

## **EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA<sup>1</sup>**

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*Abstract.* The overview of leadership in education in Croatia is grounded on the analysis of its development level, insights into existing research and state of affairs, and indications of possible activities in this field of expertise. The analysis has proved the intensive field development: numerous studies have been conducted, a number of conceptual and operational documents have been created, and an expert framework for introducing positive changes into the field of expertise has been ensured. Except for the early 90s, education policy has been more declarative than really supporting change. Experts and professional associations of principals expect faster alignment with the solutions of other European countries. They emphasize the need for institutional education of principals prior to assuming the role, the definition of the competency standard, clear and measurable criteria for the principal's election, greater security for those who have proved to be great school leaders, and a more appropriate system of professional development of leaders of educational institutions. An insight into studies confirms the existence of the continuous interest of researchers and contributes to the knowledge related to school leadership, principals' competencies, professional development, school leadership models, and other related phenomena. In the foreseeable future, legal measures for the occupational and qualification standards of principals, the standardization of competencies and principals' licensing, and the introduction of compulsory education for the future leaders of educational institutions are expected.

*Keywords:* educational leadership, principals of educational institutions, licensing of principals, professionalization of leadership in educational institutions

### INTRODUCTION

With respect to the leadership in the education of the Republic of Croatia, we will provide an insight into its current situation, development, present important studies, and will indicate the possible directions of its future development. The overview of leadership in education in Croatia is grounded on analysis of its development level, insights into the existing research

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and state of affairs, and indications of possible activities in this field of expertise. A review of leadership development in Croatian education is based on insights into (1) Acts, (2) documents and activities of education infrastructure in the field of leadership, (3) activities of professional associations, (4) key literature on principals, (5) higher education programs, and (6) conducted studies. The analysis has proved the intensive field development: numerous studies have been conducted, a number of conceptual and operational documents have been created, and an expert framework for introducing positive changes into the field of expertise has been ensured. Except for the early 90s, education policy has been more declarative than it really supporting the change. Experts and professional associations of principals expect faster alignment with the solutions of other European countries. They emphasize the need for institutional education of principals prior to assuming the role, the definition of the competency standard, clear and measurable criteria for the principal's election, greater security for those who proved to be great school leaders, and a more appropriate system of professional development of leaders of educational institutions.

## DEVELOPMENT REVIEW<sup>2</sup>

From a broader perspective of leadership in education, we can claim that its indications in Croatian education were recognized shortly after the Second World War. Hence, we could state that it started with education policy activities by adopting the general *School Management Act* in 1955, was operationalized in the documents of the responsible educational infrastructure in 1958 (Institute of Education, 1958), and was continued by experts' reflections and conceptualizations (Leko, 1958). A more evident contribution, closer to the current understanding of leadership, was provided by the 1964 *Primary Education Act*, which attributed the managerial and leadership role to a principal and assigned the responsibility of the pedagogical process to a specialized expert – a *pedagogue*. The leadership-managerial role of school principals was further profiled by the reform of secondary education in the 1970s, whose aim was to strengthen the link between education and human resource needs of the country's economy (Malić, 1971).

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<sup>2</sup> A more comprehensive review is available in Staničić, 2012

## **The first phase (1990–1999): from inspiration to deprofessionalization**

In the early 1990s, stronger efforts to introduce changes in the field of education and leadership in educational institutions became evident. Namely, the need for principals' professionalization was indicated, and their managerial role was emphasized. Concerted efforts of education policy and infrastructure were noted, as well as experts' requests to depoliticize education and raise the level of leadership competencies in education. The importance of the principals' professionalization in the field of educational management was adequately acknowledged in the early 1990s, after the obligation to pass the principal's certification exam had been stipulated by the 1992 *Secondary Education Act* (1992). To implement the above-mentioned legal obligation, a series of complementary activities followed:

1. Adoption of the *Rules and Regulations of the certification examination of principals of secondary schools and student dormitories* (1993) and the *Program of principal's certification examination* (1994);
2. Establishment of the *school for principals of educational institutions* in 1993, which was organized and administered by (then) Ministry of Culture and Education as the administrative education authority, the Institute of Education of the Republic of Croatia as the carrier of professional program contents, and "Znamen", the publishing company, as the organizer and coordinator of school's operational activities (Staničić, 2010)<sup>3</sup>;
3. Issuance of the *Handbook for principals of educational institutions* (Drandić, 1993) and the launch of the annual editions of *School Manual*, which is unique in this part of Europe due to its content, structure, and duration (Staničić & Drandić, 2018);
4. Establishment of national Associations of Principals of Secondary Schools (in 1994) and Primary Schools (in 1995) that, in addition to the long-term support to their members at the meetings, have been reopening expert-related issues in order to raise the level of principals' professional competencies.

Unfortunately, the favorable times, inspired by the need for a contribution to the quality of education through the professionalization of principals, were abruptly interrupted in the mid-90s, as the new education authority

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<sup>3</sup> The school for principals of educational institutions ceased its operations in the autumn of 1994, without receiving a formal abolishment act from the ministry of education, while the unofficial explanation stated that principals did not need formal education as the responsible ministry would provide them with comprehensive "instructions".

abolished the school for principals and reduced the number of education staff in schools. Namely, the *Act on Amendments to the Secondary Education Act* (1995) rescinded the provision on mandatory certification examination for principals of secondary schools and student dormitories. In addition, all attempts at affirming leadership in education and principals' qualifications were disputed and discontinued. Hence, the second half of the 90s stays remembered by de-professionalization in Croatian education. With respect to the decision-making, the education system became centralized, and the leadership activities became controlled remotely. In other words, the school management was based on the directives.

### **The second phase (2000-2009): conceptualization without application**

The appointment of a new education authority in the early 2000s was followed by a change of education policies. The development of the *Strategy of Development of the Republic of Croatia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* began; hence, the focus was also put on changes in education (Pastuović, 2001). The Ministry of Education and Sports gathered the experts who, in 2002, created a document *The Concept of Change in Education System in the Republic of Croatia* (Strugar, 2002). Within that project, the Croatian education system was thoroughly analyzed, which resulted in identifying weaknesses and possible solutions. The field of educational management and leadership was also covered, i.e., the existing state of affairs and suggested solutions were displayed. In addition, the document elaborated the organizational-technical and program preconditions needed to revitalize the school for principals as the expert and scientific support to the principals' professionalization. The school, however, was not reopened.

One of the most valuable contributions to the advancement of leadership in Croatian education is the development of *Program for Professional Training of Principals of Elementary and Secondary Schools*<sup>4</sup>. The initiative of principals' associations was supported by the Education and Teacher Training Agency, and The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports formed a committee responsible for the development of a professional training program in 2005. The purpose was to propose a program that would serve as a basis for the training of existing and future principals of primary and secondary schools. One of the specifications was, certainly, a proposal to form a national center for the principals of educational institutions in Croatia, which was

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.azoo.hr/images/AZOO/Ravnatelj/RM/1\\_Program\\_osposobljavanja\\_ravnatelj.pdf](https://www.azoo.hr/images/AZOO/Ravnatelj/RM/1_Program_osposobljavanja_ravnatelja.pdf) (Retrieved March 13, 2019)

based on the solutions introduced by other countries. Two years later, in 2007, a *Principals' Training Curriculum* was created at the initiative of the Education and Teacher Training Agency, based on the *Program for Professional Training of Principals of Elementary and Secondary Schools*.<sup>5</sup>

Activities related to the conceptualization of educational leadership and the development of expert frameworks (2000–2009) were followed by some other valuable contributions.

1. In June 2007, a two-day workshop “Principals’ Training and School Management in Croatia: Enhancing Quality and Relevance” was held and organized by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, the Education and Teacher Training Agency, the Agency for Vocational Education and Adult Education, and the World Bank, with particular reference to the review of educational experiences of principals in other countries.
2. Due to the incentives presented at the above-mentioned workshop, a two-year seminar for principals of pre-school institutions and primary and secondary schools started the same year, organized by the Croatian Education and Teacher Training Agency and the Dutch educational leadership institute (Nederlandse School voor Onderwijsmanagement). The methods, topics, and results were published in the proceedings of the seminar “School Principal – Management – Leadership” (ETTA, 2009). The status of principals’ trainer was acquired by 24 participants at the seminar.
3. Adoption of the *Primary and Secondary Education Act* in 2008 enacted a procedure for acquiring a principal’s license (2008), thus confirming the seriousness of the education policy’s intention to achieve principals’ professionalization.

At that stage, more concentrated publishing and researching activities of experts and scholars in the field of leadership in education were recorded. Namely, the first monograph covering that field in a comprehensive manner (Staničić, 2006a) should be emphasized, as well as a number of other papers focused on specific issues related to the programs of professional training (e.g., Hitrec & Bilankov, 2004).

### **The third phase (2010–2019): the delay continues**

A strong message towards the professionalization of leadership in education was shared during the international conference of principals of primary

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.azoo.hr/images/AZOO/Ravnateljji/RM/2\\_Izvedbeni\\_program\\_osposobljavanja\\_ravnatelja.pdf](https://www.azoo.hr/images/AZOO/Ravnateljji/RM/2_Izvedbeni_program_osposobljavanja_ravnatelja.pdf) (Retrieved March 13, 2019)

and secondary schools and student dormitories, held in Dubrovnik in 2011.<sup>6</sup> Participants' views were formulated as a request aimed at ensuring the pre-conditions crucial for principals to become ready to assume their roles, execute them in a sovereign manner, and resign with dignity.<sup>7</sup> Valuable support for the professionalization of leadership in education was ensured by publishing the *Legal and Pedagogical Manual for Primary and Secondary Schools* (Drandić, 2011), which contains 1216 pages of legal documents and expert arguments for principals to assume the role as administrative and pedagogic school leaders. That manual has confirmed that leading an educational institution can no longer be a mere function, but should become a profession. After numerous (previously described) unsuccessful attempts to make a significant change to the situation in educational leadership practice, experts were provided with a new opportunity in 2013, that is, the development of *the Strategy for Education, Science and Technology* (2014). The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports formed a working group whose task was to propose solutions that would contribute to the improvement of the quality of the educational institutions' management (Staničić 2014). It was concluded that, in the interest of management quality improvement, the changes that would professionalize leadership of educational institutions are the following: the redefinition of principals' role, the development of competency standards for principals, the institutionalization of future principals' education, the development of a program and licensing process for the principals of educational institutions. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MSES) appointed the Expert Working Group to implement the Fifth goal of the Strategy for Education, Science and Technology (EWG-a5). According to the MSES' Decision, EWG-a5 had three main tasks: (1) to develop the occupational standards of principals, (2) to develop national qualification standards for a principal's profession, and (3) to develop a licensing model for principals of educational institutions. The Expert Working Group has completed all three Decision's tasks and submitted them to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (Drandić, 2019).

Considering the proposed licensing model, EWG-a5 identified key issues, established legal and professional assumptions, and suggested the licensing model for existing principals. According to this model (1) licensing is preceded by the creation of a database of existing principals, and the

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<sup>6</sup> The conference "Status and Position of Principals" was organized by the associations of principals of primary and secondary schools and student dormitories (HUROŠ, UHSR, UUDRH), held from October 25 to October 26, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> The document comprising Conference conclusions was published as "Readily, Sovereignly, with Dignity" in Official Gazette no. 37, November 22, 2011, p. 3. It could be found at HUROŠ and UHSR websites.

adoption of appropriate legal documents and a licensing program. Candidates who registered for the licensing procedure (2) would access the examination process in front of the commission, based on the prior evaluation of documentation (portfolio) and then an immediate (written and oral) exam. All existing principals can access the licensing procedure, and the content and manner of assessment depend on their achievements in relation to the learning outcomes regulated by the national qualification standards of a principal's profession. While existing principals acquired their knowledge and skills during their work and through the process of formal and informal learning, future candidates for principal positions would acquire necessary knowledge and skills by attending accredited programs provided by higher education institutions and would acquire "the initial license", which would allow them to be elected to the principal's position by the end of the first mandate. Their re-election would be conditioned by the results of monitoring, evaluation, and re-licensing.

In addition to the activities of the responsible ministry, it could be noted that, in that period, higher education institutions also engaged in offering the programs for the acquisition of the principals' competencies. First, they introduced compulsory and elective school management and leadership courses in the existing study programs for initial teacher training, after which the accreditation of two postgraduate specialist studies for the acquisition of principals' competencies followed<sup>8</sup>. The specialist study program for principals of educational institutions is organized as a one-year study (60 ECTS). It's based on the national qualification standards of a principal's profession that defines the following sets of learning outcomes: managing an educational system, managing and leading an educational institution; basic management and leadership skills and techniques (team work, advisory work, communication, presentation, motivation, project management, quality improvement); human resource management, legal aspect of educational institution management; financial operation of an educational institution; managing the educational process, and managing relations with the environment of the educational institution. The program consists of several parts: eight compulsory courses (each course is worth 3 ECTS credits); six principal's practicums (each practicum is worth 4 ECTS credits); elective course (students choose one course from the list; the course is worth 2 ECTS credits); research methodology course and seminar in specialist thesis writing (they are worth 2 ECTS credits each) and specialist thesis writing (activity

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<sup>8</sup> There are two postgraduate specialist studies accredited in Croatia: at the University of Zadar and University of Rijeka. Authors of this paper participated in the curriculum design at the University of Rijeka, so this particular study program is taken as an example and described in this paper.

is worth 6 ECTS credits). The special features of this program are so-called *principal's practicums*. By participating in these practicums trainees acquire knowledge and skills of greater complexity and application. Generally, two instructors work together in the organization of practicums: a teacher from a higher education institution of an academic rank (assistant professor or higher) and an experienced school principal, with references acquired in his/her participation in relevant professional training programs and during his/her work in an educational institution. Within the framework of thematic practicums in educational institution management, and depending on the specific subject matter of the practicum, the attendee is expected to: have access to practical situations in the educational institution, observe specific processes, participate in carrying out real or simulated activities under supervision, develop an analysis of a given practical situation, get feedback, and have insight into his/her own performance<sup>9</sup>.

## CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

It can be concluded that, over the past thirty years, experts have made a valuable contribution to educational leadership in the Republic of Croatia. In other words, an expert framework for introducing positive changes in this field of expertise has been ensured. Thus, the development of, for example, occupational and qualification standards of principals, as well as a licensing model, has resulted in creating key preconditions for achieving a more reliable selection of existing and future leaders of educational institutions. However, the responsible education authority has again decided to postpone the legalization of these documents. Due to such political decisions, experts and associations of principals are dissatisfied with the existing situation of educational leadership. Hence, *inter alia*, they point out (Drandić, 2019):

- Occupational, qualification and competency standards, as well as the quality indicators of management and leadership in preschool and school institutions, are not legalized;
- There are no verifiable criteria for election and, in particular, the re-election of principals;
- There is no job security of principals after the end of their mandate;
- Unlike teachers and other education staff, the leaders of educational institutions cannot be appointed to a higher academic rank;

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.ffri.uniri.hr/files/dokumentiodsjeka/PED/SSR/Plan\\_i\\_program-SSR-2018.pdf](http://www.ffri.uniri.hr/files/dokumentiodsjeka/PED/SSR/Plan_i_program-SSR-2018.pdf) (Retrieved March 15, 2019).



- The principal's salary is not based on a satisfying number of factors that make their job more complex and demanding;
- Principals have major responsibilities and obligations, but do not have the option to hire an assistant principal;
- The current role of principals, i.e., their duties, authorities, and responsibilities, indicates that the principal is treated as a function rather than a profession;
- The autonomy of principals' decision-making is reduced, as well as the corresponding responsibility for the quality of school functioning;
- It is necessary to examine the quality of relations between principals and school boards;
- The system of professional development of principals of educational institutions is not considered appropriate.

The severity of the criticism is additionally confirmed by relevant international actors, that is, the statistical data displayed in their comparative education analyses that rank Croatia rather unfavorably, particularly with respect to the quality and professionalization of management and leadership practices in educational institutions. According to the EC (EC/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013), Croatia is one of the few countries in the EU that does not provide training programs for principals prior to them taking up their duties. When selecting candidates for principals, the competencies necessary to perform their duties are not considered at all. According to the TALIS (OECD, 2014), Croatia is the third-ranked country (after Spain and Serbia) by the number of principals reporting that they have not been trained for some of the relevant topics regarding the educational management and leadership (e.g. instructional leadership). Croatia has the largest number of principals (45%) who reported that their training for acquiring principals' competencies was none or weak.

## RESEARCH ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN CROATIA: AN OVERVIEW

The interest of the scientific research community in studying the phenomenon of school leadership in the Republic of Croatia can be detected by the first insight into the search results of the topic-related scientific papers published in relevant scientific journals, as well as by analyzing other published scientific publications (doctoral and master theses, editorial books, monographs, conference proceedings, etc.). The overview and systematization of conducted and published studies on school leadership in Croatia provide an insight

into key topics that attracted the authors' attention, as well as into certain characteristics of school leadership phenomenon in Croatia. In addition, it is possible to determine whether the research interests of Croatian authors are in line with the current research trends that could be found in other national contexts. It is also worth examining whether the conducted studies had followed all key thematic areas that could have contributed to the continuous improvement of theory and practice of school leadership, especially if previously mentioned limitations and deficits of its development in Croatian education policy and practice were taken into consideration. Given the key topics and contents, published papers could be grouped into the following thematic categories:

1. Activities, roles, and functions of school leadership;
2. Principals' competencies;
3. Professional training and development of principals;
4. The relationship between principals and certain stakeholders;
5. School leadership models and their functioning in the organizational context.

Given that relevant international publications have been publishing research papers on school leadership for a long time, it could come as surprising that Croatian journals still publish papers whose aim is to justify or position this field of research in the context of education (e.g., Buhač, 2017a), for management as a discipline in the field of education, and the social status of education is not recognized. However, valuable theoretical and conceptual frameworks for conducting research on management in the context of educational institutions have already been proposed by earlier papers (Staničić, 2006a; 2006b; 2007; Jurić, 2004), noting that the idea of management had a universal meaning, which is the reason why its application became widespread. The transfer and adaptation of theoretical-practical models are also noted in the attempts to discern dominant styles and models of school leadership, which have long been discussed in international publications. Hence, there are increasing efforts by authors to correlate, that is, to adapt contemporary knowledge about some of the effective school leadership styles to the Croatian research context (Staničić, 2007; Sajko & Mrnjauš, 2009; Kovač, Buchberger & Staničić, 2014; Vršnik Perše *et al.*, 2015; Buchberger & Kovač, 2017; Buhač, 2017b), thus providing room for the implementation of (albeit few) empirical studies on the effectiveness of school leadership practice in the Croatian educational context.

## **Papers focused on activities, roles, and functions of school leadership**

The majority of authors aim at highlighting the (current) key roles of principals and offer the results of assessing the importance and performance of certain roles. Burcar (2013) has conducted doctoral research which determined key roles of principals and the way they were realized in the Croatian education system, and then examined the principals' attitudes towards certain managerial and leadership activities. The author emphasized and commented on several groups of key roles of principals: the role of information collector and distributor, communicator, strategist and planner, executive manager, administrator and organizer, leader, pedagogic leader, and educator. The research results indicate a hierarchical model of realizing principals' roles in the education system of the Republic of Croatia, in line with the activities through which these roles are realized. Blažević (2014) is focused on the leadership role of school's principals, which is examined through its the following principles: motivation, communication, interpersonal relations, school development, the introduction of innovation and changes, professional development of school employees, and the school's reputation in society. The survey showed that the respondents (teachers) are generally satisfied with the realization of the leadership role of their schools' principals. They are most satisfied with the way the principals address the school's development and reputation in the wider community and the professional development of the employees; however, they are least satisfied with the introduction of innovation and changes in schools and the methods of motivating the employees.

The authors also monitor the realization of principals' specific roles, to which particular attention is paid in the context of changes affecting the education system. Thus, Kendelić (2011) emphasizes the importance of presenting the vision and mission of the school, and Stanić (2017) adds the importance of building the school image. Matijević-Šimić (2011) highlights the principal's role of motivating teachers, while Varga, Peko & Vican (2016) examine the role of principals in the concepts of changes to the education system of the Republic of Croatia. Due to the decentralization of the education system, schools have become more autonomous; hence, the expectations of principals to realize the transformation role are increasing. In the context of centralization and decentralization of the education system, Vican (2016; as cited in Vican, Sorić & Radeka, 2016) examines and determines the factors that impede the realization of principals' activities: laws and regulations, political elites, parents and custodians, education reforms, and the

appointment of new ministers. It is certain that some of the current and necessary guidelines of Croatian education policy, particularly the tendency to professionalize the principal's function and the development and registration of the principals' occupational standard, could strengthen the need for continuous analysis of key activities and roles of principals.

### **Papers focused on principals' competencies**

Studies focused on the principals' roles are logically complemented by those examining the competency profile of principals. Staničić (2000a) conducted doctoral research aimed at identifying the optimal model of school leadership, based on the competency profile of the leadership process subjects – principals and pedagogues. The importance of certain competencies, their conditionality, and their correlation were examined. The author comes to the conclusion that numerous characteristics and insights needed for a successful leadership could be integrated into a model of five competencies: personal, developmental, professional, interpersonal, and action. The developmental competency appeared to be the most relevant, accompanied by the interpersonal competency. Peko, Mlinarević & Gajger (2009) examine which competencies are of crucial importance for principals to lead a school effectively. The results of their effectiveness self-assessment point to only two leadership subscales that recorded principals' higher performance than average: encouraging professional development and building the school's reputation. The focus of the researchers' interest was also put on some of the specific principals' competencies: human resources management (Staničić, 2006b), social (Janković, 2012; Mlinarević & Zrilić, 2015), interpersonal (Jukić, 2012), leadership (Andevski, Arsenijević & Spajić, 2012), project management and school marketing competencies (Alfirević, Pavičić & Relja, 2016), and entrepreneurial competencies (Alfirević, Vican, Pavičić & Petković, 2018). By revealing empirical data mainly related to the assessment of importance or self-assessment of the mastery of certain competencies, most authors agree that there is a great need for professional training and development of principals, aimed at developing and strengthening these competencies. However, it should be noted that there are no indications of the conducted research which would provide data on the actual level of principals' qualifications. Recently, in line with the current trends in education policy, authors have been analyzing the importance and necessity of defining and adopting national competency standards for principals (Vican, *et al.*, 2016; Feguš & Kovač, 2017), while drawing attention to, *inter alia*, the fact that Croatia is falling behind other European countries with respect to that issue.

### **Papers focused on professional training and development of principals**

In his doctoral research, Đaković (2012) focused on examining the model of professional development of principals in the field of school management. Based on a theoretical review, key trends of contemporary professional development of principals were pointed out, and existing models were grouped according to the principals' work experience and the aims of professional development of secondary school principals. Principals of Croatian secondary schools listed the non-existence of the mentoring model as the greatest weakness of the existing model system, for they perceive mentoring as crucial at the beginning and in early years of principals' mandates. The results of recent studies indicate the expressed need for the professionalization of principals' occupation (Vican *et al.*, 2016), as well as the principals' high awareness of the importance of permanent professional development (Rogić, 2017). Given the recent emergence of new forms of initial training for Croatian principals, that is, due to the greater involvement of higher education institutions that offer programs of postgraduate specialist studies, it is expected that researchers will pay more attention to the assessment of actual effectiveness of such programs.

### **Papers focused on the relationship between principals and other stakeholders**

It should be noted that there are few conducted studies on the relationship between principals and certain stakeholder groups inside and outside the school (Pahić, Miljević-Riđički & Vizek Vidović, 2010, Slavić, 2014, Kovač & Buchberger, 2014; Kovač, Rukavina Kovačević & Rafajac, 2017), which have focused mainly on different aspects of the relationship with teachers, parents, and representatives of local self-government. Alfirević *et al.* (2011) analyze the (marketing) orientation of primary school principals towards several groups of individual and institutional stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, responsible ministry, local government), and their research model is based on the idea of "strategic intelligence", which is reflected in the ability to create and disseminate the data on relevant stakeholders and organized responses to them. A low level of principals' orientation towards the majority of stakeholders relevant to the school functioning, particularly the local government and potential students, is identified. Sunko (2011) examines factors affecting the trust of school employees in school as an institution and points out: the less they trust the school leader, the less they

trust the entire school system and its activities. Alfirević, Vican and Pavičić (2018) investigate which educational and social factors contribute to the perception of school principals as independent managerial profession. The results suggest that both public trust in certain social stakeholders relevant to education and the public perception of school effectiveness can serve as forecasting factors of public assessment of the principal's profession. Taking into account the results of this group of studies, a question should be asked: To what extent are the existing models of professional training and development of principals directed towards the development of their positive social relationships?

### **Papers focused on the research of school leadership models and their functioning in the organizational context**

It is essential to note that studies aimed at examining the relationship between certain features/styles of school leadership and other key phenomena, related to the school as an organization, were conducted in the Croatian context as well (Peko, Mlinarević & Gajger, 2009; Slavić, 2016; Buchberger, 2018; Buchberger, Kovač & Ažić Bastalić, 2018; etc.). Researchers analyze which school leadership features are more correlated with some indicators of school effectiveness (perceived organization effectiveness, job satisfaction, subjective teacher benefits, teachers' attitude towards performing certain activities, e.g., school self-evaluation, etc.), and the extent to which their correlation is mediated by the school climate. The distinctive value of these findings is apparent, as some specific school leadership styles can be distinguished and confirmed, which can contribute to better functioning of schools and their employees. These findings partially confirm the results of international PISA and TALIS surveys, which point to low representation indexes of some of the preferred leadership styles in Croatian schools, especially *instructional* and *distributed* (OECD, 2014; 2016). However, it is questionable whether education policymakers are sincerely interested in providing further support to such studies and, more importantly, in using the potential findings.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS – A FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE**

From the early 90s to the present day, there have been several attempts to raise the role of Croatian principals to a higher level of professionalism.

These efforts were concentrated on identifying the requirements whose fulfillment would increase the effectiveness of principals' work and the quality of education in the educational institutions. Hence, they are evident in: the field of legislation, the attempts to standardize the principal's knowledge and competencies, the institutionalization of education, and the creation of an appropriate knowledge base for principals (Staničić, 2016). The practice has also shown that there are constant shifts between periods of greater policy commitment to professionalization issues and periods of decline and stagnation. We are currently witnessing the latter phase. On the other hand, there are the concerted activities of principals and their associations that continuously draw attention to the unsatisfactory situation and define precise guidelines for the improvement of leadership practice in educational institutions (Drandić, 2019). The justification of their demands is additionally supported by the results of empirical studies and messages from the academic community.

It remains to be seen whether the issues related to leadership in educational institutions will finally be addressed in the desired direction. We expect national education policymakers to finally decide whether qualified leaders of educational institutions are needed, whether their qualifications should be determined before assuming the responsible and demanding role, and whether amateurs in educational leadership are still sufficient for the Croatian education system.

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