had authority to autonomously (to a certain extend) control various areas of public life, the field of education included.

Methods

The main source used is a work by Antun Cuvaj «Građa za povijest školstva kraljevina Hrvatske i Slavonije od najstarijih vremena do danas» ["Sources for the history of education in the kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia from the ancient times till nowadays"], 2nd edition, volumes I-XI, 1910-1913, the most comprehensive and most frequently used source in national history studies on education. A number of archive and library documents from the Croatian State Archives, the Croatian Sports Museum and the National and University Library of Zagreb were also used.

Results and Discussion

The Emperor Francis Joseph I. was forced in 1867 to come to Agreement with Hungary and to relinquish some royal authority to it. By the Austro-Hungarian Agreement the Habsburg Empire was divided into two halves and became the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Due to the special state right position of Croatia in the Habsburg Empire, the Magyars were forced into separate Croato-Hungarian Agreement in 1868 by which Croat statehood was recognised, although reduced to a bare minimum. The Croatian Parliament (Sabor) retained the control over the internal affairs, administration, justice, education and religious affair. As a consequence, the Croatian State Government, responsible to the Croatian Parliament, was established in 1869. This was the beginning of a new era in the Croatian history of executive authority which guaranteed autonomy in the matters of education, thus providing the essential preconditions for the forthcoming reorganisation of elementary schools in Croatia (Cuvaj, 1913).

Second very important precondition was advances of pedagogy in Croatia, which were manifested in 1865 in foundation of Teachers’ Association (Učiteljska zadruga). Further, Stjepan Novotny published the first textbook on pedagogy in the Croatian language in 1867, and “Didactics” of J. A. Komensky was translated into Croatian in 1871. In the same year the Croatian Pedagogical-Literary Association was founded. This professional pedagogical society had a tremendous influence on organisation and professional advancements of Croatian teachers. Many pedagogical titles were published and many libraries were opened. Particularly important for the development of education in Croatia was the First General Conference of Croatian Teachers held in Zagreb in 1871. There were approximately 1,400 participants. The Conference defined the attitude of the body of Croatian teachers towards the role of school in society and clearly denoted the rights and responsibilities of teachers as a social group, underlining that it should be independent of church.

The Vice-Roy (Ban) Ivan Mažuranić submitted the "Outline of the Law on Organisation of Plebeian Elementary Schools and Teacher Training Schools in the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia" (“Osnova zakona ob ustrojstvu pučkih škola i preparandija za pučko učiteljstvo u kraljevinah Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji”) to the Sabor in August 1874. After vivid and substantial discussion Croatian Parliament passed the Law on Organisation of Elementary Schools and Teacher Training Schools in the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia, and the Emperor Francis Joseph I. ratified the Law on October 14, 1874. It was the first law which regulated education in Croatia. Among other things, a four-year comprehensive, all-inclusive compulsory education was introduced, elementary schools became general and public, they were exempted from the church control, and the compulsory PE was introduced. The law in its integrity was evaluated as one of the most progressive law on elementary school in the then Europe (Čustonja 2004).

Conclusion

Constitutional (state-right) position of Croatia and unfavourable political circumstances in the 19th century in many ways powerfully influenced the process of introducing compulsory PE classes in the then Croatian educational system. On the other hand a strong development of pedagogy characterised the period before year 1874. In the time when Croatian sport and exercise movement was not alive yet, general educators (teachers) were generators of the motion and eager advocates for inclusion of PE in the curricula.

References