

**Involvement of the Actors in Policymaking Process: Qualitative
Analysis of the 2016 Educational Policy Reform in Poland**

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Supervisor: Dr **Caroline Schlaufer**

KPM Center for Public Management
Schanzeneckstrasse 1
CH-3001 Bern

by:
Aleksandra Pierzak
from Poland
21-128-061

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Foreword

First, I would like to thank my dedicated supervisor, Dr Caroline Schlauffer, whose guidance and support have been instrumental in shaping this thesis. Many thanks also to the interview partners who took their time to answer my questions elaborately, despite of sensitive nature of Polish politics. I am also beyond grateful for all the support from my friends and family, who consistently believe in me. I would especially like to mention my mum, Kalina, brother Marcel, dad Paweł, and grandparents Ela and Ryszard, whose support has been my driving force. Thank you to my boyfriend, Dennis, who has been cheering for me all along the way.

I am also grateful for the fantastic experience while doing my Master`s degree in Switzerland. It enabled me to grow academically and personally. I am excited to see what the future holds.

Abstract

Educational policies play a crucial role in every state, and they also have an impact on an enormous part of the population. Poland is an example of a country that experienced many changes regarding the educational system, with the reform of 2016, introduced by the Law and Justice government, being the most recent. Existing studies indicate dissatisfaction with the 2016 reform of the most affected actors. The general trend in Poland is that the actors' involvement in policymaking is limited. However, none of the studies has explicitly investigated the actors' role in policymaking regarding educational policy from 2016. Thus, the research question is: ***“How were the different actors involved in the educational policy-making process in Poland in 2016?”***. It was answered qualitatively based on the Network Governance Theory. The data were collected from the interviews, official documents, media reports and existing literature, and analysed using the Qualitative Content Analysis method. The results indicate that political preferences influenced the opinion about the reform. Moreover, pro-governmental actors felt included in the policymaking, whereas it was not the case that the actors did not support the government, even though those who opposed the reform undertook more activities to participate in policymaking. Additionally, the results indicate that the government was the most resourceful actor and the final decision-maker.

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List of Abbreviations

CBOS	Centre for Public Opinion Research (in Polish: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej)
IBE	Educational Research Institute (in Polish: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych)
ISP	Institute of Public Affairs (in Polish: Instytut Spraw Publicznych)
MEN	Ministry of Education and Science (in Polish: Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki)
NIK	National Chamber of Control (in Polish: Narodowa Izba Konroli)
PiS	Law and Justice (in Polish: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość)
PO	Civil Platform (in Polish: Platforma Obywatelska)
PSL	Polish People`s Party (in Polish: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe)
RPO	Commissioner for Human Rights (in Polish: Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich)
SIO	Educational Information System (in Polish: System Informacji Oświatowej)
SLD	Democratic Left Alliance (in Polish: Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej)
ZMP	Association of Polish Cities (in Polish: Związek Miast Polskich)
ZNP	Polish Teachers` Union (in Polish: Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego)
ZWGRP	Union of Rural Municipalities of the Republic (in Polish: Związek Gmin Wiejskich Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej)

1. Introduction

Goalsetting

Educational policies play an enormously important role. They help to maintain social order, social development, and social welfare (Maj-Wiśniowska, 2017). Education is one of the main areas of state activity (Grzywna & Stępień-Lampa, 2019, p. 118-119). The educational policy aims to govern the actions of the actors like teachers, students, and organisations like schools on different academic levels. Therefore, the actors and organisations influenced by educational policies depend on where the policy in a particular state is going (Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, & Taylor, 2013, p. 1-5). According to Kemmis (1990), ideals and visions no longer play a significant role in educational policy. What plays a role instead is what the government finds as expected from its supporters and what can other actors or groups persuade the government to do.

The educational system of Poland, in general, can be characterised as relatively unstable. Since 1991 the country has experienced many changes regarding the educational system. Constant changes in the educational system are also noticeable in the law. The problem is that the changes have not resulted from empirical evidence but instead from the political beliefs of those in power (Maj- Wiśniowska, 2017).

The other typical characteristic of the Polish educational system is that it is old-fashioned. (Odrawąż-Coates, 2017, p. 102). The practices taught are not compatible with those needed in today`s society (Buckler & Creech, 2014, p. 28-32). However, it is essential to mention that it is the case mostly in primary and secondary schools- not universities (Odrawąż-Coates, 2017, p. 102).

Until 2015, however, the reforms which occurred can be considered relatively successful. A good example is a set of changes introduced in 2009 focused on modernising the system. The reforms came partially from the EU recommendations. The 2012 PISA test was a valuable tool for assessing these reforms. The results were positive because Polish students who studied according to the new curriculum improved in the three categories. In contrast, it was not the case for the students following the previous curriculum (Bialecki, Jakubowski & Wiśniewski, 2017). Public opinion, however, has still not been satisfied with the educational system in Poland (Jakubowski, Konarzewski, Muszynski, Smulczyk & Walicki, 2017, as cited in Bialecki et al., 2017, p. 173).

In 2015, the new right-wing government was chosen in the parliamentary elections. It consists mainly of the conservative Law and Justice (in Polish: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość; abbreviation: PiS) political party (Coman, 2022). The governing party aimed to undo the educational reforms from the past years and go back to the old system from before 1999. One of the proposed changes was the removal of the lower secondary schools. These reforms significantly reduced the autonomy of the schools and local authorities. The new curriculum was created as well. (Białecki et al., 2017, p. 173).

This significant educational policy change should be examined concerning the actors playing a role in the process. The influence of the coalition of the parties in power and the opposition parties should be studied, especially considering that the main governing party has populist and nationalistic tendencies (Gwiazda, 2021, p. 581). At the same time, however, the influence of the interest groups, mainly teachers' trade unions, should not be ignored. The role of experts, parents' organisations, and local governments should also be considered (gov. pl, 2020).

Thus, this thesis aims to determine the involvement of different actors in the educational policy reform in Poland, which started to be implemented in 2016. Therefore, the research question is:

How were the different actors involved in the educational policy-making process in Poland in 2016?

Scope

There are some boundaries set for this research. First, the period considered is since 2015, so the start of Law and Justice's governing. The years before are irrelevant because PiS political party was the one that initiated the reforms. However, the data from the previous years might be used to recall some historical facts relevant to the study.

Secondly, the work focuses on public primary schools, excluding secondary schools, kindergartens, post-secondary schools, and universities. Every private, semi-public, or foreign curriculum-based school is also not included in the scope. The work, however, partially pays attention to vocational secondary and vocational schools, as their development was an essential goal of the reform.

The educational policy has been changed in many aspects (for example, curriculum or examination practices). Therefore, this field's limitation is also needed. This work primarily focuses on removing the lower secondary schools, which resulted in extending the primary schools' duration. However, the abolition of lower secondary schools also touches on some

areas of curriculum change. Therefore, curriculum changes directly connected to the lower secondary school abolitions are also included in the scope.

What is more, three stages of policymaking can be distinguished: *policy formation*, *policy implementation*, and *policy evaluation* (Antonowicz, Kulczycki & Budzanowska, 2022, p. 394). This work focuses on the stage of *policy formation*.

Existing Literature on the Topic

The research on the political parties with populist tendencies and their impact on the various types of policies has been growing (e.g., Labonté & Baum, 2020; Muis, Brils, & Gaidytė, 2022; Göksel, 2019; Chrysogelos, 2017). There are many existing works dealing with the topic of educational policymaking while focusing on the *policy formation* stage and, at the same time, indicating how complex, as well as necessary, the process is (e.g. Keating 2008; Placier, Hall & McKendall, 2000; Liasidou, 2010; Clark 2010).

There is also existing literature on the topic of the educational policy formation stage that started in Poland in 2016 after the populist Law and Justice party formatted its coalition and came to power (e.g., Żuk, 2018; Wiśniewski & Zahorska, 2020; Grzywna & Stępień-Lampa, 2019).

Żuk (2018, p. 1054) describes in his work the actions of the governing party that proceeded with the educational reforms. The author (2018) points out that the governing party has begun to be fully in charge of the actors possessing hard power, such as police or prosecutors. What is more, the government has also started to control Constitutional Tribunal. The next thing that happened was gaining influence on the public media and artistic institutions. Żuk (2018, p. 1054) argues that institutions exercising hard and soft power have been taken control of due to their importance. It was followed by educational reform. The author, therefore, does not assume that the control over complex- and soft-power institutions directly led to educational reform. Żuk (2018, p. 1054) presents it as the next step of the governing coalition's power consolidation. Other scholars have confirmed this view (e.g., Kim, 2019; Greven, 2016).

Wiśniewski and Zahorska (2020, p. 203-204) claim that educational reform was the priority of the PiS once they got to power. It was a priority because it was an essential issue in the party's electoral campaign. This view is shared by Grzywna and Stępień-Lampa (2019). The authors (2019) point out that the Polish Ministry of Education started preparing the educational reform almost as soon as the governing coalition won the elections. Wiśniewski and Zahorska (2020, p. 181-183; 203-204), on the other hand, point out the other actors who were somehow engaged in the policymaking process of this reform, meaning: researchers, local authorities,

organisations of parents, as well as the organisations of the teachers. Grzywna and Stępień-Lampa (2019, p. 121) also point out the role of the teachers while clarifying that Polish Teachers' Union (in Polish: Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego; abbreviation: ZNP) was the organisation that engaged the most. On the other hand, the opinions of the parents, teachers, local governments, and researchers seemed to be ignored regarding the policymaking process. That led to unsuccessful protests (Michniuk, 2021, p. 159-160).

Wiśniewski and Zahorska (2020, p. 181-183) additionally indicate that the non-inclusion of the actors led to the emergence of new bodies willing to take place in educational policymaking. However, this did not bring any results, and the Ministry of Education and Science (in Polish: Ministerstwo Nauki I Edukacji; abbreviation: MEN) decided to introduce the reform anyway. Grzywna and Stępień-Lampa (2019, p. 123) also mention the local authorities as the actors engaged in policymaking. Local governments are responsible for implementing the educational policies in Poland and, thus, their constitutionally guaranteed impact on educational policymaking (Skawińska, 2012, p. 133-136). The authors (2019) also mention Minister Anna Zalewska, the Minister of Education at this time, as an actor strongly associated with policymaking. However, the work of Grzywna and Stępień-Lampa (2019) does not directly indicate the real impact of Minister Zalewska and the local governments on decision-making. Antonowicz et al. (2022, p. 394) try, on the other hand, to analyse the policy-making process that took place in 2016 in Poland while basing on the three stages of policy formation: *agenda setting and problem definition, policy preparation and design, policy formulation and decision making* (de Boer, File, Huisman, et al., 2017, as cited in Antonowicz et al., 2022, p. 294). Antonowicz et al. (2022) focus, however, mainly on the reform of higher education in Poland, which is outside the scope of this thesis.

All in all, the existing works do not explain the actors' roles in policymaking in depth. Therefore, the primary goal of this work is to fill the current research gap.

Structure of the Work

This thesis is structured as follows: the second chapter comprises the literature review. The first subchapter focuses on the power shift in Poland in 2015. The way Law and Justice became relevant actors and their actions after becoming one are described. This subchapter also explains the ideology of the Law and Justice party. The second subchapter explains the educational system in Poland. The historical development of the Polish educational system is described. Afterwards, the changes introduced after the 2016 reform are explained in detail.

The third chapter is built around the Network Governance Theory used to answer the research question. The first subchapter explains the assumptions of this theory in more in-depth. The second subchapter explains the participation of different actors in policymaking in Poland while also based on the Network Governance Theory.

The fourth chapter explains the methodology that has been applied. The first subchapter describes the detail of the interviews that were an essential part of the dataset. The second and third subchapters present the official documents and existing studies that were likewise included in the dataset. The fourth subchapter presents the media reports that were included. The way of the data analysis is described in the last subchapter.

The fifth chapter describes the results and explains the involvement of the actors according to Network Governance Theory.

Chapter no. six discusses the results. The first subchapter does it in the frame of the theory used. The second subchapter presents the theoretical implications of the results, whereas the third one describes the limitation of the study.

The last chapter concludes the thesis and poses recommendations for future research.

2. Background

2.1. Shift of Power in 2015

Law and Justice is a right-wing, conservative party in Poland. Law and Justice is the English translation of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Tomczak, 2015). The party was founded in 2001 by two twin brothers: Jarsosław Kaczyński and Lech Kaczyński. The primary goal of PiS was to fill the gap in the Polish political scene (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, n.d.).



Figure 1: Logo of Law and Justice Party

The elections in 2015 were a turning point in Polish politics. Firstly, the candidate for the president of PiS, Andrzej Duda, won the elections in the second round. Secondly, PiS, as a political party, achieved a spectacular victory. PiS managed to create the majority government, together with the other three minor coalition parties, namely Solidary Poland (in Polish: Solidarność), Poland Together (in Polish: Polska Razem), and the Right-wing of the Republic (in Polish: Prawica Rzeczypospolitej). That, combined with Andrzej Duda as a president, guaranteed PiS the power that none of the parties in Poland has experienced since 1989 (Jaskiernia, 2017, p. 234-236). The new prime minister became Beata Szydło. In 2017, she was replaced by Mateusz Morawiecki (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, n.d.).

The next parliamentary elections, the ones in October 2019, also succeeded PiS. These elections were, however, different from any others. The electoral turnout was 62 %. It was the highest turnout in Polish parliamentary elections so far. At the same time, PiS has won even more votes than in the previous elections, which made the party break another record. The elections allowed PiS to control 51.1% of seats in the Polish parliament (Markowski 2020, p. 1513-1514). A similar situation has happened in the presidential elections in 2020. The turnout in these presidential elections has been the highest that Poland has experienced since 1995. The candidate of PiS, Andrzej Duda, has been reelected, winning in the second round with the PO's candidate, Mayor of Warsaw, Rafal Trzaskowski (Vashchanka, 2020).

It would be essential to find out to what extent PiS used its parliamentary majority gained in 2015 and then, in 2019, PiS to influence education policy.

It is also elementary to mention how PiS being in power influenced the condition of Polish democracy. PiS has shown since the beginning that it aimed to reform political institutions. These ambitions can be comparable to those of Hungarian prime minister Victor Orban (Jaskiernia, 2017, p. 239).

During the electoral campaign and after taking power, PiS has already started to show its populist visions. The party tends to include the importance of economic and political sovereignty in its narrative, which results in Euroscepticism and xenophobia tendencies (Jaskiernia, 2019). Procedural and sectoral types of populism are visible through negative attitudes toward the elites and pointing out that these elites do not care about ordinary people. At the same time, the strong position of state and the has begun to be promoted. Xenophobic populism is visible through supporting everything “Polish” and connected to Polish traditions (Chrostowski, 2022, p. 47).

There are also signs that PiS wants to spread its ideology in schools. Several curriculum changes introduced by Law and Justice government aimed to increase national awareness and spread conservatism values while minimalising liberal and European ones. The party introduced, for example, a lot of profoundly nationalistic content in the Polish history syllabus, which focuses more on the history of Poland than on the world’s overall problems (Żuk, 2018, p. 1054). These curriculum changes have not been undemocratic. However, they have been in line with the nationalistic and conservative ideology of PiS (Bialecki et al., 2017, p. 173).

That were not the only reforms that PiS introduced to the school system. The party has strongly reformed the entire structure of the Polish educational system. Additionally, PiS wanted to do it as soon as possible. Oppositional parties, teachers, institutions, and experts were not included in the dialogue as it would have prolonged the process (Zahorska, 2016). The goal of the following subchapter is to describe the changes introduced by the educational reform from 2016 that have taken place more in-depth.

2.2. Development of the Polish Educational System

Almost all the changes in the Polish system have their origin in 1989. This year, some of the most important members of the “Solidarity” Trade Union (in Polish: Solidarność) were finally allowed to discuss with the members of a communist party openly. The discussion resulted in the allowance of free speech, opposition, and, eventually, partially free elections. These elections took place in June 1989. The Communist Party has lost every possible position in both chambers of the Polish parliament (Kamiński, 1999).

Therefore, Poland became the first state of the Soviet Block, where the oppositional forces gained the chance to influence the matters of the state authentically. The opposition almost immediately introduced new reforms in different areas (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, p. 2020, p. 184). The first changes in education consisted of the creation of non-public schools as well as non-public universities (Hryshchuk, 2017, p. 84). Also, the pieces of communist propaganda hidden in the curriculum were changed (Wiśniewski & Zahorska p. 2020, p. 184). In 1991, further changes were introduced. Foreign language education has been one of the crucial aspects. In primary school, one foreign language (in most cases English) has become compulsory, whereas in secondary school- two of them. The following years have also brought modernising the curriculum and teaching methods. Additionally, more impact has been put on adult vocational training and education possibilities (Hryshchuk, 2017, p. 84-85).

At the same time, the decentralisation process in Poland has started to take place. The new administrative division has been created, and local governments have been given more tasks. In 1997, municipalities became responsible for leading obligatory education schools. One year later, newly created administrative units named counties were tasked to conduct secondary and vocational schools. It is also essential to add that local governments gained much autonomy regarding financial and organisational matters of the school. At the same time, the degree of direct control of the state over the schools has been significantly limited (Maj-Wiśniowska, 2017, p. 265-267).

The biggest and most significant educational reform occurred in 1999 (see: Figure 2). The reform resulted from economic changes and decentralisation (Hnatiuk, 2016, p. 75). Along with further modernisation and promoting equality, the critical point of the 1999 reform was the change in the school structure. Previously, primary school was eight years. The reform reduced this to 6 years while simultaneously creating three years of lower secondary schools. The lower secondary schools aimed to prepare the students for the next-level schools and increase the possibilities for children living in rural areas (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, p. 2020, p. 184). The test after the end of primary school has been introduced. This test aimed to check whether the pupils have gained the knowledge they were required to obtain during these six years. After the end of lower secondary school, the test that enabled students to apply for further schools was also introduced (Hnatiuk, 2016, p. 75).

The law stating that schooling until 18 is required has not changed (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, p. 2020, p. 184). The voluntary attendance of kindergartens for children aged three and above has also remained unchanged. The system that the children during the first three years of primary school do not receive actual notes and are led by one teacher introducing them to basic

skills like counting, reading, or writing has also not changed to a greater extent (Wilk, 2018, p. 110).

The children had the following options after finishing their obligatory education: 3-year general secondary school (in Polish: liceum), 4-year vocational secondary school (in Polish: technikum), or 2-, in some cases, 3-year vocational school (in Polish: szkoła zawodowa) (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, p. 2020 p. 184; Hnatiuk, 2016, p. 78-79). The reform from 1999 decreased secondary education by one year (Maj-Wiśniowska, 2017, p. 266). The pupils interested in secondary school could apply to language, economically or scientifically oriented-classes (Wilk, 2018, p. 112).

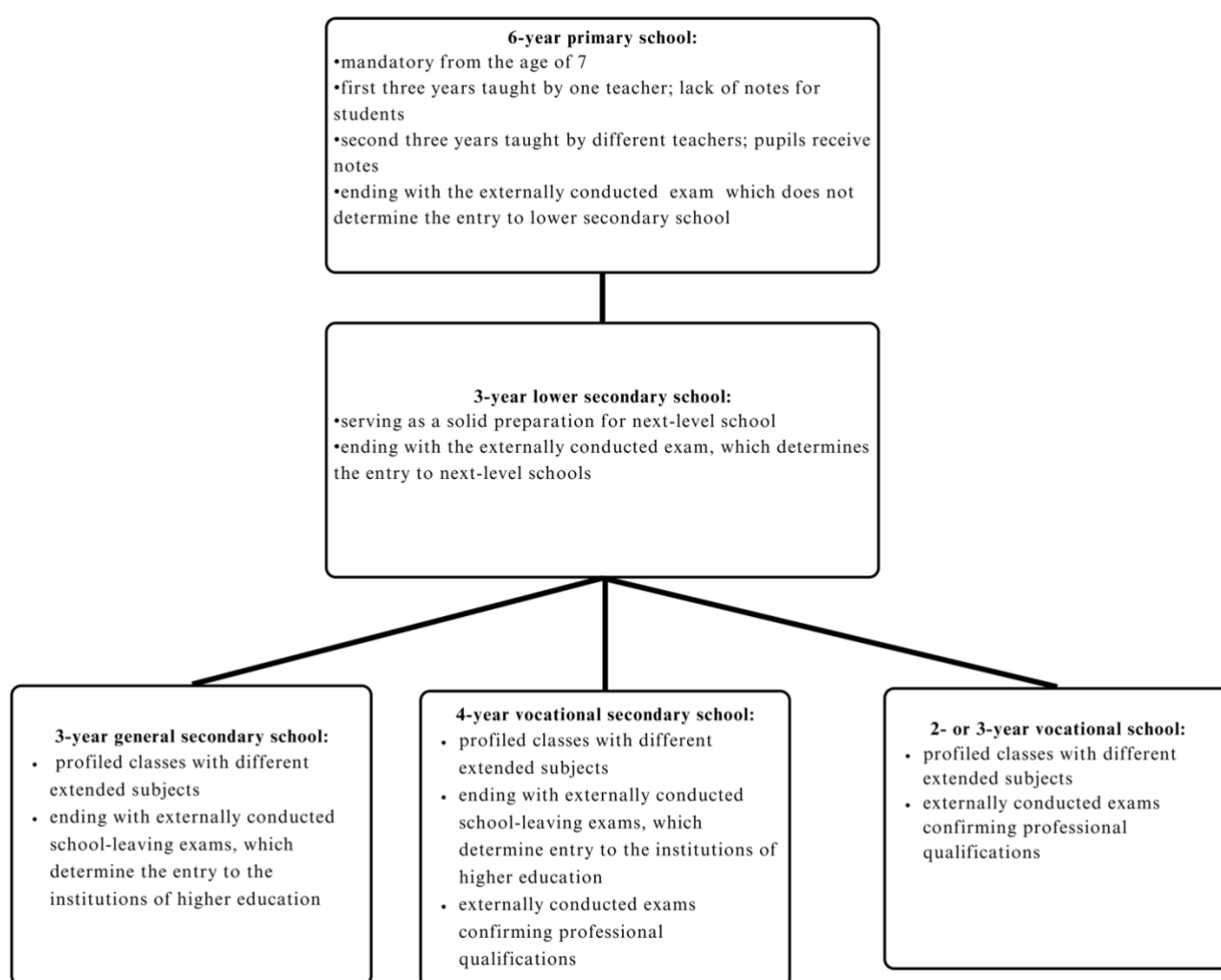


Figure 2: The outcome of the educational reform from 1999 (source: self-created table based on Hnatiuk, 2016)

Secondary schools finish with school-leaving exams, which allow applying to universities. Secondary vocational schools also give an additional possibility to take exams confirming professional qualifications (Hnatiuk, 2016, p. 76). Vocational schools finish only with exams

confirming professional qualifications, which do not give the possibility to apply to institutions of higher education. These rules mainly remained unchanged. An observable trend is that vocational schools decrease with time (Hnatiuk, 2016, p. 78-79).

The reform of 1999 has also introduced the rule the school leaving exams are conducted externally (including the exams after primary and lower-secondary schools) by the Central Examination Board (in Polish: Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna) (Hnatiuk, 2016, p. 76; Maj-Wiśniowska, 2017, p. 267-268). This type of external examination has improved the quality of the educational system. However, at the same time, it was the cause of many organisational and financial challenges (Nyczkało & Szlosek, 2008, as cited in Hnatiuk, 2016, p. 76).

As already mentioned, the Polish educational system had been seen, despite introduced reforms, as a rather old-fashioned one. The group work is not forced. Pupils are expected to work individually. There is also much pressure being put on notes, and the existence of only one “correct answer” is being promoted. There is much pressure on discipline and respecting authority so this teaching style might discourage creative and problem-solving thinking (Odważ-Coates, 2017, p. 102). Additionally, it has been noted that Polish students had not received enough guidance at school to help them decide about their future career steps. Although there is a school counsellor in every school, the after-school struggles of the young Poles have not indicated the high effectiveness of these counsellors (Czujko, 2013, p. 287-288).

Do you think that Polish schools in general:	Positive responses	Negative responses	Hard to say
provide students with a high level of knowledge	62	27	11
teach students patriotism and love of the homeland	62	24	14
care for the physical development of students	59	31	10
teach students teamwork and cooperation in solving problems	52	30	18
prepare students for active participation in social and political life of the country	36	43	21
teach students to cope with the problems posed by contemporary life	35	50	15

Figure 3: Rating of different aspects of Polish education (source: CBOS, 2014, as cited in Žuk, 2018, p. 214)

The survey conducted in 2014 (see: Figure 3) with the help of a representative sample of Polish society has shown that there had been no unanimous opinion about Polish schools. Most Poles claimed that the school system gave students significant knowledge. The population also agreed that Polish schools teach pupils patriotic values. There were also relatively positive responses regarding the physical education of Polish pupils. Only about half of the Poles claimed that Polish schools taught how to work in groups and solve problems efficiently. Preparation of the

pupils for political participation and real-life issues got more negative than positive opinions (CBOS, 2014, as cited in Żuk, 2018, p. 2014).

The other typical characteristic of the Polish educational system is its instability. A great example illustrating the number of changes that the Polish educational system has faced are two key documents regulating education in Poland, namely: “Law of September 7, 1991, on the educational system” and “The Teachers’ Charter” (in Polish: Karta Nauczyciela). The second document was introduced on the 25th of January 1982. “Law on the educational system” has been changed over 150 times, whereas “The Teachers’ Charter” has changed over 90 times (Maj-Wisniowska, 2017, p. 267).

It is essential to mention that even though the parties in power have changed with time, the core structure of the educational system has remained mostly unchanged (Maj-Wisniowska, 2017). In 2001, for example, left-wing political forces came to power. They, however, decided to continue the reform that took place in 1999. All parties have just improved the reform from 1999 by, for example, improving the curriculum, the formula of school leaving exams, or teaching methods (Hnatiuk, 2017, p. 50-51). Some reforms, like those enabling student exchanges abroad, came naturally along with Poland’s membership in the EU (Wilk, 2018, p. 110). The only parties which introduced significant structural change were the Civil Platform (in Polish: Platforma Obywatelska; abbreviation: PO), and Polish People’s Party (in Polish: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe; abbreviation: PSL) governing together when PiS was in the opposition (Pawlak, 2014). PO-PSL coalition introduced the reform regarding school starting age. The new law was adopted in 2014, which stated that since the school year 2015/2016, children have begun to be obliged to start school at 6, not as previously agreed on- 7. This law has yet to come into effect as PiS won the 2015 elections comprehensively and reversed this legislation (Hnatiuk, 2017, p. 50-51). Yet, there were other changes in the educational system that PiS decided to introduce.

PiS has already announced its educational reform plans during the campaign. The main message was that the party plans to return to the old rules. One of the most ambitious and challenging ideas of PiS was to return to the school structure from before 1999, meaning to eliminate lower secondary schools (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, p. 2020, p. 181).

PiS argued in its electoral program that the existence of lower secondary schools has been pointless as these schools did not have any specific function (Electoral program of PiS, 2014). PiS (2014) also claimed that secondary and vocational education had lost its quality and attractiveness after the 1999 reform. Moreover, the need for more general education, especially in secondary schools, has been mentioned. The electoral program of PiS (2014) stated that

Poland should not have followed the reforms inspired by Western Europe and the United States. PiS has also called for less red tape and the unification of numerous educational documents (Electoral program of PiS, 2014). However, little scientific evidence would confirm that these claims of Law and Justice were correct (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, 2020, p. 204).

At the same time, the creation of lower-secondary schools has had some disadvantages. New lower secondary schools needed to be opened, which meant a lot of financial and organisational challenges for the administrative units, which was troublesome, especially for the poorer municipalities. Moreover, in some regions, there were no lower secondary schools, which meant that some pupils needed to go to schools far away from where they lived (Grzywna & Stępień-Lampa, 2019, p. 119-120).

After Law and Justice won the elections of 2015, it began with the reforms promised during their electoral campaign (Grzywna & Stępień-Lampa, 2019, p. 118). Firstly, the lower secondary schools were removed. At the same time, primary schools were extended to 8 years. These changes also impacted secondary education. The duration of general secondary schools increased from 3 years to 4 years. The period of vocational secondary school increased, on the other hand, from 4 to 5 years. The possibility of a 2-year vocational school has been removed (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, 2020, p. 203-204; gov. pl, 2020).

Additionally, the competencies and autonomy of the municipalities and councils, the administrative bodies responsible for the schools, have been reduced (Maj-Wiśniowska, 2017, p. 168, 267). Each voivodeship, the final level of the administrative division in Poland, has its Board of Education, which oversees education in the voivodeship on behalf of the Ministry of Education (Pięta-Szawara, 2017). The Boards of Education regained the power to decide what is being introduced to schools and how they function. That was the move from de-centralization to unifying schools' curricula and teaching methods (Maj-Wiśniowska, 2017, p. 168, 267). PiS has also realised its promises regarding increasing general education in secondary schools. The Boards of Education have decided that every school should have more Polish language and history lessons (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, p. 2020, p. 203).

There are also core rules that have remained unchanged concerning 2015. These are external examinations, decentralisation of the school system, and the existence of non-public schools (Maj-Wiśniowska, 2017, p. 268). All the reforms were introduced in the new "Law of Education" on the 14th of December 2016. The law started to be implemented in September 2017 (Maj-Wiśniowska, 2017, p. 271; Wiśniewski & Zahorska, p. 2020, p. 204). It is visible that the reform introduced by PiS was strongly inspired by the educational system existing in Poland before 1999 (see: Table 1).

	1989	2015	2017
School starting age:	7	6	7
Duration of primary schools:	8 years	6 years	8 years
Existence of lower secondary schools:	Yes (duration: 3 years)	Yes (duration: 3 years)	No
Duration of secondary schools:	3 years	3 years	4 years
Duration of secondary vocational schools:	4 years	4 years	5 years
Duration of vocational schools:	3 years	2 or 3 years	3 years
Duration of secondary vocational schools:	5 years	4 years	5 years
Autonomy for municipalities and counties:	None; all schools led by the state	Increased; less supervision of the state	Reduced; increased supervision of the state

Table 1: Illustration of the reforms in Polish education in the years 1989, 2015, and 2017 (source: self-created table based on Maj-Wiśniowska, 2017, p. 268)

The first consequence of the reform was general chaos and challenges after passing the new law. The time for implementing the reform was relatively short, so teachers did not have enough time to adjust to the new curriculum. Additionally, schools' management needed to solve organisational problems, such as space limitations (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, 2020, p. 196). In 2017, lower secondary schools did not take new students, whereas primary school students stayed in their schools after the graduation of the 6th class. That meant primary schools needed much more place, and lower secondary schools gradually became empty (RPO, 2019). As the management of both lower secondary schools and primary schools depends on the municipalities, they were the ones to decide how the change would be spatially managed (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland, 2017, position 60). 2019 has been a tough year both for secondary schools and for pupils. This year, secondary and vocational schools were supposed to take the students from two yearbooks, meaning the ones finishing lower secondary schools according to the old system and students graduating 8th class of primary school according to the new system. That meant that secondary and vocational schools were also experiencing spatial problems, and it took much work for students to get a place in their dream, sometimes even any secondary school. That also meant that secondary and vocational schools

were supposed to teach in two different systems for three years, which was additionally challenging (RPO, 2019).

The second visible consequence was the teachers' unhappiness with the changes. Most of the teachers disliked the reforms Anna Zalewska and PiS introduced. One of the primary worries of the teachers was that they could lose their job (Grzywna & Stępień-Lampa, 2019, p. 121; Wiśniewski & Zahorska, 2020, p. 204). Additionally, some teachers were not satisfied with their salaries. This resulted in the strike organised in 2019 by one of the teachers' trade unions, "ZNP". The strikers' main demands were salary rises, the guarantee of secure employment, and not allowing a wave of layoffs (Michniuk, 2021).

However, the reactions of at least some of the teachers were predictable because the Polish Teachers' Union "ZNP" criticised the idea of reform before it took place (Grzywna & Stępień-Lampa, 2019, p. 121). Considering that the Polish government has appointed many experts (including teachers) to work on the reform (gov. pl, 2020), the teachers' strong dissatisfaction with the reforms seems unique.

The third consequence was that parents and pupils were unsatisfied with the reform. The organisation of parents has supported the protesting teachers (Maj-Wiśniowska, 2017, p. 281). Ministry of Education's answer to the protests was to create a platform responsible for the consultation between government officials, teachers, and parents. However, teachers and parents were disappointed with the platform as it has not brought any changes, and the conclusion of the discussion has never been presented (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, 2020, p. 203-204).

3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1. Network Governance Theory

Recently in the field of policy analysis, the concept of “governance” as an alternative to the traditional “government” has started to be used. There is no clear definition of “governance”, which indicates its complexity (Sager, Ingold & Balthasar, 2018, p 231-232). It can relate to the increased research on the subject that has occurred relatively recently, meaning at the end of the twentieth century (Davies, Holm-Hansen, Kononenko & Røiseland, 2016, p. 136).

Governance can be defined differently according to the context in which it is used. However, some general characteristics could help to simplify this complex concept. In contrast to the government, governance focuses on the plurality of different actors who possess some autonomy and are not dependent on each other. These actors are organised in some kinds of networks. Therefore, there is no clear hierarchy, and no superior actor supervises others. The official government can also be one of the actors but does not necessarily need to be. The actors are supposed to cooperate, negotiate, and create coalitions to achieve a particular goal. (Kersbergen & Waarden, 2004, p. 151-152). Thus, the concept of governance does not focus on the role of formal government but instead on the self-organisation of the different public and private actors which shape public policy (Sager et al., 2018, p. 233-235).

“Governance” is often a synonym for “network governance”. Rod Rhodes was among the most significant contributors to developing the “network governance” concept. Rhodes’ idea of network governance focuses on networks, which consist of autonomous private and public actors who negotiate in the frames of previously established rules to achieve a particular outcome. That explains the use of the terms “network governance” and “governance” interchangeably (Rhodes, 2007, p. 1246; Rhodes, 1996, p. 660, as cited in Sager et al., 2018, p. 238-239).

Network governance can therefore play an essential role in the field of policymaking. One can assume that the official government only sometimes possesses enough knowledge to make a successful policy. Thus, formal government agencies, universities, interest groups, different institutions, consultants, and private actors can organise in the form of governance to produce new policies. It happens in the exchange of resources that given actors possess (Kersbergen & Waarden, 2004, p. 162). The states increasingly use the concept of network governance as it can be beneficial in the case of wicked problems which are almost impossible to solve just by

the formal government itself. It also limits the power of proper government, increasing the quality of democracy (Davies et al., 2016, p. 136-137).

Network governance is, however, an ideal concept that can look different in reality. It is challenging to achieve a situation where all the actors hold the same amount of power, especially considering that formal government is one of the actors (Kersbergen & Waarden, 2004, p. 152). It can also be the case that the governments feel the pressure to make new policies within network governance which can lead to the creation of artificial networks and, at the same time to the downplay of the already existing social actors (Davies et al., 2016, p. 137). The credibility and legitimisation of the actors being part of the network could also be questionable. It often remains unknown if different actors present objective knowledge and if they can be considered independent (Kersbergen & Waarden, 2004, p. 162). Network governance also means that the actors need to reach a consensus. That can significantly slow down the decision-making process and therefore impact its efficiency, which is required, especially in urgent situations (Meuleman, 2011, p. 5101).

3.2. Network Governance in the Polish Context

The increasing trend of network governance in policymaking can also be visible in Poland. It has been caused mainly by the country's accession to the European Union. The acquisition reduced the formal government's role in many policy-making fields as the cooperation with other states and experts has started to be executed from the side of the EU (Niedzialkowski, Paavola, & Jędrzejewska, 2013).

However, it must be said that the formal government's significant role in policymaking has been a characteristic of Polish legislation (Jasiecki, 2015). It has roots in communist times in Poland (Wiśniewski & Zahorska, 2020, p. 184). However, even after the fall of communism in 1989, policy-making processes in Poland cannot be described as fully participative. Admittedly, the independent institution consisted of experts, the Institute of Public Affairs (in Polish: Instytut Spraw Publicznych; abbreviation: ISP) was created, but the new government chosen in 1989 still did not overly engage experts while making new educational policies (Zahorska, 2016, p. 53-56).

Additionally, the Ministry of Education has created the Educational Research Institute (in Polish: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych; abbreviation IBE), which has aimed to evaluate the quality of education in Poland. The evaluation created by both institutions should have sought to serve as the guidelines in educational policymaking. However, it has not been the case, and

the voices of the experts and teachers have not been considered (Zahorska, 2016, p. 54). The reason for this top-down attitude to policymaking was the instability of Polish politics after 1989. The parties in government have been changing often, and each wanted to introduce their ideas as soon as possible (Jasiecki, 2015, p. 108-109). The quick tempo of the reforms automatically made actual collective policymaking, including experts and teachers, almost impossible (Zahorska, 2016, p. 53-56).

The situation has mostly remained unchanged. Every government has played a primary role while making new policies up to this point. At the same time, the role of the other actors has been relatively limited. Governments so far have mainly taken decisions intuitively and have been driven by political interests. Different actors also seem to be, therefore, less encouraged to participate in policymaking (Jasiecki, 2015, p. 104-105; 108-113). Although other institutions that aim to include local governments, professional groups, and citizens in policymaking exist, their role in the critical decision-making process is limited (Jasiecki, 2015; Kosiorek, 2021; Grochowalska & Sadejra, 2017).

This participation is often one-sided, meaning opinions are being taken. However, they are not influential in the creation of new policies (Dobrowolski, Kożuch, Pypłacz, Sasach, Szczudlińska-Kanoś & Žukovskis, 2016). Different political parties declare their willingness to include other actors in the decision-making; however, in practice, this willingness ends as soon as the political interests can be put in danger. It also seems that society is not adequately educated on how they can influence the policy-making process (Jasiecki, 2015, p. 104-105; 108-113). This sceptical attitude to network governance often results in introducing reforms not accepted by the groups most influenced by these reforms (Zahorska, 2016, p. 53-54).

Even though Polish network governance does not seem particularly optimistic, there are signs that this situation is slowly changing, and more and more actors (such as local governments, private sector companies, and citizen organisations) are participating in policymaking (Dobrowolski et al., 2016). For example, universities in Poland have collegial bodies which are strongly included in policymaking. These collegial bodies strongly limit the influence of the government on the decisions regarding higher education in Poland. This situation often creates conflicts between university bodies and the government (Kwiek, 2015).

Moreover, Senior Councils and Youth Councils were created to encourage youth and elderly citizens to participate in policymaking. Both councils aim to represent the interests as well as the point of view of younger and older citizens. The committees operate on both local as well as national levels. The role of the especially Senior Councils seems to be constantly increasing

in terms of health policymaking (Frączkiewicz-Wronka, Kowalska-Bobko, Sagan & Wronka-Pośpiech, 2019, p. 909-910).

Additionally, the governmental website informs that several actors, including teachers, scholars, local governments, and citizens, have been involved in educational policymaking in 2016, along with the formal government. Ministry of Education and Science has held 50 debates. The debates at the voivodship level have taken place as well. Therefore, one can assume that network governance can also apply to the Polish case (gov. pl, 2020). Typical characteristics of network governance can be identified in this case: different state and non-state actors who are independent and can exchange their resources according to the previously established rules (Sager et al., 2018, p. 238-239). Thus, network governance theory serves as a guideline to the research question of this thesis, meaning to investigate the involvement of actors during the 2016 educational policymaking.

4. Methodology

The research question has been answered qualitatively. Interviews with the actors supposedly engaged in educational policymaking serve as the primary data set. This data collection method was chosen as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the involvement of different actors seen from various points of view (Meriam, 2002). However, triangulation has been applied to increase the reliability of independent data collection (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Therefore, along with the interviews, official documents, existing literature, and media sources were used. The dataset consists of 45 different data (see: Table 3).

4.1. Interviews

4.1.1. Interview Partners

Most of the interviewed actors were from Lodzkie Voivodeship. This administrative unit can be considered a good representation of Poland as it is not an extreme case. Out of 16 voivodeships, it is 9th in size, 6th regarding the population count and 6th regarding the GDP per capita measure. Slightly over 60 per cent of this voivodeship's population lives in cities. It is also located in central Poland (lodzkie. pl, nd.). Lodzkie Voivodeship is, therefore, on the very border between so-called western "Poland A", which is better economically developed and more liberal, and eastern "Poland B", which is more conservative and financially poorer. However, it is still a part of "Poland A" (Jagliński, 2018). One interview partner comes from Masovian Voivodeship.

Individuals belonging to the groups supposedly participating in educational policymaking were interviewed. These groups were constructed as follows: local governments, political parties, teachers' trade unions, experts and schools management. As a result, two members of local governments, two members of political parties, three members of teachers' trade unions, one expert and three members of the schools' management were interviewed. The interviewed actors were the deputy mayor of the rural municipality, the head of the Department of Education of the city hall, a Civil Platform (PO) political party member from a rural area, an Alliance of Social Democrats (SLD) political party member from an urban area, regional director of Teachers' Trade Union "ZNP", Teachers' Trade Union "Solidarnosc" member, Teachers' Trade Union "Forum Oswiata" member, political science expert, principal of the primary school in the rural area, a former lower secondary school teacher in an urban area and the former chairman of the Parents' Council in the rural area school. One interviewed person was a

member of two groups, school management and teachers' trade unions, as she is a primary school principal and a Teachers' Trade Union "Solidarnosc" member (see: Table 2).

Group of actors	Representative	Gender	Area
Local governments	Deputy mayor of the the municipality	Male	Rural
	Head of the Department of Education	Female	Urban
Political parties	Civil Platform (PO) member	Male	Rural
	Alliance of Social Democrats (SLD) political party member	Male	Urban
Teachers' trade unions	Regional director of Teachers' Trade Union "ZNP"	Male	Urban
	Teachers' Trade Union "Solidarnosc" member	Female	Rural
	Teachers' Trade Union "Forum Oswiata" member	Female	Rural
Experts	Political science expert	Male	Urban
School management	Principal of the primary school	Female	Rural
	Former lower secondary school teacher	Female	Urban
	Former chairman of the Parents' Council	Female	Rural
5	10	5 male, 5 female	5 rural, 5 urban

Table 2: The Characteristics of Interview Partners (Source: self-created table, 2023)

Members of these groups were chosen because of the information on the official website of the reform, which informs about the engagement of the local governments, experts, and teachers in preparing the reform (gov. pl, 2020). According to Minister of Education Anna Zalewska's words at the conference introducing the new overhaul, she was also in constant contact with the teachers' unions (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 41:00-41:29). As the teachers in Poland often belong to the teachers' trade unions, the representatives of the two most prominent teachers' unions, meaning "ZNP" and "Solidarnosc" (Bugdalski, 2023), needed to be considered. There is also a third teachers' union which Minister Zalewska claimed to be in contact with, meaning "Forum Oswiata" (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 40:36-40:40). That is why the interview with

the member of this trade union was considered valuable as well. The idea of reform was also widely discussed among politicians (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 3:42-4:16). That is why one member of the main oppositional party at that time- PO, as well as the member of the party that did not manage to get in the parliament, SLD was interviewed (Marcinkiewicz & Stegmeier, 2016).

Five of the interview partners were men, and the other five of them were women. There is also an equal representation of actors active in rural and urban areas (see: Table 2). Each person was professionally active in the given position during educational policymaking. In every group, except for the expert one, at least one person represented a rural area, and at least one was active in an urban area. That was important as people from rural areas can have different opinions and perspectives than those in urban areas, even if both belong to the same group, e.g., local government representatives. Additionally, gender representation was maintained, as the same number of male and female participants were interviewed.

There were also attempts to interview the deputy principal of the secondary school, an expert from the Institute of Educational Research (polish abbreviation: IBE), the worker of the Ministry of Education, two members of the Law and Justice (PiS) party and even former Minister of Education Anna Zalewska, who introduced the reform. The potential interview partners refused to give an interview after seeing the questions. Only two people justified their refusal, meaning the deputy principal of the secondary school and one of the PiS members. The deputy principal refused due to fear of losing her position if expressing a negative opinion about the reform. The PiS party member claimed not to be capable of answering the interview questions.

4.1.2. Interview Questions

Everyone has been asked the same questions. However, the questions were slightly adjusted as each of them was the representative of a different group, meaning the members of political parties were asked how a given political party was involved and so forth (see: Table 4 in Appendix A). The interviews were conducted in Polish, however, for the purpose of this study, the relevant parts were translated into English. The interviews were also half-structured and open-ended (Sager, Hadorn, Balthasar & Mavrot 2021, p. 190), as it gave the possibility to ask additional questions according to the answers of the interview partners. Interview questions were divided thematically to cover the different aspects of network governance—the first question aimed to determine the involvement of groups of actors in policymaking. The second question sought to identify the other actors in the network. The third question was to discover

the main challenges for the actors as they tried to influence the other actors in the network. The fourth question was needed to recognise the opinion of the actors about the reform and to identify whether they had enough resources to influence policymaking—questions five and six aimed to determine the coalitions formed within the network. The seventh question sought to identify whether the actors felt part of the network. Question number eight similarly was to find out the network dynamics and whether the network's existence fulfilled its purpose. The goal of the ninth question was to recognise the most resourceful actor in the network (see: Table 4 in Appendix A).

The interview partners were also asked whether they had any documents they could share. As a result, the regional director of the Teachers' Union, "ZNP", shared 13 documents from an archive of the union, many of which were media publications typically requiring a license to get access to. The political science expert shared five publications that could help answer the research question. The SLD member shared one publication. Many, but not all, of the shared documents were used.

4.2. Official Documents

Therefore, some of the shared by the interview partners documents were included in the dataset. The rest of them were found online and in the bibliography of found secondary sources. Eventually, the following official documents were used: two official reports from the Centre for Public Opinion Research (in Polish: Centrum Badania Opinii Publicznej; abbreviation: CBOS), one official statement of the National Chamber of Control (in Polish: Narodowa Izba Kontroli; abbreviation: NIK), an official letter from Anna Zalewska addressed to NIK, serving as a response to its report, an official letter from the educational experts addressed to Anna Zalewska, private notes of ZNP, official letter from ZNP director addressed to Anna Zalewska and two official statements of the coalition "NO to the school chaos" (in Polish: NIE dla chaosu w szkole). In total, nine of the official documents were used.

4.3. Existing Literature

Most of the literature proposed by the interview partners has also been used. That was the study of Malgorzata Kisiorek (2021), titled "The Right to Petition as an Example of Parent Participation in Developing Educational Policy", the study of Jozef Balachalowicz (2020) titled "Education to be fixed. (...)", the study of Ewelina Malendowicz (2019), titled "Education as a Subject of Interest of Polish Political Parties in the Second Decade of the 21st Century. (...)"

and the study of Grochowalska and Sadejra (2017), titled “The Core Curriculum of Preschool Education (...)”. In total, 4 of the existing studies were used.

4.4. Media Reports

Regarding media reports, 22 of them became the subject of analysis. It included six online newspaper articles, most shared by the interview partner. The other 16 data were in the form of YouTube videos. Three of the used YouTube videos presented different debates organised by the former Minister of Education and Science. The videos demonstrate the discussion between Anna Zalewska and local governments, Anna Zalewska presenting the reform to the public, and the debate conducted by Anna Zalewska and former Prime Minister- Beata Szydlo. The other six YouTube videos used were already existing interviews with Teachers’ Trade Union “ZNP” director Slawomir Broniarz, with two regional directors of Teachers’ Trade Union “Solidarnosc”, with the member of Modern (in Polish: Nowoczesna) political party- Katarzyna Lubnauer (two interviews) and with PO member- Grzegorz Schetyna. The dataset also included seven speeches of the members of the politicians at the parliament meeting on the 22nd of September 2016. The speeches of the PiS members, Anna Zalewska, Andrzej Kryj and Iwona Michalek, were included. Additionally, the speeches of Nowoczesna member Katarzyna Lubnauer and three PO members, Malgorzata Pepek, Pawel Bańkowski and Anna Wasilewska, were used.

Dataset	
Official documents	9
Online newspaper articles	6
Existing studies	4
Speeches recorded on YouTube	16
Conducted interviews	10
Total	45

Table 3: Characteristics of dataset (source: self-created table, 2023)

4.5.Data Analysis

Collected data were analysed using Qualitative Content Analysis as this method allows the analysis of the data while considering where data come from (Mayring, 2014). Therefore, the Qualitative Content Analysis approach allowed for in-depth insights into such a complex and subjective topic as the actors' involvement in educational policymaking. The data were analysed using the "MAXQDA2022" software.

The collected data were analysed using structural coding. It allowed for coherently organising many different data. Structural coding is suitable for this type of research, as the research question and the theory enable the development of leading questions that need to be answered with the help of the analysis (Depasquale, Salam & Davoli, 2022, p. 5-6). Therefore, first, the questions which needed to be answered were identified while basing on the Network Governance Theory:

- Which actors were involved?
- How were actors involved?
- How did the actors cooperate to be more influential?

The questions served as the basics for the codes. The first used code was **"Actors involved"**. This code enabled identifying the actors in the network. Based on the outcome of this first-stage code, second-stage code was applied, meaning **"Involvement of the (previously determined actor)"**. This code was used separately for every actor in the network and included information about the involvement itself, challenges faced, resources the actors possessed and their actual impact.

Parallel, the other second-stage code emerged while identifying the involvement, and that was: the **"(identified actor's) opinion about the reform"**. In some cases, expressing an opinion was equal to participation, but in others, the involvement was separate from telling one's view. Thus, the data, including the actors' opinions, were included under this coding category.

The second first-level code was **"Coalitions"**, which enabled identifying which actors cooperated within the network. This category included any data about the actors cooperating.

On the other hand, during the coding process, the third first stage code was identified, meaning **"Changes due to the consultations"**. It turned out to explain network dynamics and whether the goal of the possible network governance existence was reached. Any data about the changes made due to the cooperation of the actors in the network were used. The second stages codes that evolved from this category were: **"Regarding curriculum"**, **"Regarding vocational training"**, **"Regarding teachers' issues"**, **"Regarding local governments"**, and **"Regulatory**

changes". The fourth first-stage code was **"Changes that did not occur"**. This code collected the information claiming that nothing changed in the policymaking process.

It is essential to point out that in the case of every code, encompassed information could come from other sources, extending beyond those directly related to the specific actors. The codes were also created to match the objectives of the question posed to the interview partners (see: Table 4 in Appendix A).

5. Results

This section aims to present the results of the qualitative study according to the codes applied. The results presented in subchapters 5.1.-5.13, were identified by the first stage code, “**Actors involved**”, and second stage codes emerging from this one: “**Opinion about the reform**” and “**Involvement**” (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). The results presented in subchapter 5.14, on the other hand, were found using the first stage code: “**Changes due to the consultations**”, and the second stage codes subordinated to this one (see: Table 6 in Appendix B). The results in subchapter 5.15 emerged from the applied first-stage code “**Coalitions**” (see: Figures 9-13 in Appendix B).

5.1. Teachers` Trade Unions

5.1.1. Opinion about the Reform

According to the Teachers` Trade Union “Forum Oswiata” member (2023), all the teachers` trade unions were somewhat sceptical about the reform as the liquidation of one school level could have caused job losses, especially for the lower secondary school teachers. However, the “Forum Oswiata” Trade Union saw the reform as beneficial. “Forum Oswiata” member (2023) pointed out that eliminating the lower secondary school meant the reduction of red tape (see: Table 5 in Appendix B).

The other teachers` trade union, “Solidarnosc”, shared a similar view as the “Forum Oswiata” (2023) member. “Solidarnosc” supported the idea of lower secondary schools` liquidation, unlike the Teachers` Union “ZNP” members (Suchecka, 2016b; TV Zachod Szczecinek, 2017, 0:20-0:33). Cezary Janowski, “Solidarnosc” member underlined that the union did not agree with the position of “ZNP” and was not going to undertake any joint efforts, such as the protests, to oppose the reform (TV Zachod Szczecinek, 2017, 1:59-2:16).

As it was suggested by the “Solidarnosc” member (TV Zachod Szczecinek, 2017, 1:59-2:16), the “ZNP” Teachers` Union, was against the reform. “ZNP” claimed that the instant abolition of lower secondary schools would cause chaos for the pupils in the 6th grade. That meant that instead of having three years to study biology, chemistry, geography, and physics, they had to go through the same material in two years. A similar situation was with the foreign language classes. Additionally, “ZNP” was concerned about the problem of double yearbooks (ZNP personal communication, 2016). In the official letter to Anna Zalewska, Slawomir Broniarz, the director of “ZNP”, shared his opinion that the reform will bring more problems than it will solve (Broniarz, 2016). Broniarz (2016) mentioned the trouble of creating new textbooks and

possible massive teacher layoffs. At the same time, Broniarz (2016) acknowledged that lower secondary schools were problematic; however, he believed there were other means, less radical than the liquidation itself, to solve these problems. Broniarz (2016) supported his opinion by referring to the PISA results, where Polish lower secondary school students did well compared to the other European pupils.

In general, one can say that “Forum Oswiata” and “Solidarnosc” teachers’ unions, despite minor fears, supported the idea of the lower secondary school abolition, whereas “ZNP” was firmly against the reform.

5.1.2. Involvement in Policymaking

Anna Zalewska, then-Minister of Education, claimed that all the teachers’ unions were intensely engaged in the policymaking and that she decided to implement many of their ideas (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 41:00-41:29). Beata Szydlo, then-Prime Minister supported this view, claiming that teachers’ unions were engaged in the negotiations with Minister Zalewska (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 1:07-1:12). This view has also been supported by the “Solidarnosc” member and primary school principal (2023), and by the deputy mayor of the municipality (2023). A former lower secondary school teacher (2023) saw that differently. She agreed that the unions were consulted but mentioned they had no significant influence.

On the other hand, the teachers’ Trade Union “Forum Oswiata” member (2023) mentioned teachers’ unions’ initiatives, such as sending questionnaires to schools and debating with the teachers, so that they could represent teachers’ interests in the best possible way.

Anna Zalewska (2023), during the debates, has underlined that she cooperated with both the “Solidarnosc” and “Forum Oswiata” unions (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 40:36-40:40). “Forum Oswiata” member (2023) confirmed this view. However, the primary school principal (2023) pointed out that “Forum Oswiata” did not play such an important role in educational policymaking due to its small size. The primary school principal (2023) also noted that “Solidarnosc” did not strike against the reform. The union, however, negotiated with the Ministry of Education to ensure the teachers would not lose their jobs. That was confirmed by Agata Adamek, regional “Solidarnosc” director (Lokalna TV, 2017, 0:54-2:39). According to the words of an SLD member (2023) “Solidarnosc” was in strong opposition to “ZNP”.

The political science expert (2023) pointed out that “ZNP” was also involved in policymaking. It was, for example, by seeking a discussion with Minister Anna Zalewska by sending official letters (Broniarz, 2016). Broniarz (2016), in his letter to Anna Zalewska, among others,

provided the network with alternative solutions that he saw as better than the abolition of lower-secondary schools:

“We believe that the functioning of lower secondary schools can be improved by employing psychologists, pedagogues, and creating smaller classes. As representatives of education workers, we expect to meet with you, Madam Minister, soon to discuss issues related to the planned phasing out of middle schools.” (Broniarz, 2016)

“ZNP” appealed for more consultations between the teachers’ unions and the Ministry. In the declaration of “ZNP”, one can read:

“We expect the ministry to provide us with a schedule and proposed topics for meetings so that we don't end up being part of a team that agrees with all of Anna Zalewska's proposals. At the same time, we invite other education unions to a meeting on January 16, outside the Ministry of Education, at the headquarters of ZNP, during which we will collectively work out the social partners' position on key issues for employees – teachers' salaries and employment.” (ZNP, 2018)

Anna Zalewska, on the other hand, said that she did not want to comment on the words of “ZNP”, particularly Slawomir Broniarz (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 39:06-39:20), as she conducted a lot of regular meetings with this trade union (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 40:28-40:35). “ZNP” however did not claim to be heard as “Solidarnosc” and “Forum Oswiata”, which resulted in engaging in further activities, that were collecting the signatures for the referendum and, finally, organising the strike among “ZNP” members (TV Zachod Szczecinek, 2017, 0:38-0:55). Former chairman of the Parents’ Council (2023) clarified that the strike took place in 2019. To encourage teachers to strike, “ZNP,” asked local governments to provide teachers with salaries, even if the strike occurred. The general director of “ZNP” described the strike as a *“collective dispute”* (Telewizja Leszno, 2017, 1:50-2:40).

All in all, three teachers’ trade unions: “Solidarnosc”, “ZNP”, and “Forum Oswiata” were somehow engaged in the policymaking, however “ZNP”, as it was in strong opposition to the reform, has undertaken most of the activities.

5.2. Political Parties

5.2.1. Law and Justice

5.2.1.1. Opinion about the Reform

As the idea of the reform came from Law and Justice, the party was naturally supporting the reform. The issue of education was necessary for this party. PiS believed that the abolition of

lower-secondary schools and changes introduced in teaching curricula connected to this reform would teach young citizens about the importance of the sovereignty and freedom of Poland (Melendowicz, 2019, p. 385-386) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). Additionally, according to the press statement of the politician Roman Giertych, there was no chance for any critical opinion about the reform coming from the Law and Justice party as Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the party leader, was supporting the reform, and therefore no party member wanted to oppose the reform idea openly (Niesluchowska, 2015). Accordingly, most of the supporters of Law and Justice were also the supporters of the reform (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023).

5.2.1.2. Involvement in Policymaking

The PiS political party members were engaged in policymaking by participating in parliamentary discussions. Andrzej Kryj, for example, during his speech at the 26th parliamentary meeting, pointed out that the reforms of Minister Zalewska have caused a lot of criticism among the opposition, teachers, parents, and local government. Kryj, however, believed that the reform was a good idea (Andrzej Kryj's speech at the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26 meeting, 2016).

The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023) claimed that PiS was determined for this reform to work because it was the main point in their electoral program. The party wanted to prove to its voters that PiS keeps the promises they make (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023). According to the deputy mayor of the municipality (2023), PiS indeed managed to do it:

“The reform was implemented exactly as the ruling camp designed it going into the elections.” (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023)

This view was also shared by a former chairman of the Parents' Council (2023). The former chairman claimed that the determination of PiS and its leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski led to the exclusion of the actors who opposed the reform from the policymaking process:

“The greatest influence on the education reform in 2016 had the then government. Not only the minister - Anna Zalewska - but also other (...) party members, e.g., the President of the Law and Justice Party, Jaroslaw Kaczyński. He did not have to be in the government, but he significantly impacted the decisions made.” (Former chairman of the Parents' Council, 2023)

Coalition “NO to the school chaos”, formed for the period of policymaking, additionally claimed that PiS did not want to hear any voices that were against its idea of the reform, and as the party held a parliamentary majority, they could ignore the criticism (NIE dla chaosu w

szkole, 2017). This opinion was supported by the PO member (2023), who claimed that “*PiS pretended to consult by talking only with organisations from its own circle.*” (PO member, 2023)

Teachers’ Trade Union “Forum Oswiata” member (2023) claimed, on the other hand, that PiS, unlike previously governing parties, was actively listening to the teachers’ voices.

5.2.2. *Civil Platform*

5.2.2.1. *Opinion about the Reform*

Civil Platform (PO), as the oppositional party, did not support the idea of educational reform. The main argument that this party brought up was that the abolition of the lower secondary schools would cause regress in the development, as it meant “returning” to the old system. Additionally, the party believed that neither schools nor local governments were ready to implement the reform so quickly. Moreover, it was claimed that Poland could not afford the reform requiring many financial resources (PO member, 2023) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). PO member, Grzegorz Schetyna, pointed out that it made no sense to liquidate lower secondary schools, only after 20 years since they were introduced. Schetyna criticised the reform’s tempo and lack of preparation (Onet News, 2016c, 3:25-3:34).

Even though the Civil Platform was firmly against educational reform (PO member, 2023), the party also noted the need to introduce changes to the Polish educational system. PO, however, did not present any concrete propositions (Melandowicz, 2019, p. 384-385).

5.2.2.2. *Involvement in Policymaking*

Like the members of PiS, PO members were participating in the parliamentary debates about the reform. For example, one Civil Platform member, Anna Wasilewska, after the discussions with worried parents, asked Anna Zalewska for potential solutions for the problems caused by the reform, such as double yearbooks (Anna Wasilewska’s speech at the meeting of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26, 2016). The other PO member, Małgorzata Pępek, on the other hand, shared her dissatisfaction with the reform while posing the rhetorical question: “*Can the government afford such an unnecessary educational revolution?*” (Małgorzata Pępek’s speech at the meeting of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26, 2016). The following PO’s politician, Paweł Bańkowski, mentioned at the 26th parliamentary meeting that Anna Zalewska should not have expected the opposition to remain silent:

“Minister, in one of your interviews, you said that the opposition should remain silent. Well, Minister, the opposition should not remain silent in the face of the chaos that you propose for parents, children, and teachers in the education system, facing the threat of losing over 40,000 teaching positions or the burden of costs that local governments will have to bear, amounting to 1 billion zlotys.” (Paweł Bańkowski’s speech at the meeting of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26, 2016)

Anna Zalewska, then-educational Minister, during the same parliamentary meeting, accused PO of spreading lies and manipulating the school principals so they would share the opinion of the opposition:

“You could practice manipulation, especially since you already practice it on school principals. Please, school principals, are calling us, begging you not to call and threaten them. The school is free. Directors, parents, and teachers make decisions there. (...). I know that the Civic Platform tries not to see that we have proposed the elements employers have been waiting for.” (Anna Zalewska’s speech at the meeting of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26, 2016)

PO decided to increase their chances of stopping the reform by submitting 910’500 valid signatures of those who wanted the referendum on educational reform to occur. The signatures were collected with the other actors. PiS, however, rejected this proposal and did not hold the referendum (PO member, 2023). PO member (2023), summarised that his party did not significantly impact the final version of the reform passed in the parliament. However, *“(...) it should be emphasised that chaos in education was minimised thanks to local governments and the opposition’s responsibility.”* (PO member, 2023).

There were also voices criticising the activity of the PO. The elementary school principal and Teachers’ Union “Solidarnosc” member (2023) claimed that the party does not have any concrete proposal, it is just *“(...) always against, no matter what the current government does.”*

5.2.3. Democratic Left Alliance

5.2.3.1. Opinion about the Reform

According to the Democratic Left Alliance (in Polish: Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej; abbreviation: SLD) member (2023), the party did not feel exceptionally comfortable criticising the reform because as lower secondary schools were introduced, the SLD party had vehemently opposed them (SLD member, 2023) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). The party member (2023) pointed out, however, that this time SLD was against the abolition of lower secondary schools

using argumentation, such as: “Since *we unnecessarily decided on lower secondary schools in 1999, we should stay with it (...)*” (SLD member, 2023).

The SLD party was also afraid that the ruling PiS party would use the structural change “*(...) as a tool for political indoctrination.*” (SLD member, 2023). SLD member (2023) also described the reform as “*(...) unprepared, unconsulted, and not socially acceptable*” and mentioned that the reform was going “*(...) to devastate the Polish education system*”.

5.2.3.2. *Involvement in Policymaking*

The SLD member (2023) pointed out, that the party was provided with the information about the reform, and according to that, SLD held regional consultations with the people. The party also wanted to participate in the negotiations with the other actors, but apparently, “*there was no time*” (SLD member, 2023).

Party members claimed that neither SLD nor the opposition had a lot of influence on the final version of the reform resulting from “*too few consultations taking place*” (SLD member, 2023). SLD member (2023) admitted, however, that even though SLD opposed the reform of Anna Zalewska, the party “*did not have any concrete proposals (...)*”.

5.2.4. *Modern Party*

5.2.4.1. *Opinion about the Reform*

The Modern (in Polish: Nowoczesna) political party also recognised the need to reform the Polish educational system (Melandowicz, 2019, p. 385) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). According to the existing interview with Katarzyna Lubnauer, a member of Nowoczesna, for the party, “*it would make the most sense to introduce this reform not now, but at least for the students who go to the fourth grade next year so that we no longer make temporary textbooks and temporary programs*” (Onet News, 2016a, 0:40-0:50). Lubnauer also described the reform as “*(...) a disaster in education (...)*” (Onet News, 2016b, 0:20-0:24).

5.2.4.2. *Involvement in Policymaking*

Especially Katarzyna Lubnauer, the party member, can be described as an active member trying to influence the policymaking process. Lubnauer also participated in the discussions at the 26th parliamentary meeting on the 22nd of September 2016 (Katarzyna Lubnauer’s speech at the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26 meeting, 2016). The politician encouraged everyone to take part in the protests against the reform (Onet News, 2016b, 0:35-0:45). Katarzyna Lubnauer

believed that if everyone “*had protested so strongly against this disaster plus, i.e., Minister Zalewska’s education reform, Law and Justice would also have yielded*” (Onet News, 2016b, 0:53-1:12).

5.3. Ministries

According to the article by Suchecka (2016a), the other ministries were a bit sceptical about the educational reform (see: Table 5 in Appendix B).

Bartosz Kownacki, the deputy of the then-defence Minister Antoni Maciarewicz, commented that the reform was not the best idea because when somebody wanted to become a professional soldier, the person needed to graduate at least lower secondary school. After the reform, completing primary school would be enough, which means that the person with one year less of education would be allowed to become a professional soldier (Suchecka, 2016a). The Ministry of Development was worried about the possibility of continuing the projects of the European Union. The Ministry of Justice, on the other hand, shared its worries about regulatory chaos that could occur. The Ministry of Agriculture was worried about what would happen with schools run by ministers. Moreover, the Ministry of Health shared financial doubts as then-Minister Zalewska promised to provide every school with health staff, such as nurses and dentists (Suchecka, 2016a).

According to the elementary school principal and Teachers’ Union “Solidarnosc” member (2023) Ministry of Education debated with the Ministry of Finance on whether the state could afford the reform.

These residual statements of the ministries were the only shared opinions about the reform. At the same time, it was the only engagement of the ministries in policymaking. Only then-Minister of Defence, Antoni Maciarewicz, openly supported Anna Zalewska and the Ministry of Education and Science (Suchecka, 2016b).

5.3.1. Ministry of Education and Science

5.3.1.1. Involvement in Policymaking

Then-Minister of Education, Anna Zalewska, during the speech held at the 26th parliamentary meeting on the 22nd of September 2016, clearly said that the Ministry of Education had public consultations, and it was important for the ministry to listen to the people and respond to their needs. Zalewska also pointed out that her goal was to inform everyone about the reform as well as possible (Anna Zalewska’s speech at the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26 meeting,

2016) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). Members of the opposition, mainly of the PO party, kept asking Zalewska to provide legitimate scientific studies that would justify the reform (Paweł Bieńkowski's speech at the meeting of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26, 2016). Anna Zalewska addressed the accusation, as follows:

"You use the term "Minister Zalewska's reform". This is a reform of citizens. This reform resulted from studies. I will provide these studies, lots of them, I also encourage you to look at the reports from the Supreme Audit Office. This is a reform not only of the government, not only of the PiS, not only of the citizens but also of parents and teachers" (Anna Zalewska's speech at the meeting of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26, 2016)

Minister Zalewska also claimed that she was preparing the reform together with *"the ministers, the leading bodies, local governments, social institutions, associations, and organisations"* (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 6:46-7:12). She added that the Ministry of Education *"accepted almost 100 comments proposed by ministers, institutions, associations, and trade unions"* (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 6:46-7:12).

Beata Szydło, then-Prime Minister, supported this view and confirmed that Anna Zalewska:

"(...) has been conducting public consultations for six months. Consultations with various circles. Both those circles are directly related to education, so she met with teachers, with educators. She discussed the proposed changes with trade unions that function in education, but she also met with parents' organisations, parents, and representatives of various circles. These consultations were held precisely to listen to these circles' voices and to consider the comments made in the proposed changes" (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 0:40-1:33).

The official website of the president confirmed that the consultations by Anna Zalewska were held and that the results were about to be presented on the 27th of June 2016 in the Polish city of Toruń (PAP, 2016).

Center for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) (2017b, p. 3) pointed out that then-Prime Minister Beata Szydło and Anna Zalewska, rejected the referendum proposal, as it was too late, and enough consultations were already held. According to the article of Suchecka (2016a), it was a clear signal that the Ministry of Education and Science would implement the reform according to its vision.

The primary school principal (2023) agreed that the opinions were collected. However, they were still *"just opinions"*, and despite the negative opinions, the reform was *"(...) what the Ministry thought of, and that was what it did"* (Elementary school principal and Teachers' Union "Solidarność" member, 2023). The primary school principal (2023), therefore, pointed out that the final decision was still in the hands of the Ministry.

President of the local Teachers' Union "ZNP" (2023), said that Anna Zalewska was conducting the consultations, however, *"it can hardly be called a consultation because she kept talking, but no one could ask questions"* (President of the local Teachers' Union "ZNP", 2023). Slawomir Broniarz, the general director of "ZNP" also shared this view in the official statement of ZNP:

"The dialogue conducted during the meetings was a sham and did not lead to common understandings on many issues important for education employees. Anna Zalewska is using meetings with social partners to legitimise her decisions. She does not take into account the comments we made." (ZNP, 2018)

On the other hand, the SLD member (2023) claimed there were no consultations as there was insufficient time. In its report, Supreme Audit Office (in Polish: Najwyższa Izba Kontroli; abbreviation: NIK) described that the then-Minister of Education *"unreliably prepared and implemented changes to the education system"* (NIK, 2019, p. 7).

5.4. Schools' Management

5.4.1. Board of Education

5.4.1.1. Involvement in Policymaking

Boards of Education represent the Ministry of Education and Science in voivodeships (Leniart, 2018). Boards of Education have not shared any opinion about the reform.

According to Teachers' Union "Forum Oświaty" member (2023), Boards of Education held meetings with school principals and teachers' trade unions. "Forum Oświaty" member (2023) described the consultations as *"quite heated"* and pointed out the *"high cost of implementing the reform"* as the main topic discussed (see: Table 5 in Appendix B).

The head of the Department of Education (2023) indicated the significant influence of the Boards of Education on educational reform from 2016. He also added that the Boards of Education and the Ministry of Education and Science created the main assumptions of the reform. Łukasz Ługowski, director of the Youth Sociotherapy Center, indicated that the Boards of Education had such a significant influence because they acted on behalf of the Minister (Dąbrowska, 2016).

The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023), however, pointed out that the Boards of Education were against the curriculum proposed by the Ministry.

5.4.2. Parents' Councils

5.4.2.1. Opinion about the Reform

According to the response of the former chairman of the Parents' Council, parents' general opinions were divided:

“In our municipality, the lower secondary schools worked very well. People in smaller towns tended to support the existence of lower-secondary schools, while those living in the cities opposed them.” (Former chairman of the Parents' Council, 2023)

This division in parents' opinions was confirmed in the report of CBOS (2017a, p. 14). The report indicates that parents of school-age children were generally more critical of the reform than other parents. Additionally, CBOS (2017a, p. 14) stated that the parents who were against the reform did not believe that the structural change, i.e., the abolition of lower secondary schools, would improve the quality of education (see: Table 5 in Appendix B).

According to the former chairman of the Parents' Council (2023), the primary concern of the parents was the issue of the double yearbooks, i.e., that the older children that attended lower secondary school and younger children who attended only primary school, would graduate in the same year what would result in increased competition while applying to secondary schools as well as higher education institutions. The parents were also worried about *“combining younger children with older ones in classes”* and that *“the core curriculum would be discontinued”* (Former chairman of the Parents' Council, 2023). Moreover, uncertainty was scary to the parents, as they did not know what the school-leaving exam would look like and what would happen to the children who did not receive the promotion during the last year of the existence of lower-secondary schools (Former chairman of the Parents' Council, 2023).

5.4.2.2. Involvement in Policymaking

The main task of the Parents' Council is to represent all the parents from the given school (Elementary school principal and Teachers' Trade Union “Solidarnosc” member, 2023). Parents' Council, during the process of the reform preparation, were expected to give their opinion about the financial plan set by the schools' principals (NIK, 2019, p. 43). NIK (2019, p. 43) reports that not all the school principals managed to submit the financial plan to the Parents' Council. According to the elementary school principal (2023), Parents' Councils were also expected to share their opinion about the reform in general with the school principals. NIK

(2019, p. 43) also states that the Ministry undertook all the efforts to inform parents about the assumption and implementation of the reform.

According to the rapport of NIK (2019, p. 42), parents, teachers, and school principals sent different signals to the Ministerium, sharing their concerns caused by the idea of the lower secondary schools' abolition. Parents mostly informed the Ministry about their concerns regarding too many primary school teaching units and double yearbooks (NIK, 2019, p. 42). Parents in groups and individually also submitted over 20 petitions to the Ministry of Education and Science (Kisiolek, 2021, p. 9). Moreover, parents *"were able to turn to the Boards of Education, which have the most influence when it comes to representing parents at the state level,"* and therefore, they tried to *"influence Minister Zalewska"* that way (Former chairman of the Parents' Council, 2023). According to the former chairman of the Parents' Council (2023), parents also submitted their petitions to the teachers' trade unions.

The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023) confirmed the strong voices of the opposition coming from the parents:

"Therefore, parents, parents' associations, and associations running non-public schools expressed strong opposition. These entities were concerned about students (...) and the teaching staff." (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023)

The former chairman of the Parents' Council (2023) confirmed the view that parents were sending the petitions to the government, but at the same time, were not explicitly asked to share their opinion and thus could not influence the process of policymaking:

"I believe that the voices of the Parents' Council did not have any influence on the final shape of the reform. Parents' opinions were not listened to." (Former chairman of the Parents' Council, 2023)

As parents' opinion about the reform was polarised back then, the former chairman of the Parents' Council (2023) expressed that *"the best option then would have been a referendum."*

5.4.3. School Principals

5.4.3.1. Opinion about the Reform

According to the opinion of the elementary school principal (2023), the views of the school principals about the reform from 2016 were also polarised (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). However, in the personal opinion of the interviewed primary school principal, the abolition of the lower secondary school was a great decision as *"these lower-secondary schools were places*

with many problems, aggression and violence” (Elementary school principal and Teachers’ Union “Solidarnosc” member, 2023). She also described the lower secondary schools as *“artificial creations where the young people who posed many problems for educators, psychologists, educators, teachers, and parents- gathered”* (Elementary school principal and Teachers’ Union “Solidarnosc” member, 2023). The elementary school principal (2023) claimed that returning the system from the past would positively influence the quality of education.

5.4.3.2. Involvement in Policymaking

The primary school principal admitted that principals participated in the consultations organised by “ZNP” and “Solidarnosc” teachers’ unions (Elementary school principal and Teachers’ Union “Solidarnosc” member, 2023). Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Science sent online surveys to the school principals to determine their views on the reform (Elementary school principal and Teachers’ Union “Solidarnosc” member, 2023). NIK (2019, p. 14) also reported that the Ministry conducted online surveys among school principals. NIK (2019, p. 14) pointed out that most school principals opposed curriculum changes.

The elementary school principal and Teachers’ Union “Solidarnosc” member (2023) also underlined that the other tool that the Ministry used to collect the information from the principals was Educational Information System (in Polish: System Informacji Oświatowej; abbreviation SIO). School principals must complete the information about the equipment and the school staff. The Ministry of Education, based on this information, decided on the shape of educational reform (Elementary school principal and Teachers’ Union “Solidarnosc” member, 2023). NIK (2019, p. 40), however, pointed out that SIO was not a reliable source of information.

The former chairman of the Parents' Council (2023), on the other hand, shared a doubt that primary school principals could influence policymaking:

“We believe that school principals participated in the policy-making process. However, likely, this was imposed from above, and no one listened to school principals too much”
(Former chairman of the Parents' Council, 2023)

5.4.4. Teachers

5.4.4.1. Opinion about the Reform

The teachers' opinions about the reform were also divided (Elementary school principal and Teachers' Union "Solidarnosc" member, 2023) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). However, a former lower secondary school teacher (2023) claimed that the teachers' community was generally against the reform as teachers feared losing their jobs, even though the Ministry of Education and Science assured them it would not happen. Additionally, the teachers were against the "*overloaded curriculum*" and other problems resulting from the structural part of the reform (Former lower secondary school teacher, 2023). This opinion of the teacher has also been shared in Slawomir Broniarz's letter to then-Minister of Education Anna Zalewska:

"The idea raises many concerns in the teaching community. The consequences of the systemic abolition of lower secondary schools are wide-ranging and involve changes to the structure of the education system, school textbooks, grading, external exams, subsidisation, framework teaching plans, the core curriculum, school statutes, the school base and staffing." (Broniarz, 2015)

5.4.4.2. Involvement in Policymaking

Anna Zalewska claimed that the teachers were engaged in policymaking:

"(...) very often teachers came to us or wrote comments." (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 32:23-32:27).

A former lower secondary school teacher (2023), noted that the teachers were not asked about their opinion, and the reform was just introduced "top-down", without the help of any consultations:

"A lot of teachers commented that the 8-class system was good, but no one asked us what the new system should be." (Former lower secondary school teacher, 2023)

The elementary school principal and Teachers' Union "Solidarnosc" member (2023) pointed out that the teachers per se were not participating in the policymaking but belonged to the teachers' unions which aim to represent and protect the teachers. Being part of the teachers' union is voluntary. Therefore, teachers could influence the decisions of the Ministry, through teachers' unions:

*“The unions discuss with the teachers, (...) while all other institutions do not do that. (...)”
(Elementary school principal and Teachers’ Union “Solidarnosc” member, 2023)*

This view has also been confirmed in the report of NIK (2019, p. 42), where one can read that the teachers’ union presented the teachers’ concerns to the Ministry.

Teachers also tried influencing the Ministry’s decision by attending the protests (Onet News, 2016b, 0:08-0:10).

5.5. Local Governments

5.5.1. Opinion about the Reform

Regarding local governments, municipalities were generally against the reform, whereas counties were less sceptical about it (Suchecka, 2016b) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). According to the head of the Department of Education (2023), municipalities had mainly financial concerns. Municipalities received funding from the central government for every year of primary and lower secondary school, which meant funding for nine years of education. Abolishing lower secondary schools and extending primary school to eight years would mean municipalities receive less funding as they were responsible for one year less education. On the other hand, counties responsible for secondary schools would count on more financial support as the duration of secondary schools was extended to one year. However, both municipalities and counties were worried about staff and spatial problems that could result from the reform (Head of the Department of Education, 2023). This view was confirmed by the deputy mayor of the municipality, who mentioned that local governments *“mainly focused only on the structural part of the planned education reform.”* (Deputy Mayor of the Municipality, 2023). Additionally, in the view of local governments, *“(…) lower secondary schools were functioning well, so there was no need to change that”* (Deputy Mayor of the Municipality, 2023).

The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023) also added that in the case of the rural municipalities, lower secondary schools worked incredibly well as the classes could have an optimal number of students, and therefore there was no need to hire additional staff, which would generate more costs.

5.5.2. Involvement in Policymaking

According to the SLD member (2023), local governments were involved in policymaking because they were the ones to face the most significant consequences caused by this reform. The SLD member mentioned that *“first, the local governments in 1999 had to create lower*

secondary schools, and in 2016 this had to be changed again.” (SLD member, 2023). The financial, teachers’ staff and spatial problems (Former chairman of the parents’ council, 2023) that this reform could cause, motivated local governments to organise the conferences where *“they discussed the idea of abolishing lower secondary schools. Very specific positions and concrete proposals were made there. The local government was very active (...).”* (SLD member, 2023).

Moreover, local governments *“spoke to politicians in the region and conveyed their concerns to them.”* (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023). Local governments also organised debates with the people to determine what the citizens thought about the reform (NIK, 2019, p. 48). However, the regional director of the Teachers’ Union “ZNP” (2023) claimed that only the local governments, which did not support PiS, dared to fight against the reform openly. During the parliamentary speech, PiS party member Iwona Michalek mentioned that the local government of the city of Posen contacted her while sharing their financial concerns. The PiS member, however, commented that this local government *“out of the blue, calculated some exorbitant sums of money”* (Iwona Michałek’s speech at the meeting of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26, 2016).

Then-Minister of Education, Anna Zalewska, held debates with the local governments. For example, during one of the debates, a rural municipality’s mayor asked about financial support for the lower governments. He received a concrete answer from Anna Zalewska, stating when the issue would be discussed (Samorząd Województwa Podkarpackiego, 2017, 3:53-4:10). During the 26th meeting of the Polish parliament, Anna Zalewska also pointed out that she was hearing critical voices coming to her, for example from Lower Silesian Marshal’s Office (Anna Zalewska’s speech at the meeting of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26, 2016). Head of the Department of Education (2023), however, criticised these debates conducted by Anna Zalewska:

“There were meetings organised by the Ministry of Education at which representatives of the local government were able to ask questions about the proposed changes. Unfortunately, many doubts were not clarified or elaborated, e.g., questions related to the necessity of incurring costs for the adaptation of the premises of primary schools and about the premises of the existing lower secondary schools.” (Head of the Department of Education, 2023)

Beata Szydło, then-Prime Minister, on the other hand, confirmed that Anna Zalewska was organising the consultations with local governments while also engaging other actors:

“Tomorrow, here in the Prime Minister’s Office, we will meet with voivodes and Boards of Education. We have prepared a full briefing on the changes being introduced. (...) We will oblige the voivodes, the curators, to organise meetings.” (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 4:45-5:05)

Szydło, also mentioned that the opinion of local governments was necessary for the Ministry of Education (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 2:10-2:38).

The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023) pointed out that the voices of single municipalities did not mean much as *“they are not strong enough”* (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023). Therefore, local governments decided to engage in policymaking through the Polish Union of Rural Municipalities and the Union of Polish Cities (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023; Head of the Department of Education, 2023). However, the municipality’s deputy mayor claimed that local governments effectively did not influence the reform’s shape because *“if the local governments had that influence, the lower secondary schools would not have been abolished.”* as *“local governments told the then-Prime Minister that this reform was difficult and dangerous.”* (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023). The same opinion was shared by the head of the Department of Education (2023). NIK (2019, p. 35) also reported that local governments did not receive the funding they requested from the Ministry of Education.

5.6. The Commissioner for Human Rights (RPO)

5.6.1. Involvement in Policymaking

Relating to the words of the deputy mayor of the municipality (2023), the Commissioner for Human Rights (in Polish: Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich; abbreviation: RPO) was also engaged in policymaking (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). RPO was talking to the parents as well as local governments. Afterwards, RPO submitted collected opinions to the then Minister Anna Zalewska (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023). The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023), however, claimed that RPO did not have much impact on policymaking:

“The government also listened to the Commissioner’s comments. However, this was a formal correctness as the Commissioner’s opinions and explanations were not ultimately taken into account.” (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023)

5.7. Coalition “NIE”

5.7.1. Opinion about the Reform

Coalition “NIE” is a social movement created to oppose the educational reform of 2016 (NIE dla chaosu w szkole, 2017). The coalition was against the abolition of lower secondary schools, as it considered the reform an unnecessary revolution (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). Coalition “NIE”, claimed that the Ministry of Education should have built the new things on the existing basics instead of trying to rebuild everything from the beginning. The coalition also supported its opinion with educational studies. Additionally, the danger of job losses for many teachers was underlined (NIE dla chaosu w szkole, 2017).

5.7.2. Involvement in Policymaking

The Coalition “NIE” was involved in the policymaking by appealing to Anna Zalewska to postpone the reform. Moreover, the Coalition prepared the improvements it shared with the Ministry of Education and Science (NIE dla chaosu w szkole, 2017). This social movement tried to mobilise others to join its protest (NIE dla chaosu w szkole, n.d.). The coalition also criticised the ways of conducting the consultations by Anna Zalewska:

“Instead of dialogue, public consultation and an attempt to reach a consensus, they present an (...) arrogance towards anyone who dares to criticise the reform.” (NIE dla chaosu w szkole, 2017)

Additionally, the coalition did not feel included in the policymaking process:

“(...) the reform is becoming a reality. We no longer have the possibility to prevent the destruction of lower secondary schools, the introduction of incompetently prepared core curricula, the waste of the colossal public money needed to implement the changes.” (NIE dla chaosu w szkole, 2017)

5.8. NGOs

5.8.1. Involvement in Policymaking

The head of the Department of Education (2023) pointed out that many NGOs were also involved in policymaking by sending their opinions to the Ministry. The head of the Department of Education (2023) gave Stefan Batory Foundation as an example of an NGO which shared its opinion (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023) specified that many NGOs which were ideologically liberal were involved. That was, for example, the

organisations aiming to promote sexual education in schools. These NGOs were mainly fighting to liberalise the newly introduced curriculum.

5.9. Experts

5.9.1. *Opinion about the Reform*

The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023) claimed that conservative experts supported the reform, whereas liberal ones opposed it (see: Table 5 in Appendix B).

Referring to the interview of Katarzyna Lubnauer from Modern Party, both experts and existing studies did not support the idea of lower secondary school abolition (Onet News, 2016b, 0:26-0:34). This view was also supported by the members of Teachers' Union "ZNP" who pointed out that according to the studies of Institute for Educational Research (IBE), the abolition of lower secondary schools, would not significantly minimise the violence in schools (ZNP, personal communication, 2023). The interviewed political science expert (2023) also confirmed that most experts were against the abolition of lower secondary schools as it might have caused job losses.

The bunch of educational researchers also wrote in their collective letter to then-Minister of Education Anna Zalewska that *"the radicalness and speed of the changes mean years of organisational turmoil in education"* (Educational research experts, 2016). In the study of Grochowalska and Sajdera (2017, p. 21-22), one can read that the constant disagreements between political parties in Poland, lead to the fact that with every newly elected government, thoroughly new educational reforms are introduced, which poses a danger to the stability and therefore also the quality of the educational system. Thus, Grochowalska and Sajdera (2017), criticised in their study the abolition of the lower-secondary school as it would cause further destabilisation of Polish education.

5.9.2. *Involvement in Policymaking*

Anna Zalewska communicated that the reform was prepared with the help of educational researchers who shared their studies with the Ministry (Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2016, 1:47-2:04). Zalewska also underlined that the Ministry held regular meetings two days a week with the experts (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 8:05-8:30). The political science expert (2023) confirmed that educational experts and sociologists were engaged in policymaking. Teachers' Union "Forum Oswiata" member (2023) additionally informed that university professors were intensely involved in the debates. According to Anna Zalewska, the Ministry of Education and

Science created teams of experts that were expected to deal with the different issues of the reform (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 40:42-41:00):

“We worked in very diverse teams. From February onwards, there were indeed very different configurations. Concerning the fact that those teams that worked on the core curriculum had a diagnosis carried out since February. It was the diagnosis of professors, academics, practitioners” (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 32:08-32:23)

Zalewska also explained the configuration of the teams:

“(…) we had a request that each group have a professor, a practitioner, a representative of the Central Examination Commission, and a representative working with gifted Olympic students and specialists in special education. These were the primary conditions for constructing the team.” (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 32:43-33:25)

That was confirmed in the report of NIK (2019, p. 34). The then-Minister of Education additionally described the resignation of some experts during the policymaking process as a *“natural team selection”* (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 32:43-32:50).

The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023), however, claimed that Anna Zalewska was inviting mostly conservative experts to the consultations, as they supported the reform. This view was also shared by the PO member, who described the experts as *“propagandists and ideologues of the right.”* (PO member, 2023). The Coalition “NIE” pointed out that the consultations with the experts were not reliable, as *“instead of scientific research and expertise, there was a propaganda.”* (NIE dla chaosu w szkole, 2017). Regional Director of Teachers’ Union “ZNP” (2023) added that Anna Zalewska *“linked the structural reform to the reform of the core curriculum”* and that the then-Minister of Education revealed the names of the expert first, after the intervention of the court (Regional Director of Teachers’ Union “ZNP”, 2023). NIK (2019, p. 14) confirmed that only 20 % of the experts taking part in the consultations, were indicated by the independent institutions, whereas the rest were chosen by Anna Zalewska herself. In terms of the issues which can be considered contentious, like, for example, the curriculum of the subject “Upbringing for life in the family”, only experts chosen by Anna Zalewska took part in the consultations (NIK, 2019, p. 14). The Ministry of Education has also not provided the expert selection criteria (NIK, 2019, p. 14). Moreover, no specific criteria stated how the experts would be paid, and the salaries for experts varied *“both between subject teams and within individual teams”* (NIK, 2019, p. 35).

Suchecka (2016b) indicated that the academics who opposed the reform sent letters to Anna Zalewska. In one of such letters, the academics wrote that many of them *“have conducted or*

participated in these surveys and are disturbed to see how their results are interpreted one-sidedly.” (Educational research experts, 2016). At the same time, the experts appealed to Zalewska to give them a chance to participate in the consultations:

“(…) We ask for adequate time for a debate involving the broad scientific community in discussing the future of Polish education. We call for scientific research results and experts’ voices to be considered when planning future transformations. We ask for a sufficiently long, democratic consultation process in which there will be time for joint reflection on how to change Polish schools gradually and evolutionarily. We are convinced that Polish schools need improvement and want to discuss it with you. (...)” (Educational research experts, 2016)

The political science expert (2023) claimed that experts generally had a lot of influence on policymaking. However, their impact was reduced due to the protest of the reform opponents.

5.10. Catholic Church

5.10.1. Involvement in Policymaking

One of the interview partners, a PO member (2023), indicated the Catholic Church as one of the actors significantly influencing educational policymaking (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023) also shared this opinion:

“It should also be mentioned the influence of the church, mainly the Catholic Church. The church influenced the content of the curriculum.” (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023)

5.11. Referendum Committee

5.11.1. Involvement in Policymaking

Referendum Committee was created to fight for the referendum determining whether the Poles supported educational reform. Committee managed to submit over 900'000 signatures to the Polish parliament. The signatures were collected under the proposal of holding the referendum. The parliament verified and accepted the signatures (CBOS, 2017b, p. 1) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). The referendum was about to take place on the 1st of September 2016. It was supposed to pose the question: *“Are you against the education reform that the government is introducing from 1 September 2017?”* (CBOS, 2017b, p. 1). Finally, the government voted against the referendum, so it did not occur (CBOS, 2017b).

5.12. Government Legislative Centre

5.12.1. Opinion about the Reform and the Involvement in Policymaking

In one of the interviews with Katarzyna Lubnauer, it was said that Government Legislative Centre opposed the idea of educational reform (Onet News, 2016b, 0:8-0:14) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B). According to Suchecka (2016a), Government Legislative Centre prepared the official document with objections to the reform. The document was shared with the Ministry of Education and Science. Government Legislative Centre saw the new law as needing to be more specified (Suchecka, 2016a). Legislative Center therefore tried to participate in policymaking by sharing opinions about the reform.

5.13. President Andrzej Duda

5.13.1. Opinion about the Reform

President Andrzej Duda found the idea of lower secondary school abolition good. President also advocated extending secondary school duration and improving vocational education (PAP, 2016) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B).

5.13.2. Involvement in Policymaking

The official website of the Polish president informed that Andrzej Duda, together with the First Lady, Agata Kornhauser-Duda attended the meeting of the National Development Council, where they discussed the idea of the reform together with then-Educational Minister, Anna Zalewska. Andrzej Duda admitted that his involvement in policymaking could have been improved, as he needed more knowledge to bring meaningful impacts (PAP, 2016).

President's wife's opinion also guided his actions, as the First Lady was a teacher (PAP, 2016). This fact was also noted by the former chairman of the Parents' Council:

“Polish President Andrzej Duda also to justify his support for the education reform supported himself with the opinion of his teacher wife.” (Former chairman of the Parents' Council, 2023)

5.14. *Ombudsman for Children*

5.14.1. *Opinion about the Reform and Involvement in Policymaking*

The Ombudsman for Children was concerned about the policymaking process, especially regarding the curriculum. The Ombudsman advised the Ministry to hire more transparent experts working on the reform (NIK, 2019, p. 14) (see: Table 5 in Appendix B).

5.15. *Changes due to the Consultations*

5.15.1. *The Changes that Occurred*

First, according to NIK (2019, p. 34), Anna Zalewska dissolved one team of experts preparing the curriculum after the accusations of untransparent selection of the experts. She established a new way to create the curriculum (see: Table 6 in Appendix B). The former chairman of the Parents' Council (2023) also pointed out that the curriculum experienced minor changes because of consultations.

Secondly, during the speech at the 26th parliamentary meeting, Anna Zalewska admitted that, after the discussion with the politician Jaroslaw Gowin, then-Minister of Science and Higher Education, the Ministry changed some general reform assumptions regarding vocational education (Anna Zalewska's speech at the meeting of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland No. 26, 2016). Anna Zalewska confirmed this the second time during the conference held with then-Prime Minister, Beata Szydlo:

"(...) The loudest issue that we discussed was about the vocational school. There was talk that there would be two school-leaving exams, which was unequal treatment, so there would be only one type of exam after the consultations. I invite you to visit the website for the rest because everything can be found there." (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 29:23-30:10)

This has also been confirmed by the Teachers' Union "Forum Oswiata" member (2023):

"The original content of the reform envisaged a different division, mainly when it came to vocational schools." (Teachers' Union "Forum Oswiata" member, 2023)

Thirdly, Beata Szydlo, then-Prime Minister, confirmed that the Ministry of Education and Science was conducting general consultations that led to the final shape of the reform. Anna Zalewska clarified that the changes were mostly connected to the protection of the teachers by securing their workplaces, increasing salaries, and improving their working conditions, for example, by ensuring a psychologist in every school (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 28:27-29:18).

Elementary school principal and “Solidarnosc” member (2023) confirmed that schools were offered a lot of financial help, as for example funding for the creation of canteens and funding for the nurses and psychologists in every school that would allow the schools to improve their infrastructures and services offered to pupils. This view has also been confirmed by the former chairman of the Parents` Council and the deputy mayor of the municipality:

“At that time, the Law and Justice party proposed a lot of assistance programs for teachers so that there was not a lot of opposition related to job losses. They also started to raise teachers` salaries. (...)” (Former chairman of the Parents` Council, 2023)

“To satisfy the teachers, the government agreed to subventions. In addition, subsidies for equipment, additional subsidies (...) have been introduced” (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023)

The former chairman of the Parents` Council (2023) additionally pointed out that many teachers were allowed to retire early. Teachers` Union “Formum Oswiata” member (2023) confirmed that the subject of early retirement for the teachers was the result of the consultation:

“The government has developed a system of early retirement for senior teachers of lower secondary schools and the possibility of redeploying these teachers to teach in primary schools.” (Teachers` Union “Forum Oswiata” member, 2023)

Fourthly, because of the consultations with local governments, the Ministry of Education decided to increase the education subsidies:

“The government communicated that it was taking the suggestions of the local authorities into account, and the education subsidies for local authorities were also increased. The government declared that it had taken on board the voices of concern. Salaries were increased, and further financial assistance to local governments was declared” (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023)

Finally, the head of the Department of Education (2023) suggested many changes happened after implementing the reform. The changes were forced by real-life situations and concerned chiefly the legal side of the reform. The elementary school principal and “Solidarnosc” member (2023) pointed out that legal changes were mainly introduced after the intervention of other ministries.

5.15.2. Changes that Did Not Occur

There were, however, some views that none of the changes occurred. According to the report of CBOS, the government led by Beata Szydlo did not accept the referendum proposal as it

came “*too late*” (CBOS, 2017b, p. 1) (see: Table 6 in Appendix B). Moreover, during the conference with Beata Szydło and Anna Zalewska, a journalist- Grzegorz Kwolek, pointed out that he did not notice any changes due to the consultations (Kancelaria Premiera, 2016, 22:33-22:39). This view has been confirmed by the political science expert (2023) who also did not notice any changes that resulted from the consultations. The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023) also saw the issue this way:

“The Polish government wanted to show that the opinions of various actors count. However, these were only appearances. After meetings and debates, the ministry did not accept the changes that were discussed” (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023)

5.16. Coalitions

5.16.1. The Coalition of Oppositional Parties, “ZNP”, Local Governments, NGOs, RPO and Schools

Relating to the words of an SLD member (2023), there was pressure between oppositional parties to cooperate with each other because the one that did not was seen as “*a traitor*” (SLD member, 2023). It was mostly the case for the parties on the left side of the political spectrum with similar visions of education (Melendowicz, 2019, p. 39) (see: Figure 9 in Appendix B). Oppositional parties, especially SLD, cooperated with the Teachers’ Trade Union “ZNP”. It was because the Teachers’ Trade Union “ZNP” was at first part of the SLD party. According to an SLD member (2023), it has changed as “ZNP” “*is no longer as linked to the left as it was*”, and “*its members no longer belong only to the SLD but to PO, other organisations, and other parties*” (SLD member, 2023). This, however, confirms that the Teachers’ Union “ZNP” is still strongly linked to oppositional, relatively liberal parties.

“ZNP” also cooperated with the local governments, which was exceptional because “*usually, local governments are against trade unions. This time, however, the teachers’ unions and the local governments were on the same side*” (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023). This view has been confirmed by the head of the Department of Education (2023). “ZNP” and local governments also cooperated in collecting the signatures under the referendum proposal (PO member, 2023).

Moreover, local governments, as the actors responsible for primary and lower secondary schools, cooperated with these schools. Local governments exchanged information about the reform with the Parents’ Councils and the school principals. At the same time, local governments organised conferences with the school communities to exchange ideas (NIK,

2019, p. 22). “ZNP” was also trying to convince the teachers to join the strike and therefore oppose the educational reform from 2016 (Elementary school principal and Teachers’ Trade Union “Solidarnosc” member, 2023) (see: Figure 4).

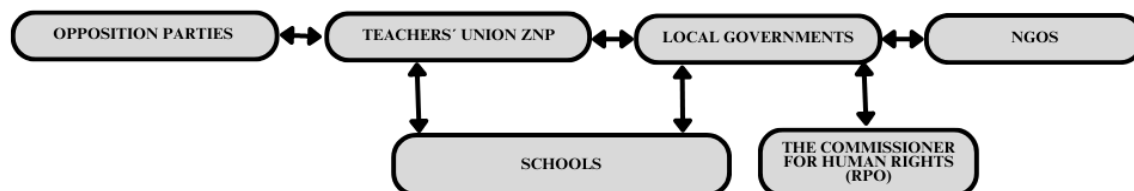


Figure 4: The illustration of the coalition of oppositional parties, "ZNP", local governments, NGOs, RPO and schools (source: self-created table, 2023)

Local governments additionally collaborated with NGOs and the Commissioner for Human Rights (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023).

5.16.2. Coalition Set Around the School Principals

According to NIK (2019, p. 41), school principals cooperated with other institutions, which would be directly touched by educational reform. That were local governments and Boards of Education. These actors were exchanging opinions but also information about the reform. School principals also cooperated with the Ministry of Education of Science regarding exchanging information (NIK, 2019, p. 41) (see: Figure 10 in Appendix B).

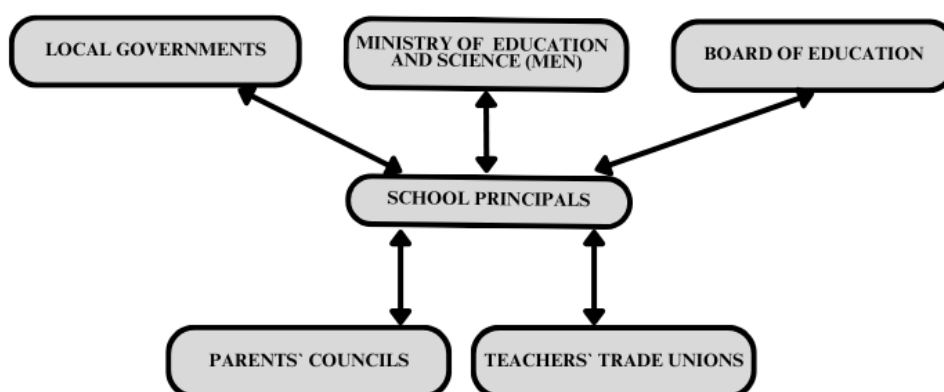


Figure 5: The illustration of the coalition set around the school principals (source: self-created table, 2023)

Teachers’ Union “Forum Oswiata” member (2023) also mentioned that the Parents’ Councils cooperated with the school principals, by exchanging their views on the reform. School principals cooperated with the teachers’ trade unions as well (Teachers’ Union “Forum Oswiata” member, 2023) (see: Figure 5).

5.16.3. Coalition of Local Governments

Local governments were also in the coalition while using existing structures (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023). An example of such a structure was the Joint Commission of Government and Local Governments, where the government discussed the reform's assumption with local governments. Local governments presented their opinions about the reform there and negotiated with the government (SLD member, 2023) (see: Figure 11 in Appendix B).

Suchecka (2016b) and SLD member (2023) also pointed out the activity of the local governments in the Association of Polish Cities, which associates “urban and rural-urban municipalities” (Head of the Department of Education, 2023):

“The Association of Polish Cities was a co-organiser of the local government conferences. There they discussed the idea of abolishing lower secondary schools. Very concrete positions and concrete proposals were made there. The local government was very active (...).” (SLD member, 2023)

The deputy mayor of the municipality (2023) also mentioned other corporations of local governments but meant for rural municipalities:

“(...) such a corporation, (...) is the Union of Rural Municipalities of the Republic. It is a self-government corporation with the rights of an association. The Union brings together more than 600 municipalities. This self-government corporation has a joint committee of government and local self-government. Issue teams are formed for various issues. These teams discuss the views and opinions of the different assumptions of the laws.” (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023)

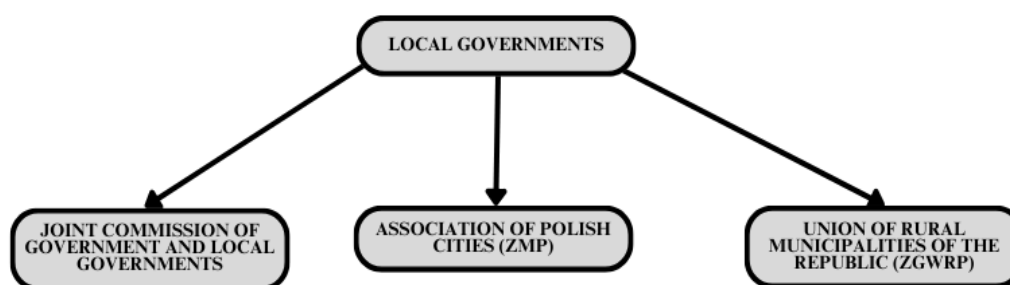


Figure 6: The illustration of the coalition of local governments (source: self-created table, 2023)

Suchecka (2016b) mentioned that the Union of Rural Municipalities strongly opposed the reform (see: Figure 6).

5.16.4. Coalition of the Ministry of Education and Science

The Ministry of Education and Science (MEN) was also part of a coalition. Naturally, MEN cooperated with the governing in a majoritarian way Law and Justice (PiS) party as the then-Minister of Education, belongs to PiS herself. PiS collaborated, on the other hand, also with the experts who were ideologically near the party. Similarly, PiS could count on the support of the local governments governed by PiS members (Suchecka, 2016b). Law and Justice party was also supported by the other conservative political parties who shared similar views of how education in Poland should look (Melandowicz, 2019, p. 390) (see: Figure 12 in Appendix B).

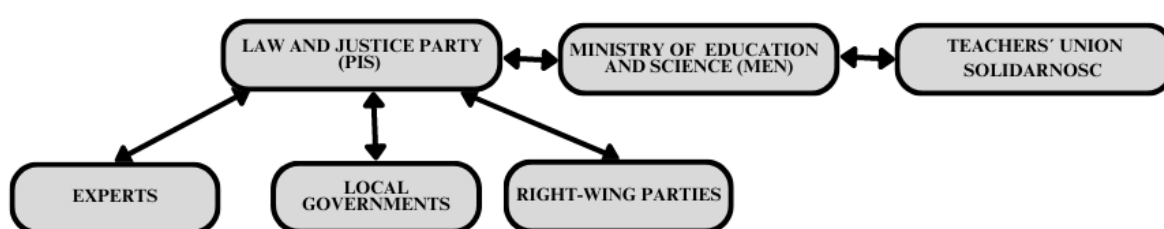


Figure 7: The illustration of the coalition of the Ministry of Education and Science (source: self-created table, 2023)

The strong cooperation of MEN with the Teachers' Trade Union "Solidarnosc" was also visible. It was the case since "Solidarnosc" supports Law and Justice party and, therefore, its ideas (Elementary school principal and Teachers' Union "Solidarnosc" member, 2023). The deputy mayor of the municipality described "Solidarnosc" as *"ideologically close to the government"* (Deputy mayor of the municipality, 2023). Suchecka (2016b) described this union as a significant ally of Law and Justice (see: Figure 7).

5.16.5. Official Coalitions Created Due to the Reform

Because of the reform, even two official coalitions (see: Figure 8) were created. One of these coalitions was Coalition "NO to the school chaos" (in Polish: "NIE dla chaosu w szkole"), which described itself as:

"We are representatives of organisations and associations working for Polish education. We differ, we have different views, but we all say NO to the changes introduced by the current educational authorities. Changes to the school system's structure, leading to the abolition of lower secondary schools, cancel 17 years of educational and upbringing experience." (NIE dla chaosu w szkole, 2017)

One of the main activities of the Coalition “NIE” was to collect the signatures under the referendum proposal, together with the Teachers’ Trade Union “ZNP” as well as most of the municipalities (PO member, 2023) (see: Figure 13 in Appendix B).

Coalition “NO to the school chaos” was part of the other official coalition, the “Referendum Committee”. “Referendum Committee”, unlike the Coalition “NIE”, did not unify only representatives of educational institutions. “Referendum Committee”, was an enormous coalition of different circles, such as *“trade unions, organisations, NGOs, parents’ associations, and other actors”* (CBOS, 2017b, p. 1). The Committee consisted more specifically of the following:

“(…) 15 representatives of various organisations, such as ZNP, Parents Against Education Reform, the coalition 'No to Chaos in School', PO, Nowoczesna, Razem, PSL, the National Forum for Non-Public Education, the Social Educational Society, the Women's Congress, OPZZ, the National Alliance of Parents and Parents' Councils, the Polish Initiative” (CBOS, 2017b, p. 1).

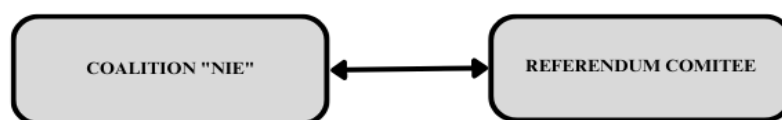


Figure 8: The illustration of the coalition created due to the reform (source: self-created table, 2023)

“Referendum Committee”, like the coalition “NO to the school chaos”, primarily focused on the organisation of the referendum (CBOS, 2017b, p. 1).

6. Discussion

This chapter aims to discuss the involvement of the different actors in educational policymaking in Poland in 2016 while basing on the Network Governance Theory, as described by Rhodes (1996). Later, the implications and limitations of the study are pointed out.

6.1. Network Governance Theory

6.1.1. Existence of Different Actors

According to the results, different actors coexisted. There were non-state actors, such as teachers' trade unions "ZNP", "Forum Oswiata" and "Solidarnosc", coalition "NIE", NGOs, experts, Catholic Church, and Referendum Committee. There were also state actors, like political parties PO, PiS, SLD and Nowoczesna, Ministries of Justice, National Defense, Development, Agriculture and Health and Boards of Education. The other state actors were teachers, school principals, Parents' Councils, local governments, Government Legislative Centre, President Andrzej Duda, Ombudsman for Children and the Commissioner for Human Rights. The central government, identified with the Ministry of Education and Science, was also part of the network.

As described in the study of Kersbergen & Waarden (2004, p. 151-152), the actors in the network are supposed to be independent and autonomous. According to the results, however, some actors such as Trade Teachers' Union "Solidarnosc", local governments governed by the PiS party, Catholic Church and experts were not fully autonomous, as they strongly depended on the governing party. Not to mention the Boards of Education, Law and Justice party, President Andrzej Duda, and the ministries officially linked to the Ministry of Education and Science. Interestingly, the members of the groups considered not fully independent were the ones who claimed to be heard the most. However, the rest of the actors could be considered autonomous and independent.

6.1.2. Negotiations to Achieve a Particular Goal

The "network governance" actors are supposed to negotiate to achieve a particular goal (Kersbergen & Waarden, 2004, p. 151-152). Looking at the results, one can notice that some consultations have taken place, and at the same time, different actors were allowed to share their opinion even if they were not officially encouraged to do so. The actors also created the coalitions to be more resourceful.

It is, however, visible that the negotiations took place in two different networks. The Ministry officially coordinated the first one, organising the debates and consultations with almost all previously mentioned state and non-state actors. Here, once set rules for the network's existence are noticeable (Rhodes, 2007, p. 1246; Rhodes, 1996, p. 660, as cited in Sager et al., 2018, p. 238-239). The negotiations that have taken part within this network led to some minor changes. The changes were generally connected to the guarantee of financial support for the actors who might have been disadvantaged due to the reform.

The second network occurred more spontaneously and was formed by the actors who were not included or did not feel heard in the network supervised by the Ministry. This can be seen as an example of the self-organisation of the actors (Sager et al., 2018, p. 233-235). The actors in this network questioned the validity of the network set by the then-Minister of Education, Anna Zalewska. In other words, they claimed that the rules of Anna Zalewska's reform were unfair and excluded oppositional actors. The actors active in the second type of network were liberal oppositional parties, liberal experts, the Teachers' Trade Union "ZNP" and some local governments, teachers, and parents. It is, however, important to mention that all of them were intensely sceptical about this reform. None of the postulates coming from this network had an impact on educational policymaking. The actors in this network created two big coalitions to be more resourceful: the Coalition "NIE" and "Referendum Committee", however, without success.

6.1.3. Lack of the Hierarchy

Actors who opposed the reform underlined that the ministry decided everything. The general tendency was that the actors who supported the reform also supported the government. Additionally, actors with positive attitudes to the reform, felt that their opinions were considered. Moreover, even the actors who generally felt heard and supported the reforms pointed out that the final decisionmaker was the Ministry of Education and Science. That would suggest the existence of a hierarchy, where the most critical decision-making actor was the formal government, which opposes the "network governance" stating that there should not be a hierarchy (Rhodes, 2007, p. 1246; Rhodes, 1996, p. 660, as cited in Sager et al., 2018, p. 238-239).

6.2. Implications

The results mainly contribute to the knowledge in the already existing literature.

The findings of this study confirm Wiśniewski and Zahorska's (2020, p. 181-183) conclusion that some actors were not included in 2016 educational policymaking, which implied the creation of new bodies. The other finding of Wiśniewski and Zahorska (2020, p. 181-183) was, that the parents, teachers, local governments, and experts participated in the policymaking. Contrary, Grzywna and Stępień-Lampa (2019, p. 121) claimed that these groups of actors were excluded from the policymaking process. Conducted research partially confirms both findings because the actors who supported the reform claimed to be heard by Anna Zalewska, whereas the opponents of the reform, noted that they hardly participated in the whole process. Therefore, the opinions of parents, teachers, local governments, and experts varied.

On the other hand, Grzywna and Stępień-Lampa (2019, p. 121) indicated an enormous role of "ZNP" and local governments in the policymaking process, which was also confirmed in this study. "ZNP", compared to two other teachers' unions and the other actors, undertook a lot of effort to influence the shape of the reform. Local governments were also intensely engaged. However, despite the financial support for teachers and municipalities they managed to negotiate, the "ZNP" and local governments' actions cannot be described as impactful.

Wiśniewski and Zahorska (2020, p. 181-183) pointed out that no changes were introduced, and that the Ministry decided everything. This view has also been only partially confirmed, as some changes due to the consultations were identified. However, the significant impact of the Ministry on the final decision-making was also determined.

Both Wiśniewski and Zahorska (2020) and Grzywna and Stępień-Lampa (2019) identified the strong impact of Anna Zalewska on the policymaking process. However, research indicates that the governing party, PiS and its management, could impact the final decision-making more than Anna Zalewska herself.

This thesis also confirmed the statement made by Jasiecki, (2015, 104-105; 108-113) that decision-making in the Polish context is mainly driven by political interest. In the case of educational policy from 2016, it was in the interest of the governing party, PiS, to conduct its reform unchanged. It was noted that PiS wanted to show the voters that it kept its promises but needed this structural reform to introduce curriculum changes to spread the party's ideology in schools. At the same time, it was in the interest of oppositional parties to stop the reform that came from the Law and Justice, their biggest political opponent. Admittedly Ministry of Education and Science, led by Anna Zalewska, accepted some changes suggested by the oppositional actors. However, these changes were minor and did not put the political interest of the Law and Justice, which was coming back to the old educational system, in danger.

The study by Jasiecki (2015, 104-105; 108-113) also stated that the political parties claim to engage many actors in policymaking as it can improve the party's image. In terms of educational policymaking in Poland in 2016, it was also the case as Law and Justice wanted to present itself as a party which listens to the people. According to some actors, Law and Justice wanted to legitimise its actions by creating the impression of many actors' inclusion in policymaking.

The changes introduced by the Ministry also slightly undermine Dobrowolski et al.'s (2016) opinion that consultations in Poland are primarily one-sided. However, a significant part of the consultations was Anna Zalewska informing the actors about the reform's assumptions.

Zahorska (2016, p. 53-54) concluded that the failure of the actors' inclusion in policymaking leads to the not acceptance of the reforms by these actors. The finding of this study confirmed Zahorska's (2016, p. 53-54) statement.

The government's decisive role in policymaking could indicate some aspects of Meta Governance Theory in the case of educational policymaking in Poland, in 2016. It is noticeable that there was a hierarchy, where the government and the Ministry played the most crucial role and set the roles of the networks. There were also signs of the existence of typical "network governance" characteristics, such as the existence of coalitions, negotiations, and many independent actors. The parts of market governance, were, however, not visible. On the other hand, the decision-making process was introduced quite efficiently, as many actors indicated the quick tempo of the reform (Meuleman, 2011, p. 101-102).

According to Meuleman (2011, p. 101-102), the existence of controlled networks can improve credibility and legitimisation. It is crucial to outline that both "meta governance" and "network governance" theories can be used to increase the legitimisation of policymaking, especially for the parties that can be considered as not fully democratic (Davis et al., 2016). Therefore, one cannot exclude that Law and Justice used the consultations to legitimise the decision about the reform.

Davis et al. (2016), also proved that authoritarian states, like Russia, also use the concept of network governance. However, oppositional actors are not included in the network. Although Poland is not an authoritarian regime but semi-consolidated democracy (Freedom House, 2022), the voices of the oppositional actors were also ignored to a great extent. However, the expression of critical opinion openly was not banned.

6.3. Limitations of Study

This study has some limitations that could lead to biased results. Firstly, there is a danger that interview partners did not fairly represent the actors participating in the policymaking. Considering that interview requests, mainly from the PiS members and supporters, were rejected, it also created the danger of interviewing more strongly anti-governmental actors whose opinions are biased. The same applies to the official documents the interview partners handed in. Moreover, regarding, strong political polarisation in Poland, the threat of intensely subjective answers also appeared while interviewing the partners favouring the ruling party. Therefore, the partisan preferences of the interview partners could lead to a falsified view of reality. The interviews have also taken place a few months before the parliamentary elections, which could increase the emotional aspect of the topic.

Additionally, the actors were interviewed in 2023 about the policy-making process that took place in 2016. There could be many facts that the interview partners forgot, which could increase the risk of collecting unreliable data. Many archival data from this time could also not be accessed anymore.

The other limitations are associated with the nature of qualitative research. A limited amount of time and a limited number of people could be interviewed, making the results difficult to generalise (Queirós, Faria & Almeida, 2017, p. 383). Additionally, other media, especially press publications, could be biased. There was also a danger that the conducted analysis was subjective, which could decrease the reliability of the findings.

What is more, there could be a problem of lacking data. Many official documents could not be accessed due to their confidential nature. Finally, a lot could happen behind closed doors, making understanding the policymaking process consideration more complicated.

Conclusion

Conservative Law and Justice party, after gaining a parliamentary majority and the president on its side after the elections in 2015, decided to introduce a vast reform of education that aimed to recreate the educational system from the past. Lower secondary schools were abolished, primary and secondary schools were extended, whereas the curriculum was generalised and nationalised. The party claimed that the reform was prepared with many other actors, which contradicted the statements appearing in existing studies.

Therefore, the thesis aimed to answer the following research question: ***How were the different actors involved in the educational policy-making process in Poland in 2016?***

The answer to this research question contributes to the literature on policymaking processes in countries governed by parties with authoritarian tendencies.

The research question has been answered qualitatively. The dataset includes interviews, existing studies, official documents, and media reports, which were analysed using the Qualitative Content Analysis method. The analysis has been based on Network Governance Theory.

The results indicate that the characteristics of “network governance” are visible in the case of the 2016 educational policymaking in Poland. State and non-state actors were included in the policymaking, whereas there were significantly more of state actors. The actors existed in the network with clear rules. There were also negotiations and cooperation between the actors. However, the results lead to three main conclusions that might question this case’s “network governance” quality.

First, the supporters of the government were automatically supporters of the reform. Analogically with the opponents of the reform. Therefore, the negotiations between the involved actors were strongly influenced by partisan preferences. That is a bit worrying as the education issue should be discussed beyond party divisions.

Second, pro-governmental actors whose independence might be doubtful felt included in the policymaking, whereas the government’s opponents felt ignored. That might indicate that the PiS government only considered the opinions of its supporters and ignored those of its opponents, even though the opponents engaged in policymaking significantly more.

Third, even though the consultations resulted in some minor changes, the main idea of the reform remained unchanged. That indicates that Law and Justice were the most resourceful actor and the final decision-maker, who might have used the network as a tool for reform legitimisation.

Considering the authoritarian tendencies of the Law and Justice party, one can conclude that this way of conducting the consultation might be typical for countries where democracy is either in danger or not fully developed yet. In that case, network governance does not fulfil its purpose, which is solving a problem but instead serves as a political tool to make the party look more democratic. It would be therefore recommended to study policymaking in other semi-democratic countries.

Considering the limitations of the study, it is also recommended for future research to study the issue of policymaking in Poland from the qualitative point of view to gain a more general perspective. Additionally, it could be beneficial to test the Network Governance theory on other policies introduced by Law and Justice after 2015 to investigate whether the results of this study are generalisable.

Selbstständigkeitserklärung für die Masterarbeit

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich diese Arbeit selbstständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe. Alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder sinngemäss aus Quellen entnommen wurden, habe ich als solche kenntlich gemacht. Mir ist bekannt, dass andernfalls der Senat gemäss dem Gesetz über die Universität zum Entzug des auf Grund dieser Arbeit verliehenen Titels berechtigt ist.



Aleksandra Pierzak

Olten, 17. August, 2023

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Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich der Veröffentlichung der von mir verfassten Masterarbeit im Falle einer Benotung von 5.0 oder höher auf der Homepage des KPM zustimme. Die Arbeit ist öffentlich zugänglich.



Aleksandra Pierzak

Olten, 17. August 2023

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Interviews:

1. Interview Alliance of Social Democrats (SLD) political party (conducted on 22nd of June 2023 at 1 PM)
2. Interview the head of the Department of Education of the city hall (conducted on 23rd of June 2023 at 5 PM)
3. Interview the regional director of the Teachers' Trade Union "ZNP" (Conducted on 23rd of June 2023 at 9 AM)
4. Interview with political science expert (conducted on 25th of June 2023 at 2:30 PM)
5. Interview with the Civil Platform (PO) political party member (conducted on 12th of June 2023 at 2:15 PM)
6. Interview with the deputy mayor of the rural municipality (conducted on 6th of June 2023 at 3 PM)
7. Interview with the former chairman of the Parents' Council (conducted on 22nd of May 2023 at 6 PM)
8. Interview with the former lower secondary school teacher (conducted on 27th of June 2023 at 11:00 AM)
9. Interview with the Teachers' Trade Union "Forum Oswiata" member (conducted on 7th of June 2023 at 2 PM)
10. Interview with the Teachers' Trade Union "Solidarnosc" member and primary school principal (conducted on 31st of May 2023 at 7 PM)