INTRODUCTION
Recent demands for changes in the educational system in Slovenia were expressed in evaluation studies at the end of the 1980s. However, the change of the social system meant that changes in the educational system became a necessity. Thus at the start of the 1990s Slovenia joined the European trend towards reforms of education systems.

It was perhaps the euphoria following the changes in the social system that created the illusion that it would be possible to formulate a concept for reforms to the education system directly from various academic discussions and conferences involving a large number of experts, educators and parents. After two years of numerous yet varying proposals and concepts submitted at these conferences, it became clear that they had to be brought together into a single coherent entity. It was for this reason that the state of Slovenia, in the form of the Ministry of Education and Sport, appointed a group of experts who worked out a basic strategy for the new education system (Education in the Republic of Slovenia – White Paper 1995). This academic paper represented the basis for the formulation of new education laws.

The appointment of a group of experts “in the know” who were therefore given the opportunity of “establishing the borders of social reality arbitrarily” is not a novelty, at least not in Slovenia. In 1764, Maria Theresa, the Empress of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, of which the present-day Slovene territory was a part, ordered Janez Krsnik, a member of the Court Study Group, to prepare a syllabus for grammar schools. A survey of subsequent curricular reforms reveals that in all of them, the state authorised a group of experts to set official school knowledge.

Preparing a proposal for a new concept of education system presupposes a range of all academic viewpoints expressed, and accordingly the legitimacy of certain solutions. To apply the proposed solutions in legal acts requires political compromises to be made. It is therefore impossible to claim that the legislation passed reflects solely the views of a separate group of those who are “in the know” as to how to preserve the social universe. In Slovenia a number of compromises have been made concerning the education system. The dilemma between a unified primary school system and the division into primary education and lower grammar school (from 11–15 years of age) was resolved with the introduction of three levels of difficulty and the introduction of optional subjects from Grades 7 to 9 of an otherwise unified primary school system. The demand for marked extension of primary education was settled with an agreement to extend it by one year, but compulsory education now begins at 6, and not 7, years of age.
as before. The demand for the introduction of religious instruction into schools led to the introduction of a secular subject Religions and Ethics, etc.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Issue of Official Knowledge

The transfer of knowledge is one of the vital processes in the preservation and development of the human race, and is also one of the most dynamic elements of contemporary society (Therborn 1995, p. 12). A particularly special place in this process is reserved for institutionalised knowledge transfer (knowledge transfer in school). Bilton (1996) characterised the foundation of special social institutions for the dissemination of knowledge (schools) as a manifestation of rationalism, the practical reflection of which was realised in the complete institutionalisation of social life, as well as in an entirely different role for science. The school can be seen as an institution authorised by the state to transfer official knowledge and to issue public documents which guarantee that certain (official) knowledge had been transferred. Public documents contain marks determining the level of knowledge achieved by an individual in acquiring the official knowledge (Collins 1979).

Official knowledge involves only verified learning, which presupposes the processes of verification, legitimisation and institutionalisation of learning, and on this basis of inter-subjective recognition of learning. In this sense we can define official knowledge as institutionalised truth, or as a “corpus of generally valid truths about reality” (Berger, Luckmann 1985, p. 87). Thus knowledge contains a dimension of inter-subjectivity and involves the social and historical framework within which it is made, while establishing a certain relationship between the individual and the society, the public and the private.

The school is authorised to disseminate part of the social fund of knowledge, where such part is so important that it has to be disseminated to younger generations. This gives the knowledge selected a special status – the status of official school knowledge. Since we are not concerned here with the entirety of the social fund, but only with a selected part of the fund of social knowledge, other important issues arise, such as: which areas of knowledge receive the special status of official school knowledge; who are the right people to take part in the formation of school knowledge; how to organise the process of dissemination and legitimisation of school knowledge, etc.

In modern societies, the status of official school knowledge in public schools is defined on several levels: the areas of knowledge disseminated in schools are defined in special documents verified by state bodies; monitoring of the process of knowledge transfer (with the system of monitoring services, textbooks, etc.); the process of testing and performance measuring is becoming increasingly institutionalised as the state introduces mechanisms for standardisation of performance measurement (introduction of national tests, standardisation of knowledge, etc.).
The extremely large number of persons involved in the process whose actions influence the manner of transfer and the understanding of transferred knowledge alone demonstrates the complexity of the process and at the same time the inability to ensure control over the transfer of official knowledge. In addition, it is also necessary to take account of the complexity of knowledge and the process of knowledge transfer. Disseminated knowledge includes numerous “surpluses of meanings” (Apple), “thought accessories” (Justin), “silent knowledge” (Polany), “implicit knowledge” (Ule), which thwarts monosemic understanding and control of the disseminated knowledge.

The analysis of the processes of formation of official knowledge in this paper will focus solely on those dimensions and elements through which it is still possible to monitor and study explicitly determined and acknowledged official school knowledge, i.e. on the level of preparation of documents and determining the official school knowledge through a national curriculum.

Highly Interested State
Modern societies are typified by the lack of a socially orienting centre and of changes in the relationship between an individual and society (Luhmann 1987). This change is not related solely to changes in social structures; it also includes changes in the foundations of the way of thinking as well. Within this framework, individuals on the one hand increasingly formulate their own systems of meaning through which they build their interpretative framework and determine the manner of understanding the world, and on the other hand they are trapped in the systems of meaning which are dominant in the defined time and space.

Comparative analyses performed at the start of the 1990s in OECD countries by Skillbeck (1990) and in the mid-90s in the Council of Europe countries by Kallen (1996) attempt to establish some typical trends regarding issues from the field of education. It is interesting that both established an increased interest on the part of the state in settling the issues in the field of education.

The authors show that during those years the majority of European countries radically reshaped their educational systems and curricula. The increased interest of states in resolving issues in the area of education could be a reflection of the desire to control a social subsystem which requires a great deal of financial resources, or it could be a reflection of the belief in the power of the school in settling important social issues, e.g. the influence of school on the development of an individual’s competence, which is in turn important when entering the world of labour and for confronting the complexities of modern society; the significance of the school in resolving concrete wider social issues, such as unemployment (extended schooling), violence, addiction, ecological issues (inclusion of contents and objectives in the curriculum).
The increased interest of the state is demonstrated in the increasing role of the state in mapping out the strategy of the national curriculum, in determining the official school knowledge for individual subjects, in defining the methods of testing and assessing, in defining the standards of knowledge, in controlling and producing textbooks and learning tools. In the majority of European countries (Van Bruggen 1994) the basic strategy of planning is worked out by a group of experts appointed by the parliament, the government, or a minister. Since it is an appointed group of experts, a professional service which forms part of the state administration is as a rule available to them.

The influence of the state is also demonstrated in the determination of the official knowledge of individual school subjects. Although this role is as a rule entrusted to experts from individual subject areas, they are nevertheless selected and authorised to perform this role by the state. Given the concept of relativity of knowledge, it thus seems that the right to make judgements about which knowledge will be included in the stock of official school knowledge is given to a narrow group of selected cognoscenti, to “those who know how to preserve the social universe”, or who can arbitrarily draw the “boundaries of the social reality”. It therefore seems that the concept of the social construction of official knowledge presupposes (total) arbitrariness and subjectivity in determining official knowledge, or in the process of determining the “universally valid truths about reality” (Berger, Luckmann 1985, p. 87).

As Van Bruggen (1994) points out, groups of specialists appointed to determine the official knowledge in individual subjects, viz. those determining which knowledge will be disseminated in the school, and those which deal with the setting of standards of knowledge (the required knowledge) were typical of the curricular reforms in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Such a division ought to contribute to a greater level of democracy and openness in the process of determining official school knowledge, since a fairly large number of experts can be included in the process. On the other hand, such a division of groups (in line with the “divide and rule” principle) can help perpetuate the actual influence of a group of people who must subsequently take care of the “co-ordination” of all appointed groups and “ensure” the coherence and consistency of “strategic” decisions.

The “co-ordination” of appointed groups of experts and the concern for strategic decisions indirectly allows the possibility of influencing the determination of the official school knowledge (compulsory subjects) which is of paramount importance to the state, and is therefore protected as the national core curriculum.

If the supposition of the subjectivity of the determination of the official knowledge and the thesis claiming such knowledge as a prerequisite for an individual’s/subject’s participation in social activity is valid, then the knowledge which...
indirectly gives social power (the power of action of an individual) is subjected to the subjectivity of individual groups given the power to determine socially accept-ed knowledge.

Thus the process of determining the official school knowledge expresses not only the relationships between the state and individual social groups, those officially authorised to take part in determining the official school knowledge and those willing to take part in such processes, but also the relationship between the individual and the society as well. The fact that an individual is qualified and classified with regard to the level of the acquired official school knowledge in the process of testing and assessing and later issuing of (school) certificates alone proves that the transfer of the official school knowledge concerns the individual directly, and that in a specific way it defines the relationship between the individual and the state (society) (Therborn 1995, p. 12).

THE CURRICULAR REFORM MECHANISM

The official changes to the educational system in terms of legislation were adopted by the Slovene Parliament in the spring of 1996. Two of the most prominent changes were the introduction of the nine-year compulsory school (replacing the current eight-year school), and the introduction of the dual system in secondary (post-compulsory) education. However, the curricular changes went even deeper; they were changes in the contents and methods of education. The appointment of the National Curriculum Council (NCC) was therefore the next step required by the new legislation. The NCC was appointed by government decree with the responsibility to define the general goals and objectives of curricular changes, the methodological framework of curricular changes, and the strategy and schedule of curricular reform. The NCC consisted of 27 experts in the area of the educational system and in individual subject areas.

In fact, the appointment of a group of experts “in the know” who were therefore given the opportunity of “establishing the borders of social reality arbitrarily” is not a novelty, at least not in Slovenia. In 1764, Maria Theresa, the Empress of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, of which the present-day Slovene territory was a part, ordered Janez Krsnik, a member of the Court Study Group, to prepare a syllabus for grammar schools. A survey of subsequent curricular reforms reveals that in all of them, the state authorised a group of experts to set official school knowl-edge.

The framework of activity of the NCC was defined by a decree. The NCC was responsible for the preparation of changes to contents and methods within the new legislation. It is important to stress that the NCC did not adopt educational programmes and curricula; it did, however, suggest that they should be adopted by the relevant councils of experts when it considered them to be appropriately modernised.
The NCC was aware that there was no single solution for curricular changes, and so the first step of the NCC was to learn about experience in other countries. The NCC carefully studied the strategies of change and the major difficulties other countries had to face.

All members of the NCC then had the chance to write down their personal vision of the main tasks and strategy of the curricular reform; the texts were published in a collection of papers entitled *Curricular Changes* (1997).

A common vision of curricular changes was adopted in the document entitled *Guidelines to the Curricular Reform*. This document was sent to all educational institutions in June 1996. The Guidelines included the broader context of the educational system in Slovene society, major difficulties, aims and goals of curricular changes, the strategy for solving problems, the main values, the strategy and the schedule of the curricular reform. This document represented the framework and guidelines for further work of the NCC and all its bodies.

In order to complete such complex tasks, the NCC appointed five sectoral curricular commissions for pre-school education, compulsory education, grammar schools, technical and vocational education, and adult education. These commissions included 80 experts. The sectoral curricular commissions consisted of experts in the specific area of education, in different subjects, and principals (teachers). For the vocational education commission, representatives of social partners were also invited.

The main task of sectoral curricular commissions was to define the goals, the programme and the timetable for the specific sector of education. Another task was to ensure the coherence of the programme. Each sectoral commission defined specific guidelines for their part of the educational system. Because of the complexity of technical and vocational education, 27 programme curricular commissions were established involving 158 experts.

The NCC also appointed 42 subject and cross-curricular commissions bringing together 278 experts. These commissions consisted of experts in individual subjects from universities, teachers and advisors from the Board of Education. One subject commission made proposals for syllabuses for all parts of the educational system. In this manner, the vertical integration/differentiation of subjects was to be ensured.

More than 500 experts were involved in total across all the curricular commissions.

The structure of commissions also included teachers’ circles. These circles included all Slovene teachers. This may be the most important part of the whole structure. Their role within the strategy and logistics of curricular changes could best be explained by the example of the compulsory school. For other parts of the educational system, the logistics were similar.
The sectoral curricular commission for compulsory education analysed the existing programme and compared it with the programmes in foreign countries. On the basis of this analysis, it prepared a proposal for a new programme and timetable.

In line with the proposal of the timetable and the time allotted to the specific subject or subject area, the subject curricular commissions produced the first drafts of syllabuses for their subjects. Before this they had to analyse at least three syllabuses from other European countries.

The sectoral curricular commission then organised a seminar for all subject commissions, where the drafts were discussed with all other commissions. After this they revised their drafts from the cross-curricular point of view.

The new draft version was sent to samples of teachers’ circles, i.e. to 20% of all Slovene teachers of the particular subject. Teachers’ circles discussed the drafts and sent their comments, proposals etc. to the relevant subject commissions. Subject commissions had to analyse their comments: they could either include them in the new draft or explain to the teachers why they were not included. Afterwards, the new (third) drafts (together with analysis of teachers’ remarks) were sent to all Slovene teachers.

They discussed the drafts and wrote down their comments. All teachers could also complete a questionnaire. In fact 70–80% (varies according to subject) did so. The questionnaire was analysed for each subject and each year separately.

On the basis of these analyses, a fourth version of each syllabus was made, which was then sent to the samples of teachers’ circles in March 1998. They could compare the new version with the old one and determine which and how many comments and proposals the subject commission included in the new version of the syllabus. After the presentation of new versions of syllabuses to sample teachers’ circles, the latest version was prepared for discussion in all circles in May 1998. Once again, the procedure was the same. In fact, four versions of syllabuses were produced solely on the basis of teachers’ proposals. The “final” version was prepared after the discussion in the sectoral curricular commissions in May and June 1998.

The sectoral curricular commissions reviewed all syllabuses, and once they had established that they were appropriately updated (according to the guidelines they adopted), they presented them to the NCC. The NCC decided on the proposals. When it considered them appropriate, it sent them to the Council of Practitioners, which was established in the course of the curriculum reform. Its role was to assess the proposals in terms of applicability. It could demand amendments, and the NCC had to consider them before it sent the documents to the Council of Experts for adoption.

The criteria for judging the proposals for programmes and syllabuses were the aims, principles and strategy adopted in The Guidelines to the Curricular Reform.
The main aims of the curricular reform were as follows:

– to increase the autonomy and professional responsibility of schools and teachers;
– to raise the interconnectedness between disciplines;
– to decrease the task burdens and tiredness of students;
– to increase the variability of forms and methods of teaching and to give students a more active role in the teaching process;
– to achieve a balanced (cognitive, emotional, social, etc.) and personal development of students, etc.

Some of the key principles were the following:

– programmes should be more goal- and development-oriented than content-oriented;
– programmes must ensure equal opportunities in education;
– programmes and teaching plans must be compared with at least three foreign ones;
– the amount of material should be adjusted to the available lesson time;
– a balance between individual fields and disciplines must be established in the programmes;
– contents which have general value and utility must be given priority;
– programmes and teaching plans must be vertically and horizontally harmonised, etc.

SOME DILEMMAS AND CONFLICTING ISSUES

Many people hear the call, but only few are chosen? or Who was involved in determining the official school knowledge

One of the initial dilemmas of the curricular reform was the issue of who was to determine the official knowledge. Should there be a small group of highly qualified experts who would work silently in peace and would announce the reform results when the task was finished, or should there be a greater number of people involved in education who would work openly and interact among themselves and with the public in the course of reform? It was assumed that the first option would make the project cheaper, and would enable faster work and deeper change. The second option would be more time-consuming, more costly and would require making a larger number of compromises. In the end, the second option was chosen because it was hoped that the involvement of a greater number of teachers would make them think about the changes in the course of the reform, would involve them in the evaluation of proposals, and would thus shorten the time and increase the probability of success of the reforms. This option implied more intense public relations on the part of the project management, and more conflicts were expected.
When the NCC embarked on its work it called on all faculties, institutes, professional associations and schools to submit their nominations for experts to sit on curricular commissions. As an exceedingly large number of nominations came in, members of curricular commissions were selected on the basis of the following criteria: academic references, representation of all levels of the educational system, regional coverage, the number and rank of proposers who supported individual nominations. As a rule, the commissions were led by experts from universities or institutes. Around 40% of commission members were teachers from pre-school institutions, and primary and secondary schools.

The curricular commissions thus formed together with consideration of proposals given in teachers’ circles should prevent the determination of the official school knowledge becoming a tool (weapon) of individual groups of people who are “waging a civil war”. Sufficient influence should be given to practitioners; they examined above all the practical applicability of syllabuses.

The solution adopted raised some issues. Some experts from the academic circles expressed their doubts as to whether teachers could really modernise syllabuses, since modernisation is above all the inclusion of new research findings. Thus individual subject commissions reacted nervously to remarks by teachers to the effect that, for example, the proposal for a certain syllabus was too demanding, was incomplete from a pedagogical point of view, etc. In such cases, the role of mediator was played by the appropriate sectoral commission.

On the other hand, there was also a fear that academic experts would just project their academic disciplines onto the primary and secondary schools. As a result of this criticism, syllabuses were subjected to multilevel checking by the teachers’ circles, the number of teachers in the curricular commissions was increased in the course of the reform, and a special national Council of Practitioners was appointed.

It would be unjust to forget that syllabuses were not actually adopted (and the official school knowledge determined) within the system of curricular commissions. In fact they were adopted by the Council of Experts.

**The Role of Professions**

The curricular reform was considered primarily as a professional task. Therefore specific professions played a crucial role in the modernisation of the syllabuses in their fields. The experts were also appointed in these commissions on the basis of their teaching knowledge and experience. However, this solution was not without risks.

We set about resolving these issues in curricular reform by appointing a greater proportion of education experts to sectoral curricular commissions and the NCC. Moreover, we tried to provide an exhaustive treatment of curricular changes by:
– goal-based planning of syllabuses;
– obligatory cross-subject adjustment of syllabus proposals;
– determining cross-subject contents that curricular commissions should include in syllabus proposals;
– introduction of interdisciplinary activities (e.g. Activity Days in primary school).

However, problems arose as soon as it was necessary to transcend the structure of individual academic disciplines on which an individual school subject is based into a nonclassical subject syllabus and when an individual profession wanted to strengthen its position at university through presence of discipline in school curricula. Teachers were afraid of how the introduction of a new subject would affect their jobs.

It ought to be stressed that the struggle of individual professions for their share in the curriculum started as a rule only in the part concerning the compulsory part of the curriculum. The compulsory part of the curriculum is that part which guarantees a certain profession a permanent position in social division of labour. The majority of professions dealt with the optional part of the programme as less important in status. Thus in the course of the reform, the newly introduced optional part of the primary-school programme shrank compared to the original plans. It seemed that individual professions would be all too willing to sacrifice it if they themselves gained more space in the compulsory part of the programme.

It is possible to assume that the fight to place individual professions in the compulsory part of the curriculum is proof of the continuing belief that school is the only carrier of knowledge, and the continuing understanding of school knowledge as a clump of eternal truths, and the continuing failure to accept the student’s role in making his/her own decisions on at least one part of the disseminated knowledge. The appearance of members of curricular commissions as exponents of their professions could be understood also as a remnant of the political socialisation of our society where, as a rule, no-one was understood as an autonomous individual, but rather as someone’s representative.

On the other hand, it is interesting that in part of the curriculum which is left to optional subjects, viz. subjects selected by a student, initiatives for very diverse school subjects arose. These subjects are normally much less indirectly linked to individual academic disciplines; they seek to put into effect a new understanding of school knowledge, and as a rule connect more professions at the same time. These subjects include e.g. Environmental Education, Media Education, Drama, various artistic activities, etc.

### Autonomy and Teachers’ Professional Responsibility

One of the central aims of the educational reform of the NCC was the demand to produce programmes and syllabuses which would strengthen teachers’ autono-
my and at the same time their professional responsibility. The prevailing conviction was that only in this way it is possible to expect the development of the educational profession and a rise in the quality of education. At the beginning of the reforms, teachers also expressed the demand for a rise in autonomy. And when examining syllabuses, which were much more open, they demanded that the people preparing them should determine in greater detail the contents, methods of work, and learning tools. Is teachers’ autonomy a Trojan horse where, behind a glittering motto, too much responsibility is hidden, too much for teachers to cope with?

Some people seek reasons in a modified understanding of the school, above all in understanding the school as an enterprise with the stress on economic efficiency and rationality. The four Es are legitimised as the principal objective of the educational system, viz. Efficiency, Effectiveness, Equality, and Excellence (Beare 1994, p. 36). Beare points out that it is not only about closer ties between the economy and the educational system, but about deeper changes a paradigm shift in our understanding of the social functions of the school. Education is increasingly subjected to the economic sphere; increasingly, economic terms are used to describe and analyse the educational system. The demand for measuring the impact leads to the demand for determining the standards of performance. The standardisation of knowledge ought to lead to an increasing routine nature of work.

The process of MacDonaldization (Ritzer 1993) of the school and the related de-intellectualisation of educational work is expected in the coming years to drive educational work into a routine occupation, since it is of great importance for students to obtain as much knowledge as possible at the least possible cost. The nature of educational work ought to change it ought to become increasingly de-intellectualised and filled with routine. A change in the status of the profession is proof of that.

Such understanding, of course, raises the question about the type of official school knowledge and the role of state. However, in the process of reform in Slovenia we strove to put into force the modified comprehension of knowledge, whereby knowledge would be understood as the development of competence for life and work. Knowledge thus understood of course demands continuous active forms of teaching and learning. And without teachers’ autonomy and professionalism, these are impossible to achieve.

The Question of Hidden Ideology
The curricular reform in Slovenia contained a hidden ideological dilemma, which was seldom spoken aloud. It was however expressed in several rather nervous discussions. The dilemma was about the basic mission of education and school.

According to some participants of NCC, one had to define the final outcome of education in terms of the desired personality of students when they leave
school. “Proper” social values were especially emphasised. On this basis one would have to develop an adequate curriculum.

The second option viewed education as a means of developing the individual’s potential to the highest possible level, whatever that may be. The role of the school was to broaden the horizons and to teach individuals to make their own choices in a situation of uncertainty, including the choice of beliefs and values. The majority of participants supported this approach.

This dilemma was first observed during the discussion on the guidelines to curricular reform. The advocates of the first option demanded that the guidelines had to express the basic values to be pursued in education. The initiative was accepted. However, when the choice of explicit values was made, it turned out that particular values (not shared by the majority of population) were to be excluded. The following were put forward: the individual and his/her development, freedom and responsibility, equal opportunity, tolerance and solidarity, national identity, and knowledge.

In the Slovene language there is a distinction between (predominantly) cognitive and (predominantly) valuative dimensions of education. The advocates of the first option criticised the curricula as biased because of a stress on the cognitive dimension. They demanded special teaching subjects of morality and ethics, and a stronger emphasis on arts and crafts. This coincided well with the demands of some disciplines to expand within the curriculum. The advocates of the second option maintained that both dimensions are part and parcel of any education, be it mathematics or chemistry. Every subject has to pay attention to basic human values and social norms. However, the results of this discussion were subjects such as Civics and Ethics, and Religions and Ethics.

Some members of NCC, in particular, demanded that the members of commission which examined all syllabuses from the perspective of religious content should be experts who had “positive attitudes towards religion”. This demand was rejected. Instead, the Subject Commission for Religions and Ethics, in which theologians, sociologists of religion and philosophers participated, was authorised to perform this task.

These discussions occasionally spilt over to the sphere of politics and even shook the government coalition. This was a challenge for both, the politicians and the experts. It should be stressed that the Ministry of Education and Sport respected the autonomy of the curricular bodies and did not interfere.

**CONCLUSION**

In the 1990s, Slovenia joined in the process of changing the educational system. The defining of official school knowledge involved a large number of experts. But the school knowledge is defined for real only through the processes of learning and teaching, with textbooks and learning tools. Despite the “increased interest
of the state” in resolving these issues (as established by certain authors, e.g. Kallen, Skillbeck, Apple), school knowledge is never determined solely by a group of experts, despite the fact that they are authorised by the state. The processes are much more complex and are formed by participants within the educational system, as well as in interaction with other social subsystems.

Curricular reform in Slovenia is in the phase of implementation. In conjunction with this, the National Evaluation Commission has been appointed. The increased interest of state in transferred official school knowledge was evident through recent events in the field of evaluation.

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