

**Children, work and education: first steps to unschooling as a result of current institutional child-care crisis in the Czech Republic?**

**Work-In-Progress (Research Report)**

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**Abstract:**

For several years, Czech mothers of young children have faced the same dilemma: their child, due to low capacity, was not accepted in a state Kindergarten and the family has to decide what to do next. Only few alternatives to a state-run pre-school day care exist in the Czech Republic, yet women are expected and willing to work. The conflict between paid work and family life is emphasized in academic as well as public debates and women are pressurized to choose either work or care/family. Alongside semi-permanent alternatives to Kindergarten child care, several families solve their situation on the permanent basis and opt for the life strategy of unschooling, rooted in the belief in symbiosis of family life, education of the children and paid work of the parents.

Paper explores and for the first time ever describes unschooling as practiced in the conditions of the Czech Republic. It introduces the individual education right, under which the Czech parents can practice homeschooling. Key theoretical concepts applied are the habitus and cultural capital of P. Bourdieu, cultural theories of B. Pfau-Effinger and preference theories of C. Hakim.. It also lays out propositions for a primary research, as planned to take place in the following years.

**Key words:**

unschooling, home schooling, individual education, work-or-care dilemma, Czech Republic, structural discrimination, gender equality, active parenthood

## **Current state of knowledge on key concepts and the Unschooler in the Czech Republic**

In this section, I will present the latest position on concepts I wish to incorporate under one theoretical framework for the purpose of my research: work-or-care dilemma and unschooling. I will also pay attention to the structural discrimination of women in access to employment, which is still deeply inherent within the Czech legal system. Although this structural discrimination is a matter of wide criticism within both the national and international political and scientific discourse, it also functions as an initiator of change. It is a trigger which in many cases sets off alternative life strategies, including unschooling.

### **Work or care dilemma**

The arrival of a child represents a dramatic change in the life of most parents, especially those, who are staying at home with him/her and take upon themselves the routine of daily care. Despite all the public debate about equal opportunities, statistics still point to a regrettable disproportion: if one parent is to give up a job totally in order to take care of a child, in a Czech society it is the woman. Becoming a member of the European community did not bring about many changes in family politics in the Czech Republic. While in most EU countries much support is given to enhancing equal opportunities in access to paid work, working conditions, professional training or career advancement, the issues debated in Czech society are very different. The conflict between paid work and family life is emphasized and women are pressurized into choosing one of these paths. Being a mother still equals and symbolizes a clear handicap in the labor market in the Czech Republic (Křížková, Vohlídalová, 2007).

The former regime had made the female workforce indispensable to the Czech economy and even in today's society, women are along the men – the breadwinners of Czech families (Bartáková 2008b). Despite this fact, the Czech labor market prefers a male worker, a symbol of a career undisturbed by family events and issues. Women on the contrary are still considered to be a risk factor in the working team and as a result of that they find placements in less well-paid professions with lower social prestige more often than men (Dudová, Vohlídalová 2007).

Scholars agree that family politics in the Czech Republic is still highly conservative. Women are expected to stay at home with a child for the full duration of their parental leave. During this time parents, who take full-time care of their child, receive a state benefit called 'parental allowance'. Parental leave period in the Czech Republic is the longest in the European Union, it can take up to 4 years (i.e. – up to the child's 4<sup>th</sup> birthday). Only upon its termination are the caring parents/women expected to join the labor market, ideally working full time and leaving the child in care of professional institutions. (Hašková 2007) The ideal model is thus as follows: up to the age of four it is the mother who takes care of the child, from then on, the child is handed over to an institution and it is this institution which becomes its teacher, educator and carer. Children age 3 to 6 are placed in a Kindergarden, Primary school accommodates children age 6 to 11 and Secondary school children age 12-16.

The predominant conservative discourse of the Czech popular press often praises the first years of motherhood as 'a woman's most beautiful period of life'. Many women, especially those whom Hakim labels home-centered (2001) would gladly agree. At the same time, preferential theory pinpoints the fact that this group of women consists of only 10-20% of the total female population and thus a predominant proportion of women may feel differently. To support this claim - much has been written in the Czech context about the hardships of the parental leave period – be it the social isolation, devaluation of self esteem, lapse in family finances or social undervaluation of full time motherhood activity (Bartáková 2008, Křížová, Vohlídalová 2007; Valentová 2004; Maříková 2004, 2002). There is no infrastructure for a parent on a parental leave. Most Czech cities lack adequate parks and playgrounds, gastro services lack arrangements for children but most of all, the individualistic lifestyle leads to social isolation, once work relations are temporarily omitted and the other parent becomes the sole breadwinner. As a result of this hardship, many women describe this period as self-sacrifice for the benefit of the family and/or children, especially should they stay at home continuously with two or more children – and they look forward to the time when the child is

old enough to enter the state daily care – the Kindergarten. (Bartáková 2008, Křížová, Vohlídalová 2007; Valentová 2004; Maříková 2004, 2002).

### **Structural discrimination of women with children in access to employment**

The work-or-care dilemma rests upon one (almost universally) shared assumption: the parent, while caring for the child, cannot at the same time earn money through paid activities. The very existence of a child prevents her(him) from doing so up to the time, when the child will be cared for by somebody else, thus vacating the time of the parent and leaving it free for money earning activities. In the Czech context this parent-substitute is most frequently embodied by a school.

The Kindergarten represents the first level of public primary education, which is under the direct inspection of the Ministry of Education in the Czech Republic and thus fulfills the role of a public service. According to the Czech law, Kindergarten is a type of school. As such it is a part of the official school system and has to comply to the law accordingly. There is no explicit limit as to the age at which children enter the Kindergarten, the law vaguely points towards the age of 3 to 6 or 7. However, there is an important structural disequilibrium in the social system concerning the child care. There are two mechanisms of support for caring parent, which however, do not work in symbiosis. There is a parental allowance – a state benefit paid out to a parent, who takes care of his/her child 24 hours/day (i.e. does not place a child in any institution of daily or occasional day care). This benefit – as pointed above – can be paid out up to the child's 4<sup>th</sup> birthday and has the longest duration of its kind in all EU. To go along with this monetary incentive to have children and to care for them, there is also a practical stimulus – by law an employer must provide a job/working place for a parent on parental leave up to the child's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday. After that, the employer may (or may not) grant an additional parental leave for one more year to those interested. What may initially seem as a privilege is in fact a trap. Unlike the state, the employer is not obliged to grant the fourth year of this leave to a parent – thus creating a disharmony within the system. The parent does receive an allowance from the state but at the end of the fourth year there is no job waiting for him/her. Since in Czech society it is the woman who demonstrably cares for the child during the first years of its life, this state-supported practice constitutes institutional discrimination against women in access to employment ( Hašková (2007).

Most women therefore want to return to work when the child is three years old, since their workplace is still guaranteed. Currently, their re-entering the workforce is not at all easy. Most of them have to combat yet another instance of institutional discrimination, namely the tremendous deficit of Kindergarten places for children aged 3 and 4. This occurred due to current demographic changes, which in combination with the shortsighted public policies of former governments has resulted in a dramatic shortage of state-run Kindergartens. Although a school by law, Kindergarten attendance is not compulsory and therefore not enforceable. Although a usual practice (enrooted as such by the former communist regime), it is rather a possibility than a right for the children. For many women this means a dead end street. They are forced to stay at home with a child with very low (but at least some) state allowance but without the certainty of a job at the end of the year. Studies show that prevailing number of employers keep minimum contact with staff on parental leave, do not plan to establish a firm-run childcare/Kindergarten and prefer employees without 'family baggage' (Bartáková 2008; Bartáková, Plasová 2008; Křížová, Vohlídalová 2007). Such a loose relationship with an employer does not build up any firm connection or a certainty on the part of the mothers who want to return to work.

Compared to other states of the European Union, there are very few alternatives to Kindergarten care available to Czech parents. Some progressive employers opted for an employer-run child care. Although desirable, this possibility is still to be seen as the exception rather than the rule. Private childcare is inaccessible to most mothers due to its costs, which are too high compared to possible earnings and extra managerial activities connected with this type of childcare. The most popular alternative in Czech Republic thus remains the "grandparent care", which is however, preconditioned by one important factor: availability and willingness of a caring grandmother (or grandfather). However, this can not be a systematic strategy, since the increasing average age of

birth giving mothers and at the same time the increasing age for retirement leads to the fact that the older generation has neither the time nor the strength to take care of small grandchildren. However, the battle for the parents/mothers is not over even when a child is accepted in a Kindergarten. Czech population with its working habits, the legacy of Austro-Hungarian as well as communist past, still sees as optimal the early start and early finish of most daily working activities. That means – do quickly what you must and enjoy for the rest of the day what you will. Employment is still often seen as the 'necessary burden', while the real life is lived in ones free time (Holy: 2001). However, this is where the clash comes: to enjoy the free time the modern man needs and consumes a whole lot of services connected with it, including transport, shopping and many other public and private services. These symbolize work for their providers, as opposed to free time for their consumers. Banks, shops, restaurants, transport, public offices, entertainment – these are just a few out of the many who had to adjust their opening times to suit the customer. Yet, most Kindergartens and schools did not. Comparably to the communist times, they open as early as 6 a.m. and close as early as 4 p.m., 4.30 the maximum. Given the scarcity of part time jobs and low willingness of Czech employers to provide them, many mothers are disqualified from professions, where working hours do not fit those of the Kindergarten. Consequently, they resort to all sorts of complicated family management arrangements, including paid nannies, bringing work at home etc. Working under these conditions may often cause considerable stress to the mother – keeping the world of a child and that of an adult seemingly apart yet connected through mental luggage and important inconveniences.

### **Alternative schooling in the Czech Republic**

The state provides a ready-made-framework for family and working life symbiosis. This model encompasses working parents and state-run care for children. In this world, the woman stays at home with a child for first three or four years and gradually carries over her caring and home-making activities into her new working phase, thus often working two jobs or two shifts at least. The man continues uninterruptedly with his career. Lasting inner stress and personal unhappiness is one of the feelings that families, which have opted for a different life strategy described below, report as a result of such ready-made framework of family life. Each member of a unit has too much of one activity and not enough of others. Fathers have so much work and financial responsibility that they do not have time for their children, wife and themselves. The mothers are caught up in managing the family as well as the job, which often causes anxieties and feeling of constant stress and not being able to do either work properly. Children live next to the parents but not with the parents, who – as latest surveys point – spend on average only 7 minutes (or less) of quality time with their parents each day.

Several families in the Czech Republic have now decided to opt for a lifestyle, where there is no ready-made framework of family life. Their choice is accompanied by pronounced revision of values and one of its reported side effects so far is the disappearance of stress.

As stated above, ideally the state takes over the child care from the parents at the age of three or four. From then on, both parents are full time at work and the child is full time in care of the state – at this age the school (up to the age of 11, end of Primary school). From the age of 12, the Secondary school does not provide caring facilities, thus leaving the child on its own after classes, or- alternatively – under the supervision of paid free time activity instructors. Increasing number of families comes to dislike these arrangements for the following two reasons. First of all, there is either-or logic of choice, which is criticized by the parents. Pre-kindergarten years leave the child-care upon the parent without much possibility of relief or alternative such as part-time work. Once the parent returns to work, there is not much possibility of a relief either, apart from standard means such as holiday and sick/care leave. It is thus obvious that there are two variables which are very much interdependent – child care and paid work of the parents and thus should be addressed together. However, there is not much evidence of this happening on the side of the legislative and executive body.

While the first dissatisfaction concerns primarily the structure of social arrangements, the other brings to the center of a debate the purpose of education. Although philosophical in its origin, it

opens up number of practical topics, such as hands-on experience, income strategies and many others. The reason of growing dissatisfaction is the content and especially the method of school education – the way children are taught. Alike the opening times of the school, the methods used to transmit knowledge in most Czech schools very much resembles the past. Much energy is still devoted to memorizing, regardless the presence and accessibility of new technologies. It is still preferred to learn by abstraction and theory than by praxis, learning for passing tests and scoring points rather than keeping and using the learned knowledge. Surveys point to the fact that most Czech children do not like school and as a result of this – do not like to learn. Jan Amos Comenius, the founder of modern teaching methods, which accents learning while playing, as well as the spiritual bond, friendship and mutual respect between the pupil and the teacher was a Czech. However, his knowledge is utilized elsewhere, leaving the Czech teachers and pupils very much at the claws of authoritative relationship, timetable restriction and measurable indicators of achievement.

Many families believe that it is their right to choose the best way to educate their children. Although not explicit, there is a law, where this right is granted to each individual in the Czech Republic. (See Zákon o předškolním, základním, středním, vyšším odborném a jiném vzdělávání č. 561/2004 § 40-41.) This law provides a possibility to opt out of the state system for those dissatisfied. Since 2005, it allows for a child to be educated at home, without necessity to attend classes at a school building. Parents (or any other chosen teachers) who have at least 13 years of schooling, concluded with a state exam, are allowed to teach their own children at home, while the school to which the pupil officially belongs restricts itself to tests and portfolio supervision twice a year. Families decide for homeschooling mainly for two reasons: ideological (Christian lifestyle, Green/sustainable lifestyle etc.) and pedagogical (more attention and time devoted to the child, better achievements of the child).

Almost ten years of experience, since the law of individual education was introduced, point to the following results: No massive exodus from traditional schools took place, as proclaimed by its opponents. Individual education still remains an option for a minority, up to date it concerns cca 1% of all Czech pupils, however, the trend is rising. The children educated at home achieve above the average test results – i.e. – no neglection of children takes place due to the fact that they are not taught by professionals. Transfer from individual home education to state system (i.e. at higher stages of education) did not cause irresolvable problems to the home-educated children. Similar results are reported from overseas (U.S.A., Canada), where homeschooling is a long term praxis now. All this points to the comparability, as well as compatibility of homeschooling with the main stream school system and thus provides its valid alternative.

Two major methods regarding the individual teaching at home are practiced in the Czech Republic at the moment. First of all, there is a so called 'home school'. Any primary school in the country can be used in this process as a 'mother school' - a place where the pupil is enrolled officially and which provides means of his/her testing twice a year. Home school very much resembles traditional way of schooling, however, done in the sanctuary of home, at a speed convenient to the child. It is thus suitable for children with special needs and/or to those families, where there is a clear benefit from this way of learning together. Parents usually follow some of the textbooks recommended by the supervising school and supplement collective activities by after school activities.

The other, more radical method, which is in fact more of a lifestyle than simply a teaching technique is called unschooling. It is much different to a home school in that it disregards the classical division of teacher-pupil role and builds upon belief in natural need and quest for knowledge on the side of the child. The parent serves rather as a guide, who is – however – also willing to take upon him/herself the role of a pupil, should the situation require. In this process thus the child can become a teacher or both the parent and the child can be pupils at the same time. This topic will be discussed in greater details in the text below.

It is interesting to follow the public as well as academic debate which preceded legalization of individual education right. Much of the academic debate centered on academic and teaching abilities of the parents. For the opponents of individual schooling it was highly important to shelter

the professional status of educators and the debate was settled on a High school diploma for those educating the children on the Primary school level, while Secondary school age children are to be educated by Bachelors at the minimum. The importance of educated parents was pushed through not only by the academic debate but also by the general public. Being not educated enough – i.e. – not having enough theoretical knowledge and professional skills came up on internet debates as the most frequent argument against the possibility to teach ones own child at home. Only secondary was the interest of the academics in social factors associated with schooling – i.e. making friends among the same age cohort, learning to accept authority etc. Public – on the other hand, did not regard this in their debates much important and paid only minor attention to it. Rather, it highlighted a different theme all together – the school as a child-minding institution. Should the children not go to school, who is going to take care of them during the time when the parents are at work? Do their parents work? What type of work can they do? Is it necessary to work from home? This brings us back to the work-or-care dilemma, which opens itself up in front of a parent eager to work and care for his/her children at the same time.

### **The concept of unschooling**

Czech scholars debating the work-or-care dilemma, as well as relations between women, work and children have worked along both macro and micro social factors and as such followed the leading world scholars in the field. Bartáková (2008) offers in her work an extensive summary of macro and micro social factors which may have decisive influence over the chosen strategies of working mothers with small children, namely gender typologies and social status, culture, gender segmentation of labor market and gendered work division. Along the micro level these include personal preferences, human capital and micro-economic pressure. Without knowledge of the context (macro factors) it is impossible to be able to distinguish nuances at micro level. Accordingly, I propose to follow the cultural theories of Birgit Pfau-Effinger (2004) and preference theories of Catherine Hakim (2001) – but only to a certain point. The aim of my research is to analyze and depart from all the above mentioned theories at a point where the parallel but separate worlds of adults and children are taken for granted.

It is a widely shared belief (and one much supported by the state) that paid work (money earning activity) and the world of children do not exist in symbiosis: in order to be able to carry out money earning activities, the parents have to be free from their children – their needs, demands, questions or simply their presence. It is assumed without question that children have different needs from adults and thus require special services from the state. Children should be taken care of and educated separately, in institutions, far away from the family home and the adult world where the parents are earning money. This belief is shared by most members of European society (see Illich 2001) and also by most Czech parents. It is due to this belief that the mothers whose children are not admitted into kindergartens, fall into despair: in broad terms they cannot earn money, socialize or live to their fullest potential, because they have to take care of the children. The research proposes to look beyond this claim in the following manner:

In opposition to this believe there are alternatives, much debated across the Atlantic (Holt, J. 1979; Ricci, C. 2012; Griffith, M. 1998; Gatto, J. T. 2002) but also increasingly more and more pronounced within the public debate in the Czech Republic (Štefl, O. 2012), which favor a different approach all together. They do not see the initial dilemma of a desperate mother who has to choose between child care and paid work, since they are building upon their confidence, that children can be and should be present to their parents' world, including their money earning activities. Rather than a specific job – it is a life strategy, which emphasizes the need to break down the walls of artificially created institutions which separate the generations in their daily activities, working and learning; life strategy of unschooling.

The family unit is of key importance to this research, in the sense of being “both the habitus generating institution and a key site for the accumulation of cultural capital” (Reay 1998:55). Bourdieu's concept of habitus and cultural capital are closely connected with the process of unschooling as well as work-or care dilemma, 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 mother's free time) available to it." (Bourdieu 1986:253). The above connection places Bourdieu's conceptual framework at the center of attention for the proposed research, since it "illustrates in detail how the operationalizing of social differentiation in schooling is tied into individual people's activities" (Reay 1998:57).

Expert opinion defines unschooling as a lifestyle with a variety of educational philosophies and practices, where learning comes about through natural life experiences, including play, game, household responsibilities, work experience, and social interactions rather than through a more traditional school curriculum. The founding father of unschooling, John Holt (1997, 1995) aimed at educational reform; however, his project became a lifestyle strategy for his followers. The life-long process of learning, where the world is the classroom, stresses the equality of individuals regardless of their age in the process of mutual inspiration, help and support. Such an approach has received wide coverage among authors overseas (Ricci 2012; MacGrath 2010; Griffith 1998).

As stated above, much of the Czech scholarly writing upon the topic of paid work and child care centers on children OR work dilemma. My research – through the introduction of the unschooling phenomenon – proposes to look at the issue from a perspective which does not stress the tension but rather the opposite. A deschooled society (Illich 1972) does not manifest itself only at the level of education but also its other total institutions (Goffman 1957) may prove in need of the de-schooled standards. I propose to look at the Czech labor market as an example of a total institution where unschooling does provide a possible and functional exit strategy for some women-parents. Labor market – alike other total institutions – is under constant bureaucratic control, where needs of an individual are handled in an impersonal and bureaucratic manner. An individual cannot learn about the decisions that concern his fate – the reasons why is one admitted to an interview (or not), why one gets or does not get a job remain mostly hidden to him.

Unschooling as a social movement does not separate the world of children from the world of adults. Adherents believe that learning is a continuous process and the world and daily routines, experiences and interactions provide the entire possible stimulus for learning (Holt 1995, McKee 2002). I therefore expect that families living according to the principle of unschooling will in some way coordinate their work and family activities without keeping them separate. Children will be part of their parents' 'working world' from a very early age and it will not change once their Kindergarten age or even school age comes about. By doing so, these families will bypass the usual work-or-children dilemma and the system which creates it. My research describes these families, their life and work strategy and concentrates especially upon how the symbiosis between work and family is achieved and manifested. By doing so, I intend to enrich current scholarly debate upon the topics of family life and work practices with a new variable – the unschooling process – which (according to my expectations) leads to a possibility of opting out of the whole work-or-family polarizing discourse.

There are families in the Czech Republic who already practice the unschooling life strategy and do not separate the world of children from the world of adults, educating their children at home, as a part of daily routines, experience, contacts and activities (Jonášová, K.:2011). Although this teaching method is still considered a novelty both within the public and expert debate in the Czech Republic, the figures of homeschoolers have been rising within the last years, following a similar trend across the Atlantic, where this method has been put into practice for over forty years.

### **Aims and methods of the research**

The research combines my former work and interests in culturally determined economic, social and gender encounters and brings together in an innovative way issues such as work, paid work, childhood, education, process of unschooling, gender and social status. It maps, describes and analyze the process that has not been covered by scholarly writing within the context of the Czech Republic so far – namely the strategy of unschooling as a reaction to the absence of other satisfactory options concerning working and family life symbiosis. Of particular interest are the dynamics of a relationship between money earning strategies of the parents, the position of their children within these activities and the social status of such family unit. I look at the labor market as

a form of a total institution and the project of unschooling as an exit strategy, with attention paid to the social integration of families which have opted for the unschooled alternative. In the final phase of the research I aim to compare the Czech data with a situation in Canada. Such a comparison is important for the following reasons: Canada represents one of the leading countries in the unschooling project, where it has been running for almost two decades. Most theoretical concepts and writings originate from the USA and Canada and are imported with only minor modifications to Europe. The advancement of scholarly research upon the topic is thus indisputable. Comparison with Canadian data provides results useful to further research development. It also serves as a possible starting line for a forecast of future development of this phenomenon in the Czech Republic and functions as a point of departure for possible future policy making activities.

The central aim of the research is to explore and describe the strategies of combining money earning activities (paid work) and the family life of individuals living according to the unschooling principle. The research questions are as follows:

What are the dynamics between social capital and a decision to opt for the unschooling life strategy? (Special attention paid to education, social background, personal experiences, cultural capital, habitus)

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What are the relations between a type of money earning activity and the unschooling life strategy? (What are the money earning activities – type of paid work unschoolers actually do and how does this compare to their former schooling/studies?)

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What are the coping strategies of unschooling parents? (What are their coping strategies in relation to the child at work? How do they separate their free time from work activities? What is the role of their life partner? How do they view their social status?)

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What are the coping strategies of unschooling children? (What are their activities and interactions both with peers and adults? These – I suppose – will be further divided into immediate activities of the children while at work with their parents, long term activities (year cycle) and transition periods/boundary makers (school age maturity, reaction of peers).

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How does the social integration of an unschooled family take place?

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What are the main aspects of public debate upon the issue of unschooling? (Including broader issues such as cultural and social beliefs about the world of children and adults). What is the position of leading gender institutions regarding the issue?

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What makes a labor market a total institution and how valuable is the concept of unschooling as a possible exit strategy?

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What is the historical context of family-or-work dilemma in the Czech Republic?

My research address several issues labeled as 'burning' within the Czech society. The critical shortage of state day-care placements for pre-school children broadens the gender discrimination in access to work. Lack of alternative care and/or its financial inaccessibility traps many women (regardless of their education) at home with no income and low self-esteem. Public money spent on their education is invested for the period, during which the women are not able to use it to their full potential. The second burning issue is the status quo of primary schooling in the Czech Republic. For several years now Czech children have been losing in test scores compared to other European countries. The message is clear: the current mainstream system rooted in didactic methods and memorization, in use since the Austro-Hungarian Empire, does not suffice any longer. Unschooling as a life strategy can provide a solution to burning issues hinted above, as overseas data suggest.

Yet more important are the analytical aspirations justifying the possible research. First of all, no study upon the proposed topic was ever conducted while utilizing an ethnographic approach within

the geographical context of the Czech Republic. Although time consuming, ethnography provides rich insights into everyday practices that shed light on larger social processes. In this research context the method fits perfectly, since the respondents constitute a group compact enough to be manageable by a sole researcher. Unschoolers in number represent a minority within the Czech educational system, as well as within the labor market and as such may easily disappear from statistics and surveys but not from ethnography. They form an imaginary community, which gathers around co-operating primary schools and NGO's; - as respondents they are therefore traceable and reachable. According to overseas data, the number of unschoolers is on the rise and it is only a matter of time until they will begin to exercise their influence within the Czech geographical context. Meanwhile, the size of this community at this particular time allows for an exceptionally deep ethnographic study.

Finally, this research project explores new theoretical approach, analyzing the labor market as a type of total institution and unschooling as a possible exit strategy from such an institution. It proposes to address wide topics such as labor market, work, family life, cultural capital and gender stereotypes where a clear intersection is represented by the unschooling strategy. Although complex, the adequate time research period (3 years) provides ample opportunity for answering the question.

The research is embedded in qualitative methodology and is based on a combination of data collection strategies such as ethnographic observations, interviews, focus groups and textual analysis. The ethnographic observation is carried out by involvement of the researchers in the everyday life at the selected sites. The three year period of the project allows time enough to spend in the field in order to comprehend the social relations and practices of the relevant respondents and their embeddings in the context of the studied environment and their own understanding of their actions. Field notes are continuously taken and analyzed during the process of observation in order to steer the due course of the research. This reflexive analysis allows, amongst other things, for the explicit voice of respondents (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000; Gay Y Blasco, Wardle. 2007).

There are two groups of key respondents in the field: respondents acting as individuals in the private sector of their home environment; and respondents acting on behalf of a corporation explicitly linked to the subject of the research (supportive or opposing schools, NGOs and other institutions). It is acknowledged that the two groups may overlap naturally and will be brought together intentionally for the purpose of the research at least through two sessions of focus groups and their analysis.

Key respondents - corporations are now being identified and their activities will be observed during the 24 months of the fieldwork part of the project. I aim take part in activities and events organized by these respondents. Ad hoc, situationally generated ethnographic interviews and semi-structured interviews with key respondents are also part of the data collection method. Key respondents-individuals are also being identified and their activities observed during three separate long term periods of the research (months IIX-X year 1; months III-VI year 2 and months I-III year 3). This is in order to get as near as possible to the ideal full twelve month ethnography cycle in the life of an individual (Hylland –Eriksen 2008) while allowing for reflection time and 'breathing space' for both the respondents and the researcher. The same pattern of interviews is used as with respondents-corporations. Repeated visits and occasions for interviews, as well as observations allows for in depth cross examination of the data, as well as self-reflexion on behalf of the respondents themselves.

Two focus groups (one conducted at the end of year 1, the other at the end of year 2) and their analysis will provide a contextual embedding to the topic. Since this method allows for a more natural setting than a one-to-one interview, it provides a valuable control mechanism in qualitative study. Interaction across the cultural and social background of key respondents may also raise unexpected issues, which can be researched further during the project. Expected outcome of the project is a monography, which is to come out in two years time.

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