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The Right to be Included: Homeschoolers Combat the Structural Discrimination Embodied in Their Lawful Protection in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

There is a 240-year tradition of compulsory school attendance in the Czech Republic. To many, compulsory school attendance is synonymous with the right to be educated. After the collapse of communism in 1989, along with the democratization of the government, the education system was slowly opened to alternatives, including the right to educate children at home, expressed in Act no. 561/2004. This inclusive law has had exclusionary consequences for many families who wish to choose this mode of education. The situation reveals a clear struggle over various forms of capital in the field of education, as famously described by Bourdieu (1998). The article, based on a longitudinal ethnographic study of homeschooling families, maps the structural discriminative dimension of the law and displays the strategies that the actors have adopted in order to combat them.

Keywords: Homeschooling, Structural discrimination, Education, Difference.

Introduction

Over the past two hundred years, nation states and their societies have become increasingly technocratic, secular, and meritocratic. One powerful tool enabling this shift is a centralized, compulsory, state-run education (Lancy, 2010). In Europe, education is now a fully institutionalized process. Professional teachers and state-run schools are the children's chief educators. Neither of them is questioned by the majority population. As classics of identity theory have pointed out, although the process of schooling is presented as natural, it is always marked by ideological conflicts and power struggles characteristic of the time in which the schooling occurs (Anderson, 1983; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Berger & Luckmann, 2001).

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Modes of compulsory school education and the necessity for reforms have been the subjects of ongoing debates among parents, government officials, and school representatives for quite a while now throughout Europe, including in the Czech Republic. Alternatives to state schooling have an inconsistent tradition in the Czech Republic. During the communist era (1949-1989), church and private schools were closed and the public sector was sentenced to meaningless activities promoting life in a socialist country, while being closely watched by the state officials. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the situation changed. New modes of schooling were introduced, including renewed private and church schools and new styles of learning, including Montessori, Waldorf, Dalton, and Step-By-Step educational methods. Most current school reforms concern the content of learning and pedagogical methods without touching upon the very idea of centralized, universal, state-run education and specialized professionals as educators. However, an increasing number of parents, without questioning the right to and the need for education, strive for a different mode of transmitting knowledge and information outside the presence and intervention of a centralized system. They wish to homeschool their own children.

The paper describes the quest for this option. The political vision of inclusive education in the Czech Republic allows for only a one-sided approach: all children, regardless of their abilities or wishes, ought to be integrated into school, the only place where education can happen (Bartoňová & Vítková, 2013). Homeschooling in praxis questions this right, which over time turned into a requirement, bringing to light subtle forms of discrimination, disguised behind the label of inclusion, that create obstacles on the path to education.

Since 2005, Education Act no. 561/2004 § 40-41 Coll. (*Zákon o předškolním, základním, středním, vyšším odborném a jiném vzdělávání*) allows for a child to be homeschooled in the Czech Republic at the primary school level. Seemingly inclusive, discriminatory devices are nevertheless built into the conditions that homeschooling families must fulfill in order to be able to homeschool. My main interest here is to map, describe, and analyze their struggle for a chance to homeschool a child who has no special needs or disabilities and does not otherwise fall into a category of special conditions. I propose that homeschooling ought to be seen not as a reaction to growing dissatisfaction with the present mainstream, state-run school system in the Czech Republic, but rather as a natural enactment of an alternative worldview or ethos, built upon different ideas about learning, teaching, education, and schooling. As such, homeschool challenges the inclusivity of the school system in the same way as any other cultural, social, or religious tradition.

My particular interest is in the subjective evaluation of learning in childhood by homeschool families and in their current options for homeschooling within the legal framework of the Czech Republic. The process of developing the legal status of homeschooling, from a dismissed alternative to a possible legal right, provides an inseparable background to this debate. I also aim to comment on the relationships among the various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1998) owned and manipulated by various families and their decisions to opt for homeschooling.

Notes on methodology

The data introduced below represent part of my longitudinal ethnographic research into alternative teaching and learning methods of primary and secondary school-age children, as well as the life strategies of their families, all situated in the Czech Republic. For two years, I interviewed families (parents and children) who opted for homeschooling as an alternative to mainstream state-run education. At the same time, I conducted interviews

with teachers and directors of the index schools[1] that enroll homeschooling children and act as examining boards in their compulsory periodic examination. I also regularly participated in the daily homeschooling routines of six families, observing the learning processes of the children and the teaching methods of the parents, spending time with them and attending their extra-curricular activities. In conjunction with these observations and interviews, I was a member of two of the most frequented online homeschooling forums (svobodauceni.cz; domaciskola.cz). I actively participated in self-educating activities for homeschooling families (conferences, workshops, and informal gatherings) and included written publications in my analysis. In keeping with the idea of ethnographic research, I pooled data from several sources in order to find as much as possible about a narrow sector of human interaction.

Although separate, all of these data-gathering methods are interconnected. Most of the interviews with homeschooling families were conducted in their homes, where I was also able observe the learning environment and family interactions. As the homeschooling families lived scattered across the whole country, I often had to stay several days in order to conduct the interviews with all of the family members. That extended and prolonged my opportunities for observation. The information gathered through the interviews could then be cross-checked with the data gathered through observation in the families, thus capturing the dynamics of learning and teaching, and of social and family interactions, all at the same time. On several occasions, I was able to follow these families to their index schools for mid-term or final examinations, thus gaining yet another opportunity to add to the data gathered in their homes. When possible, I interviewed all the members of a homeschooling unit: the children, the parents, and the other educators involved.

The written data used for my analysis here came mainly from online debates and publications either by homeschooling parents themselves (through blogging or online magazines on the topic) or by teachers/directors of the index schools. The written data provided a wider context that served as a field of reference for my own findings. It also represents a conscious image or self-presentation of the homeschoolers to the rest of the society. It is the shop window they use to inform, attract, and draw in others.

Data analysis is not the final chapter of the research, but a process that intersects with the whole research period, including data gathering (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In the course of research, a scientist makes several decisions that consequently influence the future analysis, such as whom to interview, what to ask, and what to amend. Such choices are an internal part of the interpretation of studied phenomenon (Ezzy, 2002). The same was true for my research. Interpretations that are part of this study were focused around the key question, "What does education mean to homeschooling families and how do they implement this meaning in practice in a society that does not share their views?" In order to answer this question, I concentrated on the meanings and interpretations given by the homeschoolers themselves. Their emic interpretations are set against the wider socio-cultural context, to mirror the generally accepted patterns of education cosmology represented by mainstream schooling. Judging from the rising number of readers of on-line homeschooling forums, as well as the increasing number of homeschoolers nationwide, it is fair to estimate that similar cognitive, cultural, and social processes are taking place in other families across the country.

[1] An index school is any state-registered school where a child is enrolled for compulsory education and which takes responsibility for that child's periodic examination. Success in passing these examinations is a prerequisite for the right to remain in the homeschooling regime. For a child at the primary education level (6-11 years), any state-registered school in the country may act as an index school. For children in the lower secondary education level (12-16), only a few schools in the country, chosen by the Ministry of Education, may fulfil this role.

Childhood learning theories and homeschooling in the Czech Republic

From a cultural perspective, the issues of learning in childhood have been part of socio-cultural anthropology since its early days (Malinowski, 1929; Mead, 1928, 1930). Attention has been paid to culture-dependent presumptions and generalizations about psychological determinants of social interaction between adults and children. Studies have demonstrated the diversity of the ways in children are brought up and taught around the world, as well as the sense they make of their experiences (Lancy, 2010). Ethnographies from around the world point to a model of village learning in which a child receives a guided acquisition of cultural practices. In such a setting, children learn on their own, at their own speed, anything the children presume to be important for their lives under the instruction of any adult around. This model serves pre-industrialized societies well, but to what extent is it sustainable in urban communities? Formal compulsory schooling brought major changes to the real lives of people and the way that learning and education are perceived was dramatically altered.

Anthropological literature has provided a theoretically informed appreciation of innumerable culture-dependent adaptive paths of childhood learning and has shown how difficult, if not impossible, it is to transfer a village-learning model into a school curriculum (Lancy, Bock & Gaskins, 2010). Lancy asserted (2010) that what works well for transmitting culture does not necessarily work for transmitting school knowledge. While the village-learning model requires a child's independence and non-interference in learning, formal schooling expects the opposite: uniformity in daily preparation for classes and standardized systematic curricula-shaped learning and knowledge, certified by uniform testing.

Every culture applies two main methods in order to shape people into desired forms: socialization and education (Cohen, 2000; Rival, 2000). Socialization is carried out by kin and encompasses personal feelings. It labels the behaviours through which the basic cognitive models of society are learned. These models allow us to navigate through daily events and interactions with others. Through socialization, children acquire what Lancy (2008) calls *sense*, which is a prerequisite for successful acceptance by others, as well as for successful learning processes. Education, in contrast, is about acquiring standardized knowledge, abilities, and values. It takes place in a standardized and prescribed way, administered by a person without any affection necessary (Cohen, 2000). Learning factual knowledge is only a small part of the goal of education. The processes of thinking and the structure of relations that are taught to the students are much more important (Williamson, 1979). Several authors noted the loss of illusions that schooling brought to rural communities (Bledsoe, 2000; Ogbu, 2000; Rival, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 2000). The status quo of current schooling does not seem to work also for the culture of its origin, the urban industrial society (Stahl, 2015). A kind of combination of the compulsory schooling model and the village-learning model has been sought (Holt, 1997; Ricci, 2012; Kašparová, 2014).

Within the Czech scientific and pedagogical contexts, homeschooling is a side issue, explored only by a few (Kostelecká, 2003, 2005; Kašparová, 2012; 2014; 2015). The law pronounces compulsory school attendance for children, rather than any compulsory form of education. Education in the Czech context has historically been strongly connected to schools and other educational institutions (Kostelecká, 2005, 2010). Rooted in the socialist era, learning at home has been traditionally associated, in the broader Czech view as well as in scientific discourse, with various forms of handicaps or differences that cannot be integrated into the mainstream school system (Bartoňová & Vítková, 2013).

Sociologist of education Karen Chapman (1986) identified two basic approaches to education: functionalist and conflictualist. Functionalists believe the goal of the education system to be to select individuals according to their abilities and to allocate appropriate posts and positions to them. Conflictualists see education as a battleground for several interest groups (economic, social, political, and other), where the winners formulate the curricula that is later taught to all, until another victorious group takes over. In other words, the winners decide what, when, how, and why everyone else is to learn and which cultural capital is vital for succeeding in the education system (Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Among Czech homeschoolers, the conflictualist line of understanding prevails. Homeschoolers perceive themselves as promoters of a different cultural capital in the terms Bourdieu (1998) so famously described. They clearly recognize the political and philosophical dimensions of the issue and see their activities as a challenge to the inclusive system of schooling: *"Of course I believe each child needs an education but I do not believe the current school system offers the best option. It is too uniform; it does not respect differences in children and because of that it manages to kill the hunger for education in many children before it has ripened and borne fruit. Every child learns at their own speed with a different method. Only such methods make their desire for knowledge sustainable or even stronger. I believe I can provide such an environment for them at home. I want my children to be educated this way. I don't think just because the state decides something, that it must be the right decision. Look at our communist past, it is the best example of how things can go wrong" (Helena,[2] commenting on reasons to homeschool).*

Helena described the inequalities and differences, and the causal mechanisms which allow for them, which she believes exist between homeschooling and state-run schools. She used generalized and over-simplified expressions describing two opposing fields. Homeschool and state education were presented as two mutually exclusive homogeneous systems. This was a frequent approach and argument that homeschoolers used in their initial self-explanation. Since homeschooling is unusual in the Czech Republic, homeschoolers are challenged rather frequently, and they have to constantly defend themselves against a differently-minded majority. Such superficial declarations often suffice for this defense. Should the inquirer prove to be more deeply interested in the reasons for homeschool, the very core of the argument that recognizes education as a means of control (Williamson, 1979) can be seen in this statement by Daniela.

"Think of the logic. We are living in a free country, you can have as many children as possible and nobody asks you if you will have money to support them. You can make major decisions about their bodies – for example you can decide about their vaccinations, reject them altogether or on the contrary buy many more[3]. But once you wish to influence their minds through the stuff they are learning, suddenly there is a problem. Why should you challenge the state authority on a universal curricula? Who are you to decide what is best for

[2] Unless otherwise stated, all the data presented here comes from my own research, described in the Notes on Methodology section. Names and places have been altered to ensure anonymity.

[3] The respondent is referring to a dispute between a group of parents and the Czech state about the possibility of abstaining from the compulsory child vaccination program. In this legal case, a group of parents raised a concern about human rights violations, in which individuals are forced by law to be vaccinated against their will. In the meantime, these parents did not have their children vaccinated. This resulted in the fact that these children were not admitted to state-run school institutions. The issue was debated in the media and occasionally the parents were fined. The case was finally resolved at the beginning of 2015 by the constitutional court of law, which confirmed the earlier decisions of the lower courts and dismissed the possibility of a human rights violation. However, this result was not known to the respondent when the data was collected.

your child?" (Daniela, commenting on reasons to homeschool). Knowledge becomes an objective quality, verified and certified by the state. Its uniformity supports the authority of those in charge, while divergence brings about danger, which may take the form of an ideological or economic revolution (Illich, 1971).

Homeschooling constitutes an alternative platform,[4] where education, in the general understanding of the word, is being tested. It represents much of Bourdieu's (1998) reconciliation of the objective (the field) and the subjective (habitus), running along the conflictualist paradigm mentioned above (Chapman, 1986). The habitus is here represented by the homeschoolers, who mirror the objective field represented by mainstream state-run education. Mutual negotiations between the two display the power struggle and control over the various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1998).

Like any other urban society, the Czech state provides a ready-made framework for combining family and working life. This model includes working parents and state-run care for children. Under this model, in general terms, the mother stays at home with a child during the whole period of her maternity and parental leave, lasting from the birth of the child up to three years of age. At the age of three, the child is placed in full-time day care, and the mother returns full time to her former profession, while continuing to perform her caring and homemaking activities. Thus, the mother ends up having two jobs, or two shifts at least. The father continues uninterruptedly with his career. The model often results in lasting inner stress and personal unhappiness on the part of those women who have opted for it – especially when the children are of young school age and a substantial proportion of care is still necessary (Kašparová, 2012).

Homeschooling families do not accept this model: *"We do not understand the logic of family policy at all. You are encouraged to care for your children for three years during the parental leave day and night, without any help or relief from the state, and then, overnight, just as the children are getting some sense, you are expected to place them in full-time care and go another way, working nine to five, seeing them awake for two hours a day and weekends, placing their upbringing into the hands of strangers. They do not see their parents, they do not see their siblings all day long. This is not a healthy model. This is not what we wanted," (Katka, commenting on reasons for homeschooling).* Katka was commenting on the normative actions of the state, which definitively assigns the role of the parent with its policy incentive: no intrusion or state support up to the age of three, voluntary co-operation via kindergarten activities from the ages of three to six, and obligatory care from the age of six onwards.

The different primary socialization of homeschooling children, with all its consequences, tests the validity, rigidity, and flexibility of the educational system in the Czech Republic. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital are closely connected with the process of homeschooling, since "cultural capital that is effectively transmitted within the family itself depends not only on the quantity of cultural capital, itself accumulated by spending time, that the domestic group possess, but also on the usable time (particularly in the form of the mother's free time) available to it." (Bourdieu, 1986: 253). Bourdieu's conceptual framework is placed at the center of attention here, since it illustrates in detail how the operationalization of social differentiation in schooling is tied to individual people's activities.

[4] The paradox remains that although internally fairly different, homeschoolers are perceived by the majority as a homogeneous community. Social networks and on-line images contribute a great deal to such understanding.

Structural discrimination of homeschoolers: five occasions

A growing parental lobby calling for the accommodation of alternative approaches to education resulted in a revised political attitude, and Act no. 561/2004 § 40-41 was passed in 2005. This law ensures that each child at the primary school level has the option to be educated at home, providing several conditions are satisfied. These conditions include: 1) The educator must hold at least a high school diploma, 2) the homeschooling family must find a school willing to act as a guarantor and examiner for regular compulsory testing of the child, 3) the homeschooling family must provide a letter of explanation as to why homeschooling should occur, 4) the homeschooling family must provide a written declaration that it has sufficient material means to educate the child, and 5) the homeschooling family must provide a letter of opinion from a Pedagogical-Psychological Advisory Bureau. Although everybody has the right to apply, there is no lawful demand for successful approval, since the option to homeschool is conditioned by several subjective requirements, as illustrated below.

The requirement concerning the qualification of educators brings two issues into the foreground. The first issue operates on philosophical grounds, questioning the need for this condition in the first place: *"In primary school, children learn reading, writing, and basic math. In fact, this is the stuff and the level most of the population uses all their life, regardless of their future profession. Unless you are an accountant or a scientist, you do not need much of the lower secondary school level math in your life. Sometimes a person without high school is a much better teacher than a university graduate. A degree does not say anything about the ability to be a good teacher. I see this condition as completely unnecessary," (headmaster of Kletná School, commenting on homeschooling conditions).*

This issue reflects the philosophical nature of the problem. It is created by the use of symbolic power: the educated are the gatekeepers of their trade. In order to remain so, they have to maintain their difference, certified by formal education. Another dimension is opened by the necessity of having a high school diploma: the structural discrimination intrinsically built into the requirement. The social and political history of the Czech Republic includes periods of open discrimination against selected groups of inhabitants (e.g. the educated proletariat, the bourgeoisie, and kulaks), preventing them from participating in some aspects of life, including education. As late as the 1970s, it was a common practice of the communist regime to influence educational strategies and restrict the educational options of certain families. If there were no workers in a family, the options for the children's further education were diminished due to their "unsuitable origin". If one child chose to study a subject considered undesirable by the regime, such as philosophy or especially theology, that child's siblings had no choice but to enroll into an apprenticeship, learn a trade, or work in agriculture – i.e. to usefully serve the regime[5]. Likewise, members of national minorities (especially Roma) whose children were placed in special schools were, by the nature of these schools, prohibited from continuing in further education and were thus destined to perform unqualified manual work or to learn a trade without a high school diploma. Members of these groups thus had no real chance for success in formal education during the communist era, which may yet have direct consequences in their current lives. *"Julie is taught by my mother, her grandmother. She is retired now and they spend a great deal of time together, most of it outside. My mother had many professions, she worked most of her life with children, in kindergarten, in afterschool activities, too. But after the war, she was not able to study, her family was of bourgeois*

[5] Personal family history of the author. For a further description of the period, see: Kárník, Z. 2004. *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu.* Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2004

origin, so the communists did not allow her to go to school, so she had to train to be a tailor. She does not have a high school diploma. So officially on paper, I am Julie's teacher. In practice, it is my mother," (Jana, commenting on homeschooling conditions). The case of Julie and her family shows a maneuvering strategy around the borders of the law in question. Having lifelong experience with teaching children is insufficient if it is not supported by a legal document; this forces the family to bend the law and expose themselves to consequent punishment.

To fulfil the second condition of the law in order to homeschool, the family has to find a school willing to enroll a homeschooler and to provide for regular testing. Although the law says the parent can choose any primary school, indicating that any primary school ought to consider accepting a homeschooler, the conditions and rules of co-operation between the homeschooling family and the school are within the competence of the school to decide. The research shows the schools differ greatly, from support and acceptance to obstacles and difficulties: "*We were the first homeschooling family in the former school. It was all new to the director, who was afraid of it all. She was very pedantic about all the paperwork that accompanied the change and did not pay attention to anything that I was saying to her. She ignored the fact that we decided to do a project-centered education and thus could not cover all the topics they did at school, while the ones we did cover we would do in much more depth. At the end of the school year, she was examining Danny in front of the whole class on all the stuff they covered in the whole last semester. As if it were a punishment for his having this option to be different. It was very stressful for both of us: for him, because he thought he was stupid for not remembering the difference between a rabbit and a hare after birth, which was one of the 60 questions from biology, and for me, because I could see the whole time and the whole way through the examination how very unfair and pointless such testing was. So we searched for a different school where they would be more understanding of our methods. And we found one. The director is trusting; they are interested in our project work and make Danny talk about it. In fact they are really evaluating his work, rather than testing silly encyclopedic knowledge as they were doing at the former school," (Irena, commenting upon their choice of index school).*

The attitude of the director is a key factor in homeschooling application success. The director is the gatekeeper who, in the end, makes the sole decision about this possibility. At the same time, each family, if they are rejected by one school, are free to turn elsewhere. This in praxis leads to the migration of homeschooling families towards welcoming directors and their schools. For this reason, specialized homeschooling schools are forming within Czech educational institutions. This is a paradox, since the intention of Act no. 561/2004 § 40-41 was to enable the opportunity of inclusion for homeschooling children in any primary school in the country, rather than setting them aside into specialized institutions.

The third condition, the provision of a written explanation of why homeschooling should occur, reveals the puzzle of Act no. 561/2004 § 40-41 in all its complexity. In order to apply, parents must state their motives for homeschooling. In order to be successful, motives have to be approved by the index school director. Although parents have the right to apply for homeschooling, there is no legal right to be granted it in the Czech Republic. Depending on the institution and the belief of its director, fulfilling this condition may require a high standard in literacy, debate, or even legal training: *"We wrote this motivation letter two or three times. The director kept returning it to me with notes, like I was her student or something. I was getting desperate," (Vlasta, commenting upon the conditions for homeschooling).* Returning the homeschooling topic once again to the philosophical level, there is no such thing as the equity of an alternative to the state-run education and schooling. Each case is evaluated individually; the authority to decide is

placed once again in the hands of the state, personified by the director of the school. In practice, therefore, homeschoolers are indirectly motivated to choose a homeschool-friendly index school, thus deepening the exclusion of homeschooling from the mainstream system. "*We have several schools in the neighborhood, but my friend who also homeschools recommended a school about 25 km away, in Rodnov. We know there are several homeschooling families there and the director does not make a big deal out of it. Here in the local school we would be the first family to homeschool," (Iveta, commenting upon the choice of school).* This selection takes away the burden of being a homeschooling pioneer in the local school, but it raises the cost of homeschooling due to necessary commuting. Most importantly, it discourages homeschoolers from forging ties with local communities, which traditionally center around schools. Rather, they seek alternatives and support via various other interest groups and/or social networks.

The fourth condition deals with financial matters. Parents have to declare in writing that they can provide adequate space and material conditions for the education of their child. This does not entitle them to financial support from the state, reallocated from taxpayer money, for the education of their children. The allocated amount goes to the index school where the child is enrolled and tested. Administratively, a homeschooler brings the same amount of money to the school as any other pupil. Enrolling homeschooling pupils can thus be a survival or developmental strategy for some schools, especially geographically isolated schools, where there are few other pupils.[6]

It is a big financial decision for a family to homeschool. A Czech school traditionally covers most of the equipment necessary for learning (textbooks, microscopes, computers, software, gymnastic equipment, etc.) from taxpayer money. In addition to material equipment, schools offer other benefits, such as subsidized meals and extra-curricular activities. The law does not specify how many of these advantages the index school must offer to homeschoolers. Although the schools usually offer textbooks and consultations, the availability of other material and services vary greatly. Due to the geographic distance that most homeschoolers have from their index schools, subsidized meals and after-school activities are not realistic options, and even borrowing other equipment is problematic. The system does not offer any means of compensation, and thus the financial burden of education and schooling falls almost entirely on the homeschooling family. Since most homeschooling families, in order to spend time with the children, often have only a single full-time (or two part-time) breadwinner(s), the decision to homeschool naturally hinders lower-income and single-parent families. *"I know we can afford to homeschool only because of my husband's job and also because we have opted for voluntary modesty in our lifestyle. We buy most stuff second hand, we try to grow a lot of our food, so we have to buy cheap, low-quality food as little as possible. After-school activities are very costly and since we have four children, we had to limit it to two per child. We have no more money to pay for it," (Jarka on managing their homeschool financially).*

For all the families that managed to jump through the hoops of homeschool enrollment so far, the final condition is usually the most difficult and feared. They have to provide a document presenting the opinion of a state-run institution called the Pedagogical-Psychological Advisory Bureau. This institution has several competencies. Among others, it deals with children who are different in some way, be it in their IQ, abilities, or behavior. The difference is determined by various measures and tests, labelling the child accordingly. Both the parents and the state can order an evaluation of a child, should they feel the need. Usually only children with learning or behavioral difficulties are required by

[6] One example of this phenomenon is ZŠ Březová – see http://www.zsbrezova.eu/index.php/o-nas/napsali-o-nas/474-skola-pro-cely-svet, /accessed 15.9.2015/

the order of the state (represented by a school director) to undergo tests here. On the basis of these tests, children with special needs are then integrated into the school system in a variety of ways, ranging from full classroom integration with various on-the-spot adjustments, e.g. longer time for written tests, to seclusion at home, e.g. due to a long term illness (McDonald & Lopes, 2014; Bartoňová & Vítková, 2013).

"We came there [to the Pedagogical-Psychological Advisory Bureau] and the lady in charge told us straightaway that she would not write the letter of recommendation for us, because she believes children at home are not socialized properly, that we were going to make his life miserable without friends and why would we want to do it, that he is healthy, without any handicap, so why would we not let him go with others. Perhaps she would not be so difficult about this if he had learning difficulties or some kind of long-term illness. I thought we would go somewhere else, but then she started to ask us questions, like why we wanted to do it, why we didn't like our former school, and so on. It was rather a long talk. She talked only to us, not to our son. It was like a political debate on TV. But she did not write a letter for us in the end. So we went to a different Bureau, where Mr. Alvin was in charge. I knew about him from the social forums chats – he supports homeschooling – he sent us a letter via e-mail, we did not even have to go to see him,"(Mira, on her Bureau visit). A similar reaction to the bureau officials was given by a different respondent: *"The director told us: You have a healthy child? Then homeschooling is out of the question. I do not believe this exclusion is good for anybody," (Daniela, on her Bureau visit).* This echoes the formal political regime, where the idea of inclusion in the education system was totally dependent on the health of the child. While healthy children were prohibited from being educated anywhere but in a state institution, the home education of children with different needs was tolerated, since they were considered second-class citizens without much potential use for the regime.[7] As a result of past attitudes, homeschooling continues to be seen by many officials and administrators as a symbol of discrimination – an undesirable practice that ought to be erased, using the means and tools given to them by the state. At the philosophical level, the homeschooling parents thus face their toughest opponents here, with a body whose job it is and has historically been to both define and diagnose differences. The paradox remains that although the law does not list the favorable opinion of the Bureau among the necessary conditions for an application's approval, in practice, the school directors require it, citing it in order to distribute the burden of deciding. Failure to provide a positive opinion may thus serve as a justification for homeschool rejection.

Parents trying to formalize homeschool are thus challenged in five steps by discriminatory measures. Overcoming these challenges requires a high degree of social, cultural, and economic capital, substantially limiting those interested in this model of learning. What started off as a project of connection between the immediate human and natural environment is transformed via obscure state measures into an exclusive scheme for the educated, resourceful, and wealthy. The conditions open a space where the right of parents to educate their children at home is severely hindered by institutional discrimination.

[7] As an example of the approach of the communist ideology to handicapped children, see "Children with hearing disabilities are deprived of impulses that develop speech …or other higher principles, including passion for work and the love of a collective of co-workers and socialistic community" (translation of the author). In Další rozvoj československé výchovně vzdělávací soustavy**, Svazek 2,** Czech Socialist Republic (Czechoslovakia). Ministerstvo školství, Slovak Socialist Republic (Czechoslovakia). Ministerstvo školstva SPN, 1970 , str. 59

The law itself does not guarantee the right to homeschool. It is not enough to simply provide all the documents required by the law (such as a written application, a description of material conditions, a list of textbooks to be used, and certificates of qualification). In order for the application to be successful, all of these materials have to be approved by the director of the index school. The subjective decision of the director is hidden behind seemingly objective documents and materials, provided (or not) by the parents. Since not all directors are open to the possibility of homeschooling, this rules out the possibility of enrolling the child into homeschooling in any Czech primary school. Rather, schools that specialize in homeschooling seem to be forming in many regions, and homeschooling families cluster around them.

The disapproving attitude of the state towards homeschooling is fully revealed at the lower secondary school level (ages 12 to 16), the second and last part of compulsory education in the Czech Republic. It is traditionally perceived by all the stakeholders (teachers, children, parents, directors, and government officials) as the most problematic period of compulsory learning. Teachers report a tremendous loss of interest on the part of the pupils, children report increasing boredom at school and a loss of sense in all the facts they have to learn, directors report growing difficulties in managing the behavior of the pupils (all three, see Straková, Spilková & Simonová, 2013), parents express fears for their children's future and pressure to send them to better schools,[8] and government officials report falling positions in European testing surveys.[9]

Lower secondary school level education is loaded with factual knowledge from many fields of interest: chemistry, physics, math, history, biology, home economics, music, art, literature, Czech language, two foreign languages, geography, physical exercise, civic education, IT, and manual training. Looking at the list of subjects, it is tempting to say that Williamson (1979) was wrong; it seems that acquiring factual knowledge *is* the goal of education at this level after all. My data show that to many Czech parents, the quantity of information, rather than any processes of thinking, is still synonymous with *education.*

This commonly held belief is reflected in the current government's stance towards homeschooling at the lower secondary level. Lower secondary level children whose parents wish to educate them at home must apply to one of the few pilot index schools where the Ministry of Education is monitoring the process. Depending on the will of the officials and the ministers in office, the experiment can be stopped at any time.

As such, homeschooling at the lower secondary level has an ambivalent status: neither impossible nor accepted. Families who decide on this method of learning and living have to face the uncertainty of the very near future, living from one year to the next. Financial demands multiply and circumstances divert them further away from their formal schools towards those that are centrally selected to implement the experiment. This status at the lower secondary level persists despite positive results submitted from all of the pilot index schools to the Ministry for almost 10 years now.

Concluding remarks

Anthropology of education is not yet firmly established in the Czech Republic, and the tracking of anthropology of learning is virtually non-existent. This is partially due to the ongoing beliefs of both academics and research boards that topics connected with pedagogy and education are the domain of research teams associated with pedagogical faculties; another reason is that the legacy of communist uniformity continues to dominate the minds and imaginations of many, including social science academics (Illich, 1971).

[8] See http://ceskomluvi.cz/diskutujte-o-budoucnosti-viceletych-gymnazii, accessed 18.7.2014
[9] See PISA survey 2012 on (http://www.pisa2012.cz/?a=vystupy, accessed 19.9.2014

After all, they are themselves the products of a uniform education system, and thus have difficulties imagining otherwise. It is mainly due to culturally creative thinkers that educational alternatives came into existence worldwide, and as such became of interest to social scientists. In the Czech Republic, the research that connects social science with pedagogy mainly concerns minorities (Kašparová & Souralová, 2013; Nekorjak, Souralová, Vomastková, 2011) or gender (Jarkovská, 2013). The outcomes of this research are similar to others throughout the world – namely that education strives to reduce ethnocentrism, while at the same time it is shaped by it and inevitably also reproduces it (Kašparová & Souralová 2013; Meeusen, de Vroome & Hooghe, 2013).

The emic encounters described in this paper confirm several important facts associated with education and schooling. Although these findings have to be read within the legal context of the Czech law, they represent a navigation of personal strategies similar to the situation elsewhere in the world (Ricci, 2012).

First, there is an unresolved ongoing philosophical social and political debate on the meaning of education and schooling. The state, the guardian of the metacapital (Bourdieu, 1998), has the final decisive power to accept or reject alternatives. However, the legal guarantee of a right is not in itself a token of acceptance or inclusion. As is the case in the Czech Republic, the law can contain discriminatory conditions that transform a universal right into a right for a select few.

Second, parents who opt to homeschool often change their professions so as to accommodate for changes, or share educational responsibilities in order to be able to sustain their professions. As such, homeschooling is practiced by families throughout the whole spectra of society, being functionally adopted by single parents as well as by large two-parent families, living in urban as well as rural settings. What connects the families is that their desire for change relates to their early childhood experience (not necessarily negative), motivating them to be able to imagine and to fight for a difference both for themselves and for their children. Despite their own education and training, they are able to step aside, envision an alternative, and assemble agency to make it happen. Nevertheless, a homeschooling parent is never free from ties to the formal school and state system. Structural adjustments ensure at least a partial penetration of the formal system by the parent into the teaching and learning of the children. It is not an accident that the greatest challenge described by homeschooling parents is to deschool themselves.

Third, since in homeschooling families there is little or no spatial and institutional division between family life and learning, most homeschoolers do not differentiate between socialization and learning, as described by Cohen (2000) and Rival (2000). As such, homeschooling resembles the learning strategies of pre-industrialized societies: sibling learning and responsibility, stress upon observation, practice oriented, and the child as an initiator of its own progress (Lancy, 2008). Yet the resemblance fails in one of the major aspects of the village-learning model: the immediate society does not play the role of a teacher, since usually it does not share the same values. Homeschoolers are frequently too different, and are thus excluded from local schools as well as some local (mostly rural) communities; they are forced to create virtual communities via social networks. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the development of the issue. There is not enough data within this geographical context yet. In a decade or two, follow-up studies will be possible and we will be able to tell how the fusion of education and socialization will project itself into the lives of both homeschoolers and the broader society. At the moment, homeschooling opens a world of alternatives for those who seek it actively enough and challenges the practices of post-socialist inclusive education.

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