WHAT KIND OF SYLLABUS DO SLOVENIAN GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL WANT?

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present part of the research results on Slovenian geography syllabi, which began in an online chat room in the framework of the Meeting of Slovenian Geographers in Maribor in September 2017. Afterwards, it expanded beyond the set framework and continued until April 2018 via the online group ‘Geolista’, in which geography teachers are included. The aim of the research was to determine what kind of syllabi geography teachers in Slovenia want for geography lessons at the primary and secondary levels of education. This paper presents the opinions of the respondents about the basic conceptual orientation of the syllabus for primary school, as well as about its foundation and scope. The respondents evaluated the adequacy of the existing elements of the syllabus and provided suggestions for supplementing/transforming it. The 122 respondents evaluated the existing concept of the geography syllabus for primary school as good, but at the same time, they expressed a wish for a more issue-oriented syllabus. The majority favours a more general and, above all, shorter syllabus for geography lessons in primary school, accompanied by a handbook on how to execute it. A crucial message is that any modernisation of the syllabus should be undertaken in a timely and systematic manner, with sufficient participation of all stakeholders.

Key words: syllabi, geography, geography teachers, primary school

1 INTRODUCTION

In the Slovenian linguistic area, there are certain terminological peculiarities regarding the use of the terms ‘school programme’, ‘syllabus’ and ‘curriculum’—this is especially
true for the last two decades. Although the history of pedagogy shows that the concept of ‘curriculum’ was in use more than four centuries ago (when it defined the sequence of learning particular content by years), one can speak of a curriculum in the present sense from the 18th century onwards, when state authorities provided the guidelines for learning content, prescribed textbooks and teacher education, and set up an inspection service to determine whether teachers and schools were fulfilling their mission. The state thus defined the ‘course of work at school’, towards which schools were expected to strive. In the 18th century, the term curriculum denoted a syllabus; later on, this concept disappeared from pedagogical use and re-appeared at the beginning of the 20th century (Ivanuš Grmek, 1997).

In the Slovenian area, one of the broadest definitions of ‘curriculum’ was provided by Sagadin (1991), who 27 years ago defined it from the viewpoint of learning purposes and objectives, learning content, didactic and psychological concepts of the lessons (teaching and learning), including the teaching materials (textbooks, etc.) for teachers of particular school subjects. In 1996, Strmčnik defined ‘syllabus’ as a professional document that combines and adapts the learning content and its purpose to learners’ capacities and educational needs. Five years later, the same author asserted that the task of the syllabus was to didactically adapt the learning objectives and learning content for actual implementation in learning (Strmčnik, 2001). Teachers currently use the syllabus for a certain subject as the basis for planning, carrying out and evaluating students’ learning activities over a certain period. The present study applies Strmčnik’s definition of syllabus.

From these definitions, it follows that in Slovenia the concept of syllabus is perceived as a narrower, but fundamental part of the curriculum, the latter being “the complete rational foundation of the educational programme of an institution and individual teachers”; it also includes subtle parts of curricular change and development. Furthermore, it presupposes the principles in accordance with which learning takes place (Kelly, 1989, pp. 9–11). It encompasses “at least four basic dimensions of educational planning and practice: 1) the aims and objectives of the planners; 2) the processes adopted in order to implement these aspirations; 3) the actual experiences of students, which are a result of the teachers’ direct attempts to realize their aspirations/the aspirations of the planners of the curriculum, and 4) the ‘hidden’ learning, which develops as a by-product of the organization of the curriculum and, certainly, the school” (ibid., pp. 4).

The geography syllabus should follow educational guidelines, social needs and geographical science. The very structure and, of course, also the target-orientation of the syllabus as the key document for teaching geography are influenced by various stakeholders: educational policy, pedagogical and geographical institutions, geography teachers and the general public. Therefore, the final structure of the syllabus is always a compromise (Kolnik, Konečnik Kotnik, 2010).

The geography syllabi in Slovenia for both primary and secondary education were most recently updated in 2008. This update was based on uniform national starting-points, which were supposed to enable continuity between educational programmes (Ivanuš Grmek et al., 2009). The guidelines, principles and objectives of the most recent update to the syllabi were an upgrade of the curricular modernisation undertaken during the period from 1996 to 1998; previously, the geography syllabi had been thoroughly restructured.
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Figure 1: A schema for effective modernisation of syllabi.

in 1991, in the period when Slovenia gained its independence. From this chronology, it is evident that in the last three decades, geography syllabi changed every 7 to 10 years.

According to those who participated in the target-oriented research project entitled Planning the Educational Process – Concepts of Planning the Curriculum (Ivanuš Grmek et al., 2009), the following conclusions were among the most important shifts in the last restructuring of the curricula:

• Schools and teachers are given autonomy and professional responsibility not only by being able to choose their teaching methods and forms of work, but also because national documents are sufficiently flexible to let teachers themselves (or with student input) choose the learning objectives and content according to students’ motivation, or/and also link them to current events in the local community. In this context, autonomy stands for finding authentic paths to achieving an agreed objective.

• When forming objectives, a shift from having knowledge of content and data to mastering the strategies for acquiring and using new knowledge should be pursued. The shift should be made from the knowledge itself to finding the useful value of knowledge and comprehensively connecting it. The interconnection should be carried out within the subject, in a cross-curricular manner, as well as between theory and practice. One should be able to clearly identify the objectives which Žakljeva (2007) defined as objectives for the development of thought/cognitive activities, emotional-motivational objectives, meta-cognitive objectives, objectives for the development of independent, critical and creative thinking, as well as objectives for the development of autonomy, creativity and divergent thinking in finding solutions and answers to various questions and issues.

The major, ongoing changes in geography syllabi at both the primary and the secondary level of education were established in the sphere of learning content, as a result of major socio-political changes to which geography responded as a scientific discipline and as an educational field (Kolnik, Konečnik Kotnik, 2009). National education guidelines prevailed in the sphere of syllabus structure (e.g., the transition to nine-year primary education and the syllabi from 1998) and in the accompanying educational philosophies (e.g., defining the role of students and their direct activities, emphasizing differentiation, implementing information and communications technology, etc. in the 2008 curricula). Geographical science and its influence have thus far been most prominent in the substantive scope of defining spatial/regional units and the method of educational study of regions. For certain variations regarding content and methodology, which in some cases cannot be attributed to these factors (e.g., the inclusion or exclusion of cartography in general geography; the relation between physical and social geography; the relation between the synthetic and analytical approaches to discussing regions), we can conclude that the development of geography syllabi during the period in question was significantly influenced by dominant geographers, i.e. individuals with a subjective perception of the objectives of geography lessons (Kolnik, Konečnik Kotnik, 2009).

The 2nd chapter of the paper presents methodological research approaches related to the quantitative empirical non-experimental research, which was carried out in the form
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of a questionnaire. In the 3rd chapter, the sample of teachers participating in the survey is presented in more detail. The two subchapters of the 4th chapter present some of the key results of the research on the geography syllabus for primary school. In the 5th chapter, the concluding findings are briefly discussed.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The updated syllabus for the subject of geography in primary school was confirmed by the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education at its 114th session in 2008, and the Expert Council was also acquainted with the content-related and editorial corrections of this syllabus at its 140th session on 17 February 2011 (Geografija, učni načrt, 2011). This is the document to which the main purpose of the present research was related: to obtain the opinions of geography teachers about the syllabus that has been used in Slovenian primary schools for the last decade. We were interested in how geography teachers evaluate the structure of the syllabus and in their wishes/recommendations for potential change.

In our research, we used the descriptive method, and by analysing pedagogical documentary material, we provided key terminological explanations related to how syllabi were understood and developed in Slovenia over the past three decades. In the applied part, quantitative, empirical, non-experimental methods were used to collect data by means of a questionnaire. The data obtained with this kind of research were then statistically processed. This methodological approach to scientific research in the field of pedagogy is particularly useful when trying to obtain the views/opinions and attitudes of respondents regarding a certain issue (Cencič, 2009).

The online survey questionnaire, which was implemented from September 2017 to April 2018, was developed exclusively for the purpose of this research as an instrument for acquiring data. We created it by using the online tool 1ka.si. As far as its composition goes, we were mindful of the logical structure of the survey questions: the sequence of questions enabled the respondents to gradually get acquainted with the issue of our research. Thus, the questionnaire began with more general questions (e.g., the fundamental conceptual orientation, structure and scope of the syllabus), and continued with specific questions (e.g., the usefulness of and the need to include certain elements in the syllabus, suggestions by respondents for changing syllabus content). The questionnaire also included demographic questions about the respondents. It consisted of seventeen questions of the closed and semi-open kind (short open-ended answers).

The research first took place in an online chat room in the framework of the Meeting of Slovenian Geographers in Maribor in September 2017, and afterwards—in order to include a larger share of geographers—it continued beyond the set timeframe until April 2018 by means of the online group ‘Geolista’, in which geography teachers are included. The link to the online questionnaire was thus sent via the online group ‘Geolista’, but not also to personal e-mail addresses. Unfortunately, because of the way ‘Geolista’ functions, it was not possible to obtain information about the number of participating stakeholders by individual activity segments (e.g., primary school teachers, secondary
school teachers, etc.); therefore, it is impossible to provide summary data on the number of primary school teachers participating in this online list.

When displaying the results, only those questionnaires that were fully completed were taken into consideration.

2.1 Sample

The questionnaire for the geography syllabus for primary school was completed by 122 respondents, of which 73% were female and 27% were male. Most respondents (29%) were aged from 36 to 45; 27% of the respondents were aged from 26 to 35; 22% of the respondents were aged from 46 to 55; 14% of the respondents were aged from 56 to 65; 2% were older than 65; 6% were younger than 25.

The largest share of the participants in the survey (30%) has from 6 to 15 years of teaching experience, while in addition to Geography, the majority of teachers who took part in the survey teach History (48%) and Citizenship and Homeland Education and Ethics (37%).

Since the syllabus always reflects a compromise between different stakeholders, and because it makes sense to consider it from the point of view of the entire education vertical, it seemed reasonable to give as many geographers as possible the opportunity to participate in the study. Thus, in addition to 88% of primary school geography teachers, the survey about the syllabus for primary school comprised 2% secondary school geography teachers and 10% geographers not teaching. It can be presumed that the latter are geographers who are indirectly connected with geography education, i.e. university teachers from the field of geography and geography advisers. However, the fact that the greatest response came from primary school teachers indicates that the issue of updating the geography syllabus for primary school is of particular interest to those very teachers.

The method of data collection made it possible to include respondents who, of their own accord, responded to the online chat room during the Meeting of Slovenian Geographers in 2017, as well as those who are part of ‘Geolista’. The disadvantage was that the method did not cover the whole population of primary school geography teachers or the stakeholders who—by being secondary or higher education teachers of geography—are connected to the issue of geography syllabi for primary school through the education vertical. We believe that the number of participating stakeholders and the results obtained provide a good starting point for further discussion on the format and content of the geography syllabus for primary school in case of potential curricular modernisation.

3 RESULTS

The results of the research will be presented in two sub-chapters. In the first, we will focus on the conceptual orientation, structure and scope of the syllabus, and in the second on the assessment of its usefulness and the need for the inclusion of certain elements in the geography syllabus for primary school.
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3.1 Conceptual orientation, structure and scope of the geography syllabus for primary school

In the first content unit, we asked respondents about the desired structure of the geography syllabus for primary school (basic conceptual orientation, structure and scope). Respondents were able to choose from seven possible conceptual orientations:

1. an issue-based approach, with emphasis on examples from Slovenian regional geography;
2. an approach with a combination of general geography and regional geography (with regional geography being more prominent);
3. an approach with a combination of general geography and regional geography (with general geography being more prominent);
4. an approach based on regional geography alone, explaining the general characteristics along the way;
5. an approach based on general geography alone, with examples from the field of regional geography from Slovenia and the world;
6. an approach very similar or identical to the current one;
7. the option ‘Other’, denoting a syllabus that is conceptually different from the options offered.

Respondents evaluated particular conceptual orientations with ratings from 1 (the least desired conceptual orientation) to 5 (the most desired conceptual orientation).

Figure 2: The desired conceptual orientation of the geography syllabus for primary school.
The majority of respondents (43%) gave the option ‘Other’ the highest rating, but did not provide a rationalized opinion for how the basic concept of the syllabus should look. Twenty-two percent of respondents would prefer a syllabus combining general and regional geography, but with regional geography featured more prominently. Ten percent of respondents would prefer to keep the syllabus as it is. The smallest share of the respondents gave the highest rating to the geography syllabi for primary school with either only general geography or only regional geography. More than a third of the respondents (36%) clearly stated that they did not want an approach based on general geography alone, with examples from the field of regional geography from Slovenia and the world; nor did they want an approach based only on regional geography, explaining the general characteristics along the way.

A good third of the respondents (35%) prefer an issue-based approach with emphasis on examples from Slovenian regional geography. The ‘issue-based syllabus’ was derived from a didactic approach, not from a substantive concept in geography. If we combine the group of respondents who gave the highest rating (5) to the issue-based approach with emphasis on examples from Slovenian regional geography (5) and the group of respondents who gave this option the second highest rating (4), we can conclude that two-thirds of the respondents found this option the best or at least highly desirable; this conceptual orientation of the syllabus received an average rating of 3.8. However, there remains an open question regarding the respondents’ subjective didactic notions of the significance of the issue-based approach—whether what they have in mind involves illustrative individual examples (e.g., social issues supplementing existing content) or merely individual issues/the problematization of existing content, etc.

Figure 3: Average ratings of the desired conceptual orientation of the geography syllabus for primary school.
Findings about the desired conceptual orientation of the geography syllabus can be supplemented with other average ratings: the rating of 3.7 was assigned to the option “Other”, which remained undefined, since respondents did not provide suggestions of their own; the average rating of 3.4 was given to the concept with a combination of regional geography and general geography (with regional geography featured more prominently), and the rating of 3.2 was given to the option ‘very similar or identical to the current one.’ The average rating of 3.2 was also given to the concept of a combination of general geography and regional geography (with general geography featured more prominently). On average, respondents have the least favourable view of concepts where the approach involves either regional geography or general geography by itself.

When asked what the geography syllabus for primary school should include, 39% of respondents gave the highest rating to the geography syllabus including only general learning objectives and competences, as well as the basic standards of knowledge. Thirty-three percent of respondents thought that the best syllabus structure would include other elements (not indicated on the questionnaire), but the majority did not define those elements in their answers. Thirteen percent of respondents would prefer to retain all or most of the chapters in the existing geography syllabus. Twelve percent of the respondents gave the highest rating to the geography syllabus that included only the general definition of the subject and the basic standards of knowledge, while ten percent believe that it would be best if the geography syllabus included only the general learning objectives of the subject.

Figure 4: The desired structure of the geography syllabus for primary school.
The average ratings of the syllabus structure show that respondents gave the highest rating (3.9 out of 5) to the syllabus that included general learning objectives and competences, as well as the basic standards of knowledge. An average rating of 3.3 was given to the syllabus with the same basic structure as the existing one.

Respondents’ answers showed that they also wanted change in the scope of the syllabus. Twenty-eight percent of respondents would prefer a substantially shorter syllabus (5 to 10 pages)—they rated this option with a 5. The average rating of this option (3.3) was also the highest among all the options on offer. The fewest respondents would like a very short syllabus (up to 5 pages—the average rating was 2), or a syllabus much longer than the current one (which is around 40 pages long)—the average rating of this option was 1.7.

At the same time, 88 % of respondents answered in the questionnaire that they would like the syllabus to be accompanied by a handbook for teachers—as an appendix for application. It should contain examples of, for instance, the planning of individual structural components of teaching, assigning marks according to different levels of learning difficulty, proposals for choosing more demanding learning content, teaching methods, learning forms and teaching requisites.

On the basis of generalizing the additional notes of respondents (the questionnaire provided an open-ended option for respondents to add any additional thoughts they might have related to the issue), we can conclude that they considered the issue of geography lessons in a wider sense than the questions asked of them. As an example: they do not
want to expand the syllabus, since they are barely “reaching the learning objectives” as it is, and they would like to have more hours per week for geography lessons. Furthermore, certain individuals pointed out the problem of delimiting the geography syllabus for primary school from a potential national assessment of knowledge (NPZ) catalogue; they would prefer that the catalogue not introduce new requirements or ones that differ from those in the syllabus, which, in their view, caused the issue between the syllabus for grammar school and the Matura Examination Catalogue. Among the individual notes, there was also a proposal to reduce the number of operational objectives for regional geography in Asia and the observation that the regional geography of Latin America was too neglected in comparison to the regional geography of North America. Furthermore, there were thoughts related to the need for more ‘issue-based lessons’, ‘case studies’, ‘doing away with the boundaries between general and regional geography’ and ‘reducing the very distinct division between social and physical geography’, all of which were not explained.

We can conclude that the respondents would prefer the option of a shorter and more general geography syllabus (it should only include general learning objectives and competences, as well as the basic standards of knowledge), but would also like to have a handbook for its implementation.

3.2 The utility of and need for individual elements in the geography syllabus for primary school

The second set of questions in the questionnaire was related to the degree of usefulness (to what extent a certain element of the syllabus can be applied during work/to what extent it is prepared in such a way that the respondents can use it effectively) and the degree to which particular elements of the syllabus are needed (to what extent respondents actually require particular elements of the syllabus). In the first part of the questions concerning the degree of utility of elements of the current syllabus, 37 % of respondents answered that the least useful (rated with 1 and 2) element of the current syllabus was ‘Didactic recommendations: individualization and differentiation’, while the majority of respondents (64 %) evaluated the element ‘Minimum standards of knowledge’ as the most useful (rated with 5 and 4).

From the answers of the respondents (Figure 6), it is evident that the highest percentage of respondents gave the highest rating of 5 to the category ‘Minimum standards of knowledge’ (41 %) and the element ‘Operational learning objectives and contents’ across all grades (27 %). The majority of respondents evaluated the usefulness of the element ‘General learning objectives’ and ‘Standards of knowledge’ with a rating of 4, the usefulness of the element ‘Definition of the subject’ and all the ‘Didactic recommendations’ with a rating of 3, except for ‘Didactic recommendations: individualization and differentiation’, which was most frequently given a rating of 2 (by 28 % of the respondents). The average ratings of the degree of utility of elements in the existing geography syllabus for primary school range from 3 to 4. All the operational objectives were rated the highest, followed by the minimum standards. The didactic recommendations received the lowest
average ratings, especially the sections on individualization and differentiation, as well as information technology.

In the question about the degree to which particular elements are needed in the syllabus (to what extent respondents actually require individual elements of the syllabus in their work—Figure 7), none of the respondents evaluated the operational objectives as unnecessary. The elements of the syllabus that were most often marked as unnecessary (the share of such responses was equal to or lower than 9 %) are didactic recommendations and the definition of the subject. The minimum standards (83 %) and operational objectives (with minor variations between grades: from 77 % to 79 %) were given the highest percentage of both highest ratings (5 and 4); the respondents thus evaluated these as the elements most needed in their work.

From the comparison of respondents’ answers on the structure of the geography syllabus for primary school as regards its scope and the presence of individual elements, we can ascertain that, one the one hand, most respondents would like a shorter syllabus with a simpler structure; on the other hand, they pointed out that the existing elements of the syllabus were necessary and that none should be excluded. This raises the question for future compilers of geography syllabi: how can the existing syllabus be revised in such a way as to meet the wishes of geography teachers both by being short (from 5 to 10 pages) and by containing all (or a large majority) of the elements included in the existing syllabus? Is the potential solution really in the combination of a general (and short) syllabus together with a handbook for its implementation? The question relates in particular to the surveyed geography teachers’ notions of the content of the syllabus, which we did not examine in the present research.
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Figure 7: The degree of necessity of the elements in the existing geography syllabus for primary school.

As far as the usefulness of elements of the geography syllabus for primary school is concerned, the respondents were also asked whether their work was made more difficult by the fact that the current syllabus (unlike the previous one) contains no key geographical concepts and geographical names. Respondents could choose between ratings 1 to 5, where a rating

Figure 8: Does the lack of geographical concepts in the geography syllabus for primary school affect the work of the respondents?
of 1 indicated that the lack of a list with geographical concepts and names makes their work more difficult, while a rating of 5 indicated that the lack of a list does not affect their work.

From the answers (Figure 8), we can ascertain that the majority of respondents do not miss the presence of concepts in the syllabus (ratings of 4 and 5 were given by 46% of respondents, and if we include the ratings of 3, the share rises to 68%). The average rating of the responses was 3.6, indicating that the absence of concepts and geographical names in the syllabus does not make it significantly more difficult to teach. However, certain respondents stated that they would like to have geographical concepts and names included in the description of the minimum standards of knowledge.

The study was also concerned with assessment of the relevance of existing elements of the geography syllabus for primary school and in concrete proposals by the respondents for changing the content of the syllabus. The relevance of individual elements of the syllabus was assessed by respondents with ratings from 1 to 5, with a rating of 1 indicating that a particular element would require many content-related amendments and a rating of 5 indicating that this element of the syllabus is perfectly adequate.

Figure 9: The relevance of the elements of the geography syllabus for primary school.

The highest rated (most relevant) elements of the syllabus were the ‘General objectives’, with an average rating of 3.9 and the ‘Definition of the subject’ with an average rating of 3.8. These were followed by the ‘Operational objectives in the 6th and 8th grade’ with an average rating of 3.6, and by the operational objectives for the other grades and the ‘Minimum standards of knowledge’ with an average rating of 3.5. The lowest ratings (between 2.9 and 3.3) were given to elements of the syllabus related to didactic recommendations, with the section dealing with information technology having the lowest rating among them. There were few specific proposals for changes, and we referred to these in parts of the present paper that addressed content related to those proposals.
4 CONCLUSION

Previously, there was a lack of subject-based didactic research as a foundation for directing the development of a syllabus over a long period. During the last syllabus reform, it was established that “In the future, more research attention should be given to this field of the didactics of geography” (Konečnik Kotnik, 2008, p. 277), since this would make it easier to implement the necessary and desired changes when a new reform is undertaken. Frequently, one of the key problems in the previous reforms was the lack of time for meaningful reflection and professional modernisation, which led to syllabi with which some teachers were not fully satisfied. Furthermore, there was the following reflection: “If the syllabus reform is carried out without a foundation of subject-based didactic research, the ‘arguments of power’ may prevail over the ‘the power of arguments’” (Senegačnik, 2005, p. 98).

As part of bridging this gap, we conducted research with the objective of determining what kind of geography syllabus for primary and secondary school was desired by Slovenian geography teachers. In this paper, we presented part of the results of the study related to primary school.

The views of the 122 participants who completed the questionnaire in full were presented with reference to the basic conceptual orientation of the geography syllabus for primary school, its elementary structure and scope, as well as assessment of the representation and relevance of its individual elements.

A generalization of the answers shows that the respondents are satisfied with the existing basic concept of the geography syllabus for primary school (with an average of 3.4 out of 5), but the wish for a more issue-based syllabus was also clearly expressed (with an average rating of 3.8 out of 5). This survey did not try to determine the respondents’ subjective conceptions of the didactic significance and of particular characteristics of the issue-oriented syllabus, nor the degree of distinction between the respondents’ understanding and interpretation of the syllabus or their understanding of autonomy in (and responsibility for) creating yearly lesson plans, thematic units, choosing learning objectives from the syllabus in order to adapt them to the learning needs of the learners and to the learning conditions, etc. Respondents (with an average rating of 3.3) are also satisfied with the structure of the syllabus, but would rather see (with an average rating of 3.9) the structure become more general and the syllabus itself shorter (e.g., containing only general objectives, competences and minimum standards). Most of those who responded to the questionnaire (88 %) expressed the desire to have a handbook for teachers as a supplement/annex.

Could the potential combination of a more general and, above all, shorter syllabus (along with a handbook for its implementation) indeed create the conditions for teachers to have more autonomy, more creativity, and perhaps fewer time constraints in the implementation of the programme (syllabus), while enabling regular actualization/updating of the learning objectives, content or learning approaches with the help of a handbook? It should also be noted that in the study we did not establish exactly what kind of annexes in the form of a handbook the respondents actually expected. This should be borne in mind...
because of experience from abroad. An analysis of selected foreign geography syllabi (Konečnik Kotnik 2008) showed substantial differences between them both conceptually and content-wise. For instance, in different federal states of Germany, there are several concepts of syllabi, which differ from one another especially in the distribution of learning contents. The concept of the Finnish vertical includes general, physical and social geography, as well as global risk areas (issue-based regional geography). In the British syllabus, content is of marginal importance and it appears through a non-linear accumulation; it is more closely related to developing abilities and skills. Regional geography is limited to a few examples. A review of national geography standards in the United States of America shows similarities to the British syllabus, which is not surprising, given the historical connections the two areas share in the fields of culture and economy; the similarities are mainly in the definitions of thematic general units of skills, abilities and knowledge. Furthermore, geography syllabi vary in structure and scope. The Finnish geography syllabus at the secondary level of education consists of five pages and includes a brief description of the subject, eight general objectives for geography lessons, a seven-line description of the main content emphases when marking students, and a slightly more precise definition of the objectives (on average, seven per unit) and the main content in four larger thematic units. The British syllabus consists of seven pages and, in addition to a short description of the subject and the indication of one global objective for geography lessons, it includes the lesson objectives in five units. The objectives are grouped into units according to their main purpose: understanding geographical content, geographical (and general) skills, space (regions), geographical structures and processes, environmental change and sustainable development. Within each unit, there are from two to seven general-purpose objectives. What is expected of students is defined at eight levels or more. Each level is defined by from seven to twelve standards that encompass all of the above categories of objectives. The Finnish and British syllabi have broadly planned learning objectives. Owing to the broader concept, the number of objectives is significantly lower than in the Slovenian syllabus (ibid., pp. 70–86).

The geography curriculum must always be understood as a development process, updated in a sensible manner, and brought closer to the real needs of those being educated and to the dynamic social situation. When preparing the modernisation of Slovenian syllabi, it is certainly worthwhile to look abroad, but also to consider the fact that the knowledge of Slovenian students is not below standard, as international research has shown. The key message of the present research is that syllabus reform needs to be undertaken in a timely and systematic manner, with sufficient participation of all stakeholders: members of the Subject Development Group for Geography working within the National Education Institute Slovenia, university teachers of geography and, of course, as many active geography teachers as possible. It is because of their active participation in the modernisation of the syllabus that we can hope for its successful implementation in everyday practice. The realization of the syllabus is in principle the result of a compromise between the existing educational philosophies of each individual teacher and the newly planned changes (Kliebard, 1982; cf. Reynolds, 2000). “When amending the syllabi, we must not forget that, as innovatively oriented as they might be, they will only
be successfully realized if they are taught by confident teachers who are experts and have professional sovereignty” (Kolnik, 2008, p. 85). Thus, modernisation of syllabi requires more than just modernisation of the written documents; this must necessarily be followed by advanced training of teachers, because, as Ile Klun (2017) notes, it is only in such a way that syllabus modernisation and modernisation of the content-related and didactic planning of school subjects can be undertaken. Taking into account both the advantages and disadvantages of the existing geography syllabus for primary school, it is necessary to first use the potential for making corrections during revisions and shorter updates, and in subsequent steps—in collaboration with various stakeholders—to expertly, logically and comprehensively pave the way for potential structural changes in the syllabus for primary school as part of the geography educational vertical.

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