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HETERONORMATIVITY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ZAGREB: YOUNG MEN WEARING MAKE-UP, KISSING AND WALKING PROUDLY

ABSTRACT: This paper analyses the presence and characteristics of heteronormativity in the context of the Croatian school system by focusing on secondary schools in the capital of Zagreb. We base our analysis on the results of a survey on opinions and attitudes regarding homosexuality conducted on a sample of 322 students and 117 teachers in nine secondary schools. The research reveals that stereotypes and prejudice towards lesbians and gays are omnipresent and widespread. Both students and teachers hold highly discriminatory attitudes concerning the visible/public expression of non-heteronormative gender and sexual identities. In addition, almost one-third of all students reported having resorted to verbal/physical violence against a person because of their alleged homosexual orientation. Moreover, we explore the research findings in relation to the (non)existence and (in)visibility of LGBT issues in school curricula and textbooks. In addition, we consider the recent (September 2012) introduction of a Health Education curriculum which for the first time introduces into Croatian schooling the topics of “acceptance of sexual diversity” and “stigmatisation and discrimination of sexual minorities”. Finally, we outline public debates and reactions to this ‘introduction of homosexuality to Croatian schools’ coming from the Croatian Catholic Church and faith-based organisations.

KEY WORDS: secondary schools, Croatia, young people, homosexuality, sexuality education

Heteronormativnost v zagrebških srednjih šolah: Našminkami mladi fantje, ki se poljubljajo in s ponosom hodijo naokrog

IZVLEČEK: V članku se ukvarjava z analizo heteronormativnosti v kontekstu hrvaškega šolskega sistema, zlasti v zagrebških srednjih šolah. Analiza je zasnovana na podatkih iz raziskave stališč in mnenj o homoseksualnosti, ki je bila opravljena na vzorcu 322 dijakov in dijakinj ter 117 učiteljev in učiteljic iz devetih srednjih šol. Raziskava je

pokazala na vseprisotnost predsodkov in stereotipov o gejih in lezbijkah. Tako dijaki kot učitelji so izražali diskriminatorna stališča glede vidnih/javnih izrazov neheteronormativnih spolnih in seksualnih identitet. Skoraj tretjina vprašanih dijakov je poročala, da so že uporabili verbalno ali fizično nasilje proti osebi, za katero so domnevali, da je istospolno usmerjena. Zbrane rezultate analizirava v povezavi z (ne)obstojem in (ne)vidnostjo LGBT-vsebin v šolskem kurikulumu in učbenikih. Na koncu razpravljava še o nedavni (september 2012) vpeljavi zdravstvene vzgoje v kurikulum, ki je prvič v hrvaški šolski sistem vnesla vsebine, povezane s »sprejemanjem seksualne različnosti« ter »stigmatizacijo in diskriminacijo seksualnih manjšin«, ter o odzivih katoliške cerkve in drugih verskih organizacij na »vpeljavo homoseksualnosti v hrvaške šole«.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: srednje šole, Hrvaška, mladi, homoseksualnost, spolna vzgoja

1 Background

In Croatia homosexuality was decriminalized in 1977¹ and in 1998 the age of consent was equalized to the age of fourteen for both opposite and same-sex sexual activity². At the turn of the 21st century the growth and integration of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender/Transexual (LGBT) community and movement (mostly in the capital of Zagreb) was started with the development of Internet forums and the changes after the 2000s elections (Bosanac and Dobrović 2007; Jugović et al. 2007; Hodžić 2010). The right-wing war-time government was replaced by the coalition of centre-to-left parties, which significantly improved political liberties and the state of human rights. The year 2002 marks the increased public visibility and the beginning of more intense lobbying and advocacy for the protection of rights of *sexual and gender minorities* within the Croatian legal system. The same year, the first Croatian *Gay Pride* was held in Zagreb³, organized by gay and lesbian organizations *Iskorak* and *Kontra* from Zagreb, and the first national campaign for the promotion of lesbian and gay rights was implemented by LORI, a lesbian organization from Rijeka. This campaign included a TV clip *Ljubav je ljubav* (Love Is Love) which was banned by national television as “inappropriate”⁴.

In 2003, discrimination based on sexual orientation started being prohibited in many national laws. This was the result of intensive lobbying of civil society organizations

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1. In 1977, Yugoslav Criminal Code was transferred to the level of each federal unit and Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Vojvodina removed homosexual sexual acts from the list of criminal activities.
 2. In the new Criminal Code from 2011 this age limit was raised to fifteen years for all.
 3. The first Zagreb Pride was held on June 29th, with around 300 participants marching through the city centre heavily guarded by the police. That did not stop numerous insults coming from both *ordinary* citizens and organized groups of young neo-fascists and skinheads who managed to throw tear gas at the march and beat up around 30 Pride participants. While 27 people were arrested, no one was ever charged with assault or discrimination.
 4. Interestingly, also in 2002, the first mainstream Croatian film dealing with same-sex (lesbian) relationship, *Fine mrtve djevojke* (Nice Dead Girls) was released, and selected as the Croatian nominee for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar Academy Award.

(CSOs) as well as the state's response to the requirements of the accession processes to European institutions and associations. However, the Same-Sex Civil Unions Act adopted in 2003 grants to cohabitating unregistered partners only the rights to legal regulation of property and financial support and only after the dissolution of the union. In 2006, a proposal for the Registered Partnership Bill was rejected by the majority of the Croatian parliament⁵. On the other hand, that same year, hate crime legislation covering sexual orientation was introduced to the national Criminal Code. The first person charged according to this law, for attempting to throw petrol bombs on Zagreb Pride March in 2007, was found guilty and sentenced to fourteen months in prison. The Anti-Discrimination Act passed in 2008, which besides sexual orientation, also recognizes gender identity and gender expression as anti-discrimination bases, is the most recent and the most comprehensive of a dozen of legal acts relating to LGBT rights in Croatia.

Although significant improvements have been made in the area of legal protection of LGBT individuals and public gatherings in Croatia in the last decade, the legislation remains irrelevant until it is actually implemented⁶. Realization of many provisions has been impaired by discriminatory statements and actions by various state actors, as well as by their lack of commitment to protect LGBT rights and to prevent discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Lacking confidence in state institutions and the legal and law enforcement systems, and fearing disclosure of their sexual orientation, many victims still do not report violent incidents to the police (Amnesty International 2012; Lesbian group Kontra). In addition, the significant influence of Catholic values on private, social and political life also plays an important role in upholding the high-level of homophobia and transphobia in Croatian society (Labus 2005). Research from 2005, exploring violence against lesbians, gays and bisexuals in Zagreb, Rijeka and Osijek, has shown that every other respondent (N=202) experienced some form of violence since 2002, and 15% were victims of physical violence. More than half of the reported cases occurred in public (Pikić and Jugović 2006). In 2009, Zagreb Pride started the virtual gay-bashing map of Zagreb, marking the places where over 60 reported violent attacks on LGBT people have occurred over the past 11 years (Zagreb Pride 2009).

At the moment, in the Spring of 2013, there are more than 10 active organizations and initiatives, exclusively based in Zagreb, Split and Rijeka, the only cities with the critical mass of LGBT people that would produce a sense of a visible community. Besides regular Zagreb Pride marches and Queer Zagreb festivals (2003-2012), the capital has several clubs, gay saunas and cruising bars, and a dozen of LGBT-friendly

5. During parliamentary and Commissions' discussions about the proposal, discriminatory statements were voiced by members of the Croatian Democratic Union, the ruling party at that time. One of the comments, "The entire Universe is heterosexual, from an atom and a tiniest particle, from a fly to an elephant", was later printed on a Queer Zagreb T-shirt.

6. According to the latest edition of the ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map, which includes the scale reflecting the national legal human rights situation of LGBTI people, Croatia is ranked at 13th place out of forty-nine European countries (ILGA-Europe 2012).

bars and cultural venues hosting various LGBT and queer gatherings, as well as its own annual editions of Zagreb City Gay Guide.

This constitutes a part of the social milieu in which the growth and development of Croatian young men and women takes place, and in which they also learn and modify their attitudes and opinions about non-heteronormative identities and practices. With an aim to detect the level and nature of prejudices and stereotypes about homosexuality present among secondary school students in Zagreb, the authors of this article have carried out a quantitative research, as a part of a Queer Zagreb project. Besides research activities, an educational program and a manual dealing with homophobia and violence in schools have also been designed by the authors (Hodžić and Bijelić 2012).

2 Research on Opinions and Attitudes towards Homosexuality in Secondary Schools in Zagreb

The research was conducted on the sample of 322 students and 117 teachers in nine secondary schools in the city of Zagreb in order to explore attitudes and opinions on homosexuality. Two grammar schools, three craft schools and four technical schools participated in the research. A self-administered questionnaire was used, one for students and the other for teachers. Both questionnaires targeted information on the level of knowledge and information on LGBT issues, social distance and attitudes towards gays and lesbians, and (in)visibility of homosexuality in the school context.

2.1 Students

Survey has been conducted in the period from October 2011 until January 2012. The research participants were only those young people whose parents provided a signed consent for their participation. Parents' consent was a precondition set by the Education and Teacher Training Agency (ETTA) in their official approval of the research. Although we have argued that parents' consent can lead towards biased results that would undermine the homonegativity among student population, the ETTA did not change its decision. Their opinion was based on State Pedagogical Standard for Secondary Schools which sets a precondition of parents' consent for any research involving students, despite a coexisting Ethical Codex on Research on Children ruling that children over 14 years of age can independently of their parents give consent for participation in the research.

The sample was envisaged as stratified random sample but due to difficulties experienced during the fieldwork it turned out as a convenient sample for both students and teachers. Obstacles were related to some schools' reluctance to take part in such a research⁷ and the other was the outcome of parents' consent condition. 62% of all parents/guardians, included in the first selection round, refused to provide a signed

7. The reasons schools provided included not having time for conducting a research, their own policy of not conducting a research in the school, or being overburdened with the curriculum. The explanation of one headmaster was particularly figurative stating: "I don't want to pull the devil by its tail".

consent for their children to participate in the anonymous and voluntary survey⁸. After variables were prepared for statistical processing, data was analyzed using PASW Statistics 18. We utilized univariate analysis determining frequencies and percentages of answers and bivariate analysis determining statistically significant difference using chi-square test, t-test and analysis of variance.

The student sample (N=322) consisted of 64% young women and of 36% young men. Most students were 17 and 18 years of age, i.e. students finishing secondary school. The average age of respondents was 17 years. Around half of the respondents (52%) attend technical schools, 26% grammar schools and 22% attend craft schools in the city of Zagreb. 11% of young people consider themselves to be not religious while the rest, 89% of them, report practicing religious ceremonies (ranging from “almost daily” to “once every few years”).

Majority of students, 81% report receiving no information on homosexuality throughout school curriculum. At the same time, 11% of the whole sample estimate that curriculum offers mostly negative information on homosexuality, whereas 6% think that it offers positive information.

The use of a social distance scale was aimed to establishing the degree to which young people are willing to accept and associate with gays and lesbians. Scale consisted of nine degrees of acceptance, from *lower* to *higher* (“to live outside Croatia”, “to be living in the same country as I am”, “to be my neighbor”, “to be my teacher at school”, “to be my schoolmates”, “to be my classmates”, “to sit with me in the classroom”, “to be my friends”, “to be my brother/sister or other family member”). Each respondent had to indicate the highest degree that he/she is willing to accept. The scale distinguishes lesbians from gays.

Table 1 Social Distance.

| DEGREES OF ACCEPTANCE | LESBIANS (%) | GAYS (%) |
|--|--------------|----------|
| To live outside Croatia | 11.7 | 20.5 |
| To be living in the same country as I am | 7 | 8.1 |
| To be my neighbor | 4.7 | 2 |
| To be my teacher at school | 2 | 1.3 |
| To be my schoolmates | 5 | 3.4 |
| To be my classmates | 4.7 | 2 |
| To sit with me in the classroom | 4 | 4 |
| To be my friends | 27.4 | 25.3 |
| To be my brother/sister or other family member | 33.4 | 33.3 |

Around third of young people, 33% expressed the highest degree of acceptance, i.e. are willing to accept gays and lesbians as family members. Around fourth of them

8. Contact persons in schools informed us that some students were embarrassed to show consent form to the parents; some parents did not want to read the form or discuss it and some even tore it apart.

are willing to accept gays and lesbians as friends. Around 24% of students are willing to accept them as neighbors, teachers or schoolmates. 20% of students expressed the lowest degree of acceptance, stating that they are willing to accept gays only when living outside Croatia, while 12% feel the same about lesbians.

On the basis of the degrees of acceptance a new variable *social distance* was constructed for gays and for lesbians. Each degree of acceptance was numerically marked with value 1 attributed to the category “to live outside Croatia”, and value 9 to the category “to be my brother/sister or other family member”. Accordingly, the higher numerical value indicated the higher level of acceptance. The following analysis includes this new variable. Analysis of variance established that there is a statistically significant difference between the level of acceptance of gay people and respondents’ sex ($F(1,295)=73.2, p<0.05$). Young women are more likely to display a higher degree of acceptance of gays (mean, 7.14) than young men (mean, 4.07). At the same time, there is no significant difference between respondents’ sex and acceptance of lesbians. It is also established that there is a difference between the type of school that young people attend and the level of acceptance of gays ($F(2,294)=20.2, p<0.05$) and lesbians ($F(2,296)=9.4, p<0.05$). Grammar school’s students are more likely to show a higher degree of acceptance of lesbians (mean, 7.67) and gays (mean, 7.75). Results on the social distance scale suggest that there is a difference in perception and acceptance of gays versus lesbians, as more students think that gays should live outside Croatia (21%) compared to their attitude toward lesbians (12%).

Knowing a gay person positively affects the level of acceptance of gays and lesbians. Analysis of variance established significant difference in both cases: for the acceptance of gays ($F(1,295)=4.1, p<0.05$) and lesbians ($F(1,297)=7.9, p<0.05$). The respondents that know a gay person are more likely to show a higher degree of acceptance of gays (mean, 6.57) and lesbians (mean, 7.10).

Religious affiliation is also associated with the level of acceptance of gay people. T-test established that there is a significant difference between believers and non-believers in relation to the level of acceptance ($t=5.37, df=47, p<0.05$). Non-believers are more likely to show a higher degree of acceptance of gays (mean, 7.81) and lesbians (mean, 8.38) compared to believers (mean, 5.90 for the acceptance of gays; mean, 6.27 for lesbians).

Students’ attitudes toward homosexuality and gender roles were measured using the Likert scale. Respondents had to express the level of agreement with each statement. Non-normative gender expression appeared to be unacceptable to the majority of students as 78% do not accept that boys could wear make-up. Public display of homosexuality, exemplified by two young men kissing in public place, is unacceptable for the majority of students (64%). One of the most controversial issues was child adoption by lesbians and gays. 58% of students think that gays and lesbians should not be allowed to adopt children, while third of them would allow it. On the other hand, around half of respondents consider gay people to be capable of working with children (52%) and raising children (46%) whilst one third of respondents disagree. Although majority, 71%, disagree with the statement that gay people should be excommunicated

to a desert island, around fifth of them (20%) agree. A strong disapproval of another form of public display of non-heteronormative identities, a Pride March, is also visible in respondents' attitudes. Majority of them (60%) do not see the reason of public display for lesbian and gay identities because "heterosexuals do not do such a thing", thus not being aware of everyday heteronormativity and failing to notice a political dimension of a Pride March. This item, together with attitudes towards boys wearing make-up and same-sex male kiss in public are three statements that caused the biggest disapproval. Variable *homophobia* was constructed using 20 statements/attitudes. Attitudes assembled into a variable *homophobia* represent sum of recoded answers to all 20 items so the scale was 20-100 with a higher score representing a higher level of homophobia. This new variable was used in the following analysis. T-test established that young men display the higher level of homophobia than young women ($t=5.8$, $df=230$, $p<0.05$). On the scale from 20-100 boys' score was higher (mean, 63.40) than girls' (mean, 52.50). Analysis of variance established association between type of school and the level of homophobia. There is a significant difference in regards to the type of school that young people attend ($F(2,319)=31.53$, $p<0.05$). Grammar school's students display a lower degree of homophobia (mean, 44.91) than students from technical (mean, 60.46) and craft schools (mean, 60.42).

There is association between homophobia and knowing a gay person ($t=3.7$, $df=239$, $p<0.05$). Young people that do not have experience of knowing a gay person show a higher level of homophobia (mean, 59.12) from those who know gay people (mean, 51.93). Homophobia was also associated with the religious affiliation. T-test established that there is a significant difference between these two variables. Believers display a higher degree of homophobia (mean, 57.86) from non-believers (mean, 43.63). Experience of knowing a gay person is related to acceptance and tolerance while religious affiliation contributes to a higher level of homophobia and non-acceptance.

A set of questions was related to the violence against gay and lesbians and the ones that are being perceived as gays and lesbian. The questions were related to the violent behavior towards persons for their alleged homosexuality, including verbal and physical violence, passive bystanders and helping the victim.

Table 2 Violence.

| BEHAVIOURS | YES (%) | NO (%) |
|--|---------|--------|
| Abusive behavior because of someone's alleged homosexuality | 26.1 | 73.9 |
| Physical assault because of someone's alleged homosexuality | 5.9 | 94.1 |
| Passive by standing when witnessing violence against a person because of their alleged homosexuality | 20.2 | 79.8 |
| Offering help to the victim in violent situation because of someone's alleged homosexuality | 15 | 85 |

Table 2 shows that 26% of students were verbally abusive towards a person because of their alleged homosexuality and 6% were physically violent in a similar situation. 20% were the passive bystanders that witnessed violence against a person because of

their alleged homosexuality, while 15% offered help to the victim of violence. T-test established that there is a significant difference between the perpetration of violence and respondents' sex ($t=5.43$, $df=159$, $p<0.05$), where young men (mean, 0.57) are more likely to be the perpetrators of violence than young women (mean, 0.17)⁹.

2.2. Teachers

Teachers from selected schools were also asked to voluntarily and anonymously fill out the questionnaire, which mostly resembled the student one, with the added section about the inclusion of LGBT themes in school curricula. 117 teachers from nine secondary schools completed the questionnaire. 26% of teachers work in grammar schools, 21% in craft schools and 53% in technical schools. Majority of them (83%) work as subject teachers, while the rest are expert assistants (13%) and school directors (3%). Roughly half of them (55%) were older than 40 years of age. The sample predominantly consisted of women (78%), persons who live in Zagreb (85%), and persons who identify as religious (77%).

When it comes to teachers' attitudes, at first it seems that the majority is affirmative towards gays and lesbians, as around two-thirds of them nominally and "politically correctly" approves of equal rights (64%) and anti-discrimination legislative (66%), and considers lesbians and gays as "suitable" and "qualified" to raise children (58%) and to work in kindergartens and schools (80%). However, around 60% of teachers hold negative attitudes about visible and public non-heteronormative sexual and gender identities and expressions. It is interesting that they showed the highest proportions of disagreement with the same three issues as students did: boys wearing make-up (58%), young men kissing in public place (59%) and holding a Pride March (64%).

Moreover, the analysis using a new, compiled variable *homophobia* (constructed in the same way as for students) confirmed that there is a statistically significant relation between a level of homophobia and personal acquaintance with a gay person ($t=3.7$, $df=81$, $p<0.05$), as well as between homophobia and religious affiliation ($t=6.0$, $df=46$, $p<0.05$). Teachers who do not personally know a lesbian or a gay man (mean, 51.93) express higher level of homophobia compared to ones who have gays and lesbians as acquaintances or friends (mean, 42.87). Likewise, teachers who identify as religious display a higher degree of homophobia (mean, 49.50) than those who identify as non-believers (mean, 35.34).

Research results support the need to include education about LGBT rights in school curricula, as around half of the teachers themselves (52%) think that such content should be integrated in curriculum, and 41% of them feel that they would need additional training and skills to tackle this subject in schooling. However, a little bit less than a third of the sample said that there is no need for such education (27%) and that they would not like to teach about it (28%). Here the analysis revealed that teachers who

9. Item related to the use of verbal violence and item related to the use of physical violence were combined and recoded into single variable *violence* that scales from 0 (negative answer to both items) to 2 (positive answer to both items).

identify as religious are significantly more likely to have negative attitudes to teachings about sexual diversity ($\chi^2=6.76$, $df=2$, $p<0.05$). Results also show that the issue of homosexuality is mostly non-existent and invisible as a theme in school education process, and that teachers are quite uninformed about it. Around third of them reported that they do not know if homosexuality issues are present in school curricula (39%) or as a theme in education process (36%) regardless of the official curriculum. Likewise, around third of them affirms that there are no LGBT themes in curriculum (37%) and that such issues never appear in teaching context (24%).

2.3. Discussion

The key research findings ought to be viewed in relation to the required parents' consent, which, one can argue, have influenced the sample characteristics and resulted in the underestimation of the homophobia level in the population of secondary schools' students. In addition, the research was implemented in Zagreb exclusively. We can assume that if more comprehensive, nation-wide sample was carried out, the results would have tendency to more negative opinions and attitudes towards gays and lesbians. However, even in Zagreb, there is a significant number of both students and teachers who do not approve of the public display of transgressive gender expressions and homoerotic desires. The images of young men wearing make-up, as well as a same-sex kiss, and the holding of a Pride March, were three items which have caused the highest percentage of disagreement in both students' and teachers' sample. These represent the most visible disruptions of heteronormative formulas and, as such, often lie behind violent behavior towards persons perceived as gay or towards someone who is gender transgressive (CARE and ICRW 2009; Jakovljević and Arsenović 2012; Radoman 2011). The right to free expression and respect of one's sexual and gender identity should be one of the building blocks for any educational strategy aiming to diminish homophobia and transphobia among youth.

In relation to the expression of affirmative attitudes towards homosexuality and the acceptance of gay people, our results point to several characteristics, which are associated with such opinions. To summarize these insights, we can portrait an ideal-type of a gay-friendly person as a young woman who attends gymnasium, who is not religious, and who knows someone who is gay. These last two characteristics have been found relevant for the teachers' sample as well. A couple of other results only confirmed certain trends seen in previous international research. Namely, that there is a correlation between knowing a gay person (as an acquaintance, a friend, or a family member) and having a more affirmative and accepting attitudes towards gays and lesbians (Herek 2009). Likewise, they showed that lesbians are more accepted than gays (Herek 2000). Male homosexuality appeared to be more unacceptable, above all in the views of boys, as it endangers dominant hetero-masculinity and violates the norms and power relations of heteronormative system more than a lesbian identity.

In the context of school curricula and educational process, our respondents, both students and teachers, reported that homosexuality issues are mostly non-existent, which relates to a recent analysis of representations of homosexuality in textbooks that reve-

aled that the theme of homosexuality was either invisible or stigmatized, and only in a couple of cases it was presented neutrally, though very briefly (Bijelić and Cesar 2010). Our findings suggest that relevant educational programs for the youth should focus on the following themes: gender identities and expressions; gender stereotypes and discrimination, the concept of sexuality and sexual orientation and identity; homophobia and violence; and LGBT rights. In addition, there is a strong need to revise textbooks and remove negative and stigmatizing stereotypes about gay persons. Moreover, education for students should be accompanied by the adequate teachers' training, but also with development of school policies against homophobic and transphobic harassment and violence. In the next section we trace the recent history of negotiation processes over sexuality and health education programs in Croatian public schools.

3 Sexuality Topics in Croatian Schools

3.1. Sexuality and Health Education Programs (2004 – 2008)

During the last two decades, certain elements of sexuality education, mostly information on anatomy and reproductive sexuality, have been a part of the biology curriculum for elementary and secondary schools. In addition, psychology, sociology and ethics curricula in secondary schools offer a couple of lessons that cover adolescence, love, sexuality, marriage and family. However, a course that dedicates the highest number of school hours to the issues of sexual upbringing is the elective Catholic instruction, attended by 90% of primary and nearly 75% of secondary schoolchildren¹⁰ (Zrinščak 2004). Through 28 hours, allocated to the 7th and 8th grades in elementary school and to the 3rd grade in secondary school, this course includes discussion of sexuality firmly positioned within the context of heterosexual marriage (Ministarstvo prosvjete i športa 2003; Hrvatska biskupska konferencija 2009).

When in early 2004 media reported about the screening of an explicit American anti-choice documentary during a Catholic instruction class in one secondary school, the outburst of public reactions stirred the interest in teachings about sexuality in schools (Bijelić 2008). At that time, Croatian students have had access to two very different extra-curricular sex education programs – *MemoAIDS*, a peer-led HIV prevention program, and *TeenSTAR*, an abstinence-based sex education program. *TeenSTAR* came under strong public criticism by LGBT and feminist organizations, and Ombudspersons for gender equality and for children when it was revealed that it provides biased information on the topics of homosexuality, masturbation, contraception and gender. For example, masturbation was identified as a form of severe moral disorder and same-sex intimacy was equated with sexual harassment (Pravobraniteljica za djecu 2004; Pravobraniteljica za ravnopravnost spolova 2005).

10. This huge percentage is the consequence of not having structural alternatives of other religious or non-religious instructions in elementary schools, as well as the result of social pressure to confirm to dominant Catholic worldview.

In response to this increasing public pressure, at the beginning of 2005 the Ministry of Sport, Education and Science (MSES) established a Commission to assess the existing school-based sex education programs and to recommend a nationwide program. The Commission's final advice was, since they found none of the reviewed programs to be adequate, to submerge sexuality education contents within the broader health education program, which would be selected on the basis of a public call for proposals. After a long procedure, two programs were finally selected in the late 2006. Besides the program of *Forum for Freedom in Education*, a CSO working on improving the educational standards in Croatian schools, the other program chosen to be piloted was the one by *Parents' Voice for Children* (GROZD), a CSO formed by leading figures of *TeenSTAR* program. A majority of the Commission's members argued that the GROZD program, just like *TeenSTAR*, ignores and misrepresents a number of scientific facts about masturbation, contraception, and adolescent sexual activity, and includes biased and discriminatory information about homosexuality (Hodžić et al. 2012). Notwithstanding, the MSES decided to pilot both programs in selected number of primary and secondary schools.

As a response to this announcement, the civic coalition opposed to the GROZD sex education program was founded. Consisting of 130 CSOs and 350 individuals, the Coalition *Stop high-risk sex education* has used various advocacy strategies to block the introduction of the GROZD program in order to abolish the "reactive, irresponsible, inefficient, and non-transparent" government policy. The Coalition's efforts to exert international pressure culminated with the submission of a collective complaint with the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) against the Republic of Croatia in 2007. The complaint, filed via the International Center for the Legal Protection of Human Rights from London, was concerned with the state's failure to provide mandatory and comprehensive school-based sex education, while supporting scientifically inaccurate, biased, and discriminatory programs.

In its final decision in 2009, the ECSR opined that the number of hours and the information taught in the existing national curricula are limited, but did not deem them as "sufficiently deficient", arguing that pregnancy and STI rates among Croatian adolescents are generally not worse than in other European countries. However, the Committee did find that Croatia's limited sex education curriculum discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation, citing the use of a biology textbook which contained homophobic statements. In response, the MSES immediately pulled and replaced the textbook in question (European Committee of Social Rights 2009).

In the meantime, at the end of 2008, the MSES decided to abandon plans to introduce Health Education into the national curriculum, based on their interpretation of the results from a commissioned evaluation study, which reported no significant difference in health-related knowledge between students taking experimental sex education classes, and those in the standard program (Buljan Culej et al. 2008). They also argued that sex education is already present in schools through a so-called "integrative educational model", or as an MSES official stated, "Health Education is no less present in Croatian schools than in the EU" (Lučin and Dukić 2008).

3.2. Recent Developments (2012 – 2013)

After an unsuccessful attempt to introduce sexuality education five years ago, in September 2012, the current government¹¹ exercised more political will and decided to include teachings about sexuality in school curricula as one of four educational modules of a new Health Education (HE) curriculum (Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje 2012). For the first time in the history of Croatian schooling LGBT issues became a part of official curricula for elementary and secondary schools. The 4th module of the HE curriculum, entitled *Sex/Gender Equality and Responsible Sexual Behavior*, contains three school-hours dedicated to the issues of sexual and gender diversity. In the 7th grade of elementary school (ages 13-14) one hour is allocated to the topic *Acceptance of Sexual Diversity* which sets following learning outcomes: to recognize similarities and differences between people in relation to sexuality; to discuss the notion of sexual minorities and their position throughout the history; to recognize stigmatization and discrimination; and to recognize the importance of accepting differences. The other two hours are directed to the topic *Stigmatization and Discrimination of Sexual Minorities* and are implemented in the 3rd grade of secondary school (ages 17-18). The learning outcomes for this session include: to analyze different approaches (scientific, religious and activist) to human homosexuality; to know the difference between the terms transsexual and transgender; to recognize different forms of violent behavior and discrimination towards sexual minorities; and to build up values of acceptance and tolerance of sexual diversity. In addition, the list of recommended literature to assist teachers in the implementation of HE includes the published report of the research discussed in this article and the accompanying educational program and manual¹², as well as an another manual on sex, gender and sexuality by the same authors (Bijelić and Hodžić 2012; Hodžić and Bijelić 2012; Hodžić et al. 2003).

This overt placement of LGBT topics in the official school programming immediately provoked a fierce anti-government campaign against the HE curriculum, i.e. its 4th module, led by GROZD and its affiliated cluster of faith-based CSOs. Their main complaints were related to discussions on homosexuality, masturbation, pornography, differentiation between sex and gender, and gender identities and roles. They argued that HE introduces “homosexual propaganda into schools” and that “gender ideology is contrary to scientific facts and it destroys a sexual identity of adolescents” (HINA 2012). The Church and its satellite CSOs framed their campaign within parents’ rights to decide on the upbringing of their children and in reference to the proposed sexual education module as being an attack on traditional Croatian values. In that way, they used the same tactics of confining sexuality issues to the private sphere and within a traditional (hetero-cultural) national context as they did in 2004-2008 debates (Hodžić

11. Almost the same coalition of centre-to-left parties that won 2000 elections received the majority of seats again in 2011 parliamentary elections.

12. Program of 14 school-hours includes 7 thematic sessions: Sex and gender; Sexual identities, behaviors and orientations; Prejudices and stereotypes; Coming out; Discrimination, homophobia and violence; Visibility; Human rights.

et al. 2012). In their actions, they strived to mobilize parents to sign petitions against HE and to advise them to withdraw their children from sex education classes. In addition, these faith-based CSOs initiated a web site *zdravstveniodgoj.com* where they publish their critiques towards HE, the authors of the program and CSOs supporting it, mostly built upon arguments *ad hominem*.

The Catholic Church itself has also explicitly railed against the sexual education module. Josip Bozanić, the archbishop of Zagreb, stated that the implementation of such HE would undermine the beliefs of religious parents and the Catholic Church in Croatia. He pointed out that HE is “dangerous” because teaching gender equality “destroys the essence of what it is to be human” (Barilar and Sever Šeni 2012). Another prominent theologian said that “lesbians and fags will destroy Croatia” and that HE is “a global conspiracy of homosexuals and other people of deviant sexual behavior wanting to impose their sexual moral and destroy our society” (Laušić 2013). During Christmas holidays in 2012, Croatian Bishops’ Conference published a special leaflet about the HE program. The goal was to alert parents and to mobilize church-goers to stand up and protest against the proposed program. In the leaflet they ask parents if they agree that “a child will learn that homosexual act is as natural and as equal as the heterosexual one” and that “a child will become indoctrinated with gender ideology” (Hrvatska biskupska konferencija 2012). This leaflet was distributed utilizing two biggest national retail chains *Konzum* and *Tisak*, thus exposing close relations between religious institutions and the politics of private capital.

In reaction to these strong accusations, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the Education and the Education and Teacher Training Agency issued public statements on several occasions (Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta 2012a; 2012b; Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje 2013a). In the letters, they denounced the Church’s statements as “untruths, misinformation and malicious data”, displayed scientific facts about controversial educational topics and developmental messages, and emphasized the compulsory character of HE. Their arguments were framed within the human rights discourse, UN declaration, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and “fundamental EU values of nonviolence, gender equality and tolerance towards diversity”. Support to HE was also voiced by Ombudspersons for children and for gender equality who, in their assessments, emphasized legal foundations for such a school program in both national and international documents, stressing that all children have equal rights to information independently of their parents’ consent¹³ (Pravobraniteljica za djecu 2012; Pravobraniteljica za ravnopravnost spolova 2013).

Likewise, around 20 CSOs (the core of them was actively involved in 2007 initiative against GROZD program) produced a website *www.zdravstveniodgoj.hr* to support a more quality HE implementation, however, this time strategically staying away from

13. For their arguments they utilized articles from the Croatian Constitution, Gender Equality Law and Education Law, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and relevant international documents by UNESCO, WHO, UNAIDS, Council of Europe and European Court of Human Rights.

a direct confrontation with faith-based CSOs. In addition, an *ad-hoc* initiative, the *Coordination for secular Croatia*, organized a couple of public rallies entitled *Gathering of Reason* to support the government in their implementation of the HE curriculum. Moreover, Zagreb Pride organized a public protest called *Love Thy Neighbor* in the front of Zagreb Cathedral, as a reaction of LGBT community to hate speech coming from representatives of the Catholic Church in Croatia.

The faith-based organizations promptly reacted and their campaign reached its peak at the end of January 2013 with the visit of Judith Reisman, accompanied by a great media attention. She was invited to Croatia by the *Vigilare* association and the Croatian Centre for the Renewal of Culture to give lectures and to participate in public discussions. Reisman, a controversial U.S. writer who advocates abstinence-only sex education, came to defame the HE curriculum as a product of a “criminal homosexual-pedophilic work of Alfred Kinsey” (Pavičić 2013). She, as anti-Kinsey crusader, also put forward allegations against reputable Croatian sociologist, university professor and one of the authors of the HE curriculum Aleksandar Štulhofer as being the promoter of Kinsey’s ideas in Croatia due to his professional connections with the Institute. Reisman accused him of trying to implement pornography and pedophilia as positive values into the HE curriculum. Moreover, Štulhofer has been accused of “his cooperation with pedophiles” and, without any evidence, his colleagues with whom he co-authored several publications, sexologists Teo Sandfort, Vern Bullough and Erwin Haeberle, were defamed as pedophiles (HINA 2013).

The Catholic Church continued advocating against HE and in certain parishes, during Sunday masses, new leaflets started to circulate, criticizing authors and supporters of the HE curriculum by claiming that “these people who do not have children will teach you how to raise yours” and trying to discredit them on a personal level (Lucić 2013). However, this strong Church’s campaign failed to significantly mobilize public opinion against HE. Results from a January 2013 national public opinion research show that 41.5% of the respondents support the introduction of HE and that more than half of them (56.2%) oppose Church’s meddling (HRT 2013).

At the time of concluding this article, in March 2013, the Education and Teacher Training Agency published online the list of workshops to assist teachers in the implementation of the HE curriculum, and started a two-weeks long online public discussion about the proposed educational tools (Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje 2013b; 2013c). At the same time, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport announced that they would start with revision of textbooks especially targeting parts that are discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation and gender, and that are mostly to be found in some Biology, Sociology, Psychology and Catholic instruction textbooks (Penić 2013).

Judging by the recent steps undertaken by the educational authorities, it seems that the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport has taken a firm stand on the issue of HE and is determined to implement the curriculum. Continuing with the implementation of HE, despite the Church’s opposition, indicates that there is a political will to base educational system on scientific facts and principles of non-discrimination rather than traditional and religious misconceptions and myths.

4 Closing Remarks

Despite the fact that over the last decade significant improvements have been made in the field of anti-discrimination legislative relating to LGBT persons in Croatia (excluding rights pertaining to same-sex unions/families), until recently there were no institutional efforts stemming from educational sector to diminish homophobia and transphobia among young people in schools. Research findings presented in this article suggest a strong need for systematic approaches in Croatian schooling system to reduce stigmatization and harassment of non-heterosexual youth. The recent educational authorities' decision to include, in the new Health Education curriculum, three school-hours dedicated to discussions about sexual diversity and stigmatization and discrimination of LGBT people, represents an important step towards making school environments less homophobic. Another significant move is the reported revision of textbooks aimed to eradicate present stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory statements concerning sexual orientation/gender identity.

In addition, an active role that several LGBT organizations have been taking in developing educational programs and policies should also be noted. In the last two years, Queer Zagreb produced an educational program against homophobia and violence in schools with an accompanying manual, and has trained ten young people to implement it through peer-educational activities. LORI, a lesbian organization from Rijeka, has organized workshops for psychologists in several local schools and has recently issued two manuals, one for teachers and one for students, as well as a set of comprehensive directions and recommendations to decrease homophobia, transphobia and peer-violence in schools.

On the other hand, a strong opposition to these pioneering attempts to include issues about non-normative sexualities into schools' programming, coming from the Catholic Church and faith-based organizations, demonstrates how in Croatia, the discourse of Catholic morality, conflated with national culture and traditional/parental values, is being used to uphold heteronormativity.

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