From Selectivity to Universalism: How Macro-Level Policy Narratives Shape Meso-Level Policy Outcomes?

Marcela Veselkova a and Miroslav Beblavý b

Paper prepared for the ECPR General Conference in Glasgow, 3-6 September 2014. Preliminary Draft. Please do not cite or circulate without authors’ permission.

Abstract

This paper presents the first macro-level Narrative Policy Framework study. We examine how narrative strategies of institutions at the macro-level (OECD) influence policy processes and outcomes at the meso-level. Our findings are as follows. The importation of macro-narrative of less selective schooling to Czech Republic and Slovakia following their accession to OECD contributed to the formation of the Pro-Later Tracking coalition. However, we do not observe convergence of meso-narratives towards the macro-narrative. This lack of policy learning across coalitions is the result of intractability of policy issue at the meso-level. We document the intractability of the issue of later tracking by differences in the use of narrative elements and narrative strategies. Finally, the intractability of the policy issue influenced also the use of expert-based information, which was used primarily for political purposes.

1. Introduction

Recent literature based on the comprehensive datasets from OECD’s PISA program suggests that the sooner the students are tracked, the greater the dependence of the student performance on family background (for a recent review of literature, see Woessmann, 2009). However, the ideas about equality of educational opportunities can be traced back to the progressivist movement, which began to dominate educational discourse at the dawn of the twentieth century (Labaree, 2005). Yet, despite an accumulation of expert-based information, the comprehensive school reforms in the post-World War II period show that efforts to postpone the age of tracking and reduce the rigidity of student selection often fail (for example, see Ambler, 1987; Apple, 2004; Farrell, 2000, Meier & Schutz, 2007; Merritt & Coombs, 1977; Weiler, 1988). It is so because this type of educational reform – a change in the age of tracking and the accompanying curricula reform – presents a specific type of reform, as it cuts to the core beliefs about the stratification in the society and is therefore deeply institutionalized (Esping-Andersen 1990). Later tracking should therefore be viewed as a “wicked problem” (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Extreme polarization along with uncertainty and complexity thus produce situations in which “the only things left to examine are...stories (Roe, 1994: 3).”

In this paper we use Narrative Policy Framework introduced by Jones and McBeth (2010) to examine the strategic construction of policy narratives and how they relate to winning or losing in the policy arena. Specifically, we examine how the macro-narrative of less selective schooling influenced the construction of policy narratives at the meso-level. To this end, we conduct case studies of proposals to abolish the multi-year gymnasium in the post-communist Czech Republic and Slovakia. We ask two research questions. First, did the macro-narrative lead to policy learning across coalitions? Second, are there intercoalitional

---

a Slovak Governance Institute, Bratislava. marcela.veselkova@gmail.com
b Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels; Comenius University, Bratislava. beblavy@governance.sk
differences in the use of narrative elements, narrative strategies, and policy beliefs between the two major advocacy coalitions in national case studies?

Our contributions are both theoretical and empirical. On a theoretical level, we formulate hypotheses about the relationship between the macro- and meso-level narratives. On the empirical level, this is the first NPF attempt to analyze how macro-narratives shape strategic construction of narratives at the meso-level. Finally, our research provides valuable policy lessons for those interested in education reform aimed at the postponement or advancement of the age of tracking.

2. Theoretical background

There is a growing stream of literature on the role of expert-based information in the policymaking process (for a recent review of literature, see Weible, 2008). Four of the most prominent theoretical approaches to the study of the policy making process suggest different uses of information in the policy process. According to the multiple streams theory, expert-based information is present in two of the streams. In the problem stream it helps identify causes of policy problems and in the policy stream it enables policy entrepreneurs to legitimize the proposed policy solution (Kingdon, 2010). In Punctuated Equilibrium theory, existing social constructions of the policy issue (the so-called policy images) serve as an obstacle for adjustment of behavior to new information (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). Any change in the policy image is therefore radical, as actors overcompensate for previous neglect of information, and may lead to the break up of policy monopolies. The social constructivist approach to policy making process views the expert-based information as a social construct, which may be used for reinforcing or destroying dominant social constructions of the policy issue (Schneider & Ingram, 1997; Ingram, 2007). However, both the punctuated equilibrium and social construction theories have failed to identify the source of policy images or constructions (Weible, 2008: 630). Finally, the Advocacy Coalition Framework predicts that knowledge will be used as a resource in political debates between coalitions rather than to inform the rational, problem-solving approach to the issue at hand (Sabatier, 1987). The ACF suggests three mechanisms of a policy change. External shocks, such as changes in governing coalitions, changes in socioeconomic conditions or impacts from other subsystems, are assumed to open or close venues or shift resources of coalitions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). The second mechanism of policy change is a hurting stalemate (Zartman, 1991), when the adversarial coalitions exhaust all venues to achieve their objectives (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999: 150; Sabatier et al., 2005). Finally, the gradual accumulation of information over time may alter the core beliefs and lead to “policy-oriented learning”.

However, the view that expert-based information could contribute to a belief change (Bennett & Howlett, 1992; May, 1992; Sabatier, 1987) is challenged by the fields such as risk analysis (Golding et al., 1992) or Narrative Policy Framework (McBeth et al., 2007), which demonstrate that stories are more powerful than scientific evidence in shaping beliefs. This is true especially of “wicked problems”, which are characteristic of strong inter-coalition differences in core beliefs (Shanahan, 2013: 462). As beliefs are grounded in competing cultural norms (Wood & Doan, 2003: 641), wicked problems will resist resolution by appeal to the facts (Schon & Rein, 1994: 4). Extreme polarization along with uncertainty and complexity thus produce situations in which “the only things left to examine are...stories (Roe, 1994: 3).”

Narrative Policy Framework offers methodological tools for studying how individuals process political and/or policy-relevant information (Jones & McBeth, 2010; McBeth et al., 2007; 2010; Shanahan et al., 2013). Narratives contain the same components as any good story, i.e. they identify heroes who support the preferred policy, villains who thwart the policy
and victims who suffer without the adoption of the policy (Stone, 1988). Policymakers use policy narratives strategically to construct a story to win the desired policy outcome. Persuasion is thus the key part of what stories need to achieve (Rhodes, 2011). The process by which political players, including the media, use linguistic cues to define and give meaning to issues and this way set boundaries of public policy debates is referred to as framing (Callaghan & Schnell, 2005). Frames can thus lead to an increased or decreased mobilization around the issue and support for or opposition to policy reform (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Rochefort & Cobb, 1994; Stone, 1988).

Narratives are thus viewed as a missing link between external shocks and policy change in the Punctuated Equilibrium theory, as a tool used by policy entrepreneurs to merge streams in multiple streams theory, or as containers of stable core policy beliefs, as well as political strategies used by coalitions to expand or contain the conflict in the Advocacy Coalition Framework (McBeth et al., 2007: 90; Nowlin, 2011: 53; Shanahan et al., 2013: 455). In “wicked” policy environments, all groups will tend to portray themselves as losing (Shanahan 2013: 462) to expand conflict and mobilize opposition (Baumgartner, 1989; Cobb & Elder, 1983; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993).

Narrative policy framework proposes several political narrative strategies, which aim to expand the conflict (McBeth et al. 2007; see also Shanahan et al. 2013). First, coalitions that perceive themselves as winning on a policy issue are more likely to identify specific winners in their policy narratives, whereas policy groups that perceive themselves as losing on a policy issue are more likely to identify specific losers (McBeth et al., 2007: 90). Second, winning groups are more likely to contain the issue by diffusing benefits and concentrating costs on a small group, whereas losing groups will tend to expand the issue by diffusing costs and concentrating benefits (Shanahan et al., 2011). Third, losing groups are more likely than winning groups to rely on frames or what Achter (2004: 315) refers to as “condensation symbols” (McBeth et al., 2007: 90). By focusing on some aspects of reality while minimizing other aspects, frames suggest a particular policy solution (Kinder, 2003). Losing groups may also try to use the policy issue at hand as a policy surrogate to debate larger and more controversial problems to mobilize opposition (Nie, 2003). Finally, losing groups are more likely to attack scientific results and present scientific disagreement, whereas winning groups are more likely to contain the issue by defining the issue in terms of scientific certainty (Nie, 2003; McBeth et al., 2007: 90).

At the macro-level, NPF theorizes that the policy narratives of institutions and cultures play an important role in shaping policy processes and outcomes over substantial periods of time (Shanahan et al. 2013: 457). The new institutionalist theory - irrespective of the concrete strand - assumes that institutions evolve through periods of stability and inertia – referred to as “path-dependency” – interrupted by “critical junctures”, i.e. exogenously induced crisis (see Krasner 1984, Hall and Taylor 1996, Pierson 2000). This assumption plays the central role in the new institutionalist approach to educational system pioneered by Meyer and Rowan (1977, 1978), which posits that there are “global characteristics that are important and independent of national characteristics” (Fiala and Lanford 1987: 317) and emphasizes “transnational similarities in the institutional character of state educational systems” (Ramirez and Boli 1987: 2) and worldwide convergence of patterns of educational organization. Based on the above, it is reasonable to assume that institutional macro-narratives will shape meso-level policy narratives over the long run (null hypothesis).

The fact that there is more change and variation in educational organization than institutionalists seem to acknowledge became a source of critique (see Meyer and Rowan 2006b; Levy 2006; Marshall and Anderson 1994; Crowson 1996). The new institutionalism attempts to address this question by pointing out to unique national contexts (see Ramirez 2006). These represent “path dependencies” that produce unique adaptations of standard
world models and affect the time and ease with which such models get adopted. The relative strength of national versus global models of education depends on the national academic traditions. Educational systems in countries with weak national academic traditions are more likely to converge towards the world model than in countries with strong academic traditions. In this case, the convergence of meso-narratives towards the macro-narratives will be mediated by the tractability of the policy issue at the meso-level (alternative hypothesis).

3. Methodology

To explore our research questions, we employed content analysis of policy narratives generated in the Czech Age of Tracking policy subsystem over a 14-year period between 2000-2013 (N=72) and the Slovak Age of Tracking policy subsystem over a 15-year period between 1999 and 2013 (N=35). All policy narratives were public consumption documents, such as newsletters, editorial opinion pieces, speeches and reports that are disseminated in the public domain (Shanahan et al., 2013: 457).

The unit of analysis is the policy subsystems, which are defined as semiautonomous decision-making networks of policy participants that focus on a particular policy issue (Sabatier, 1987). To identify stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in influencing the issue of later tracking, we identified authors of public consumption documents. In the next step we grouped them into two coalitions, the Pro-Later Tracking coalition and the Anti-Later Tracking coalition. This grouping was based on the proposed policy solutions (in favor or against later tracking).

Coalitions were then content analyzed for policy narrative elements (story type, causal mechanism, policy solution, characters and the use of science) and narrative strategies (diffusion or concentration of costs and benefits, the use of condensation symbols, policy surrogates and the devil shift). A codebook (Appendix A) was adopted from Shanahan et al. (2013: 481-3). We added questions about the use of condensation symbols and policy surrogates (see McBeth et al. 2010: 394) and macro-narratives. We measured the convergence of meso-narratives towards the macro-narrative as the number of meso-level narratives with narrative elements of the macro-level narrative as a percentage of total. We focused on direct references to OECD and the use of the policy solution or causal mechanism implied by the OECD macro-narrative. Content analysis of policy narratives was conducted by human coders.

4.1 Macro-narrative of less selective schooling

By the dawn of the twentieth century, new child-centered approaches to schooling began to dominate educational discourse. This new, progressivist, way of thinking about the nature of the child, classroom methods and the purposes of the school originated in the works of Comenius, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi or Friedrich Froebel and promoted active learning and adaptation of the traditional curricula to the changing needs of industrial society (Reese 2001). Although the progressive education movement was not a single entity but a cluster of overlapping and competing tendencies (Labaree 2005: 279, Tyack 1974, Church and Sedlak 1976), these strands shared a common dissatisfaction with the traditional academic curriculum and favored comprehensive over the separate high school (Labaree 2005: 283, Simmons 1960: 108). Comprehensive high school was first pushed on the formal agenda in the United States with the 1918 publication of the Cardinal Principles of the Secondary Education, which argued that secondary education should no longer meet the “needs of only a few groups” (Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education 1918). In fact, “social mingling of pupils through the organization and administration of the
school” was viewed as means of unifying the diverse American population. The principles and practices outlined in this work were endorsed and elaborated upon by most of the major proposals for secondary education in the United States (Wraga 2001: 494). However, the influence of the progressivist movement was not limited to the United States and quickly spread to the rest of the world.

The macro-narrative of less selective schooling was further supported in the 1940s and 1950s by the ascendance of views, which challenged the prevailing theories of intelligence as a genetic capacity and emphasized the importance of environmental influences, such as class and race segregation (Skeels & Dye, 1939; Spitz, 1945; Spitz & Wolf, 1946; Dennis, 1960; Skeels, 1966). On the macro-level, this view was promoted by the recently established UNESCO, whose Constitution expresses the belief in the ideal of “full and equal opportunities for education for all” (UNESCO 1945). A postwar UNESCO conference of social scientists, for example, issued a statement maintaining that when races were ”given similar degrees of cultural opportunity to realize their potentials, the average achievement of the members of each group is about the same” (UNESCO 1950, reprinted in UNESCO 1969: 32). The first major legal instrument in the field of the right to education was the Convention against Discrimination in Education, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 14 December 1960. According to its preamble, the main purpose of the Convention is to proscribe any form of discrimination in education and to promote equality of opportunity for all in education. This paradigm shift inspired calls for educational interventions. For example, UNESCO’s 1950 Statement on race was referred to in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case, which would eventually end the practice of racial segregation of students in the United States. The “Statement by Experts on Race Problems” released by the UN/UNESCO Social Sciences Departments in 1950 received substantial and positive coverage in the international press and became a key resource for educators throughout the world (Selcer 2012: S173).

Dissatisfied with unfavorable results of U.S. students in the Second International Maths and Science Study, administrations of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher approached UNESCO with the request to carry out performance indicator studies (Kuehn 2004). When UNESCO refused, they withdrew in 1986, taking their money with them and turned to OECD (ibid). The most recent calls for less selective schooling therefore originated in OECD and have been informed by the growing body of literature based on the comprehensive datasets from OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This body of work suggests that the sooner the students are tracked based on their ability, the greater the dependence of the student performance on family background (for a recent review of literature, see Woessmann, 2009). The macro-narrative produced by OECD (for example, see OECD 2000, 2004, 2007, 2010 or various national studies) therefore proposes postponement of the age of tracking to address this policy problem.

The macro-narrative of less-selective schooling thus began to form at the turn of the century. Informed by the progressive pedagogical movement, it spread around the world through a lose network of educational experts. The macro-narrative was institutionalized by UNESCO after World War II, partly in response to the paradigm shift in psychology away from genetic to environmental explanations of intelligence and partly in response to NAZI atrocities. Recently, the macro-narrative of less selective schooling was supported by the data produced by OECD’s PISA.

The macro-narrative has consistently included a "historical" or "structural" causal mechanism. This model holds that social patterns tend to reproduce themselves because people with power and recourses to stop a problem benefit from the social organization that keeps them in power and maintain it through control over selection of elites and socialization of both elites and non-elites (Stone 1989). However, Stone (1989) warns that complex causal
explanations do not offer a single locus of control, a plausible candidate to take responsibility for the problem or a point of leverage to fix the problem. The macro-narrative of less selective schooling is thus remarkable for its lack of villains. This is particularly true of the OECD version of the narrative (OECD 2000, 2004, 2007, 2010). However, even UNESCO's narrative only implied villains, such as scientific racism, and abstracted from direct blaming. For example, following the scientific backlash against the 1950 Statement on Race, Director-General Bodet declared that UNESCO’s “weapon” against the lies and irrationality of racism must be “the truth, and nothing but the truth” (cited in Selcer 2012: S178). These references to objective, expert-based information were characteristic of the macro-narrative of less selective schooling at all three stages. Overall, there was a great consistency in the victims identified by this macro-narrative, which included mostly children from non-white or minority families and families with low socioeconomic background.

4.2 Czechoslovakia – 1918 - 1993

The debate about the comprehensive schooling in Czechoslovakia dates back to the 1920s and arose in reaction to the continuing fragmentation of the educational system. When Czechoslovakia was established in 1918, basic education was provided by a five-year “obecná škola” (community school) for pupils aged 6 to 11 years (Příhoda 1945: 10; Greger 2005: 2-3, Váňová 2007: 79-80). After five years of community school, children could choose one of the following tracks. They could attend additional 3 years at community school. This, however, was a dead-end option, as completion of eight years at the community school did not enable students to continue their education at the upper-secondary level. Students with higher aspirations therefore opted for a three-year “měšťanská škola” (civic or town school) or secondary schools, i.e. a seven-year “réálná škola” (secondary technical school, real-schule) or an eight-year “gymnasia” (gymnasia – upper secondary schools). The first tracking thus occurred at the end of the fifth grade (age of 11).

The macro-narrative of less selective schooling was imported to Czechoslovakia by educational experts, particularly Václav Příhoda from the Philosophy Faculty of Charles University, who was the most vocal proponent of the unified school in the interwar Czechoslovakia (see Příhoda 1928, 1933, 1945). Inspired by his trip to the United States and meeting with prominent progressivists John Dewey and Edward Thorndyke, he suggested to model Czechoslovak secondary schools according to the U.S. high schools as internally differentiated schools. The proposed comprehensive educational model was thus supposed to consist of the unified community school (age 6 to 11) and a four-year lower secondary “komenium” (11 to 15), followed by a three-year upper secondary “athenaeum” (15 to 18). A number of competing proposals for unified school arose in the postwar period, some of them proposing differentiated, others non-differentiated organization of unified schooling (see Příhoda 1931: 6-9). Although by 1928 the comprehensive schooling up to the age of 15 was endorsed by the Minister of Education Milan Hodža, and a number of teachers' associations, the pro-unified school coalition managed only to introduce the unified curricula in 1930.

The debate about later tracking took off in 1945 where it had stopped before the war. The pro-unified school coalition still referred to the macro-narrative of less selective schooling produced by the progressivist movement. In a book published in 1945 Příhoda (1945) pointed out to the socioeconomic segregation in secondary schools of interwar Czechoslovakia. Whereas clerks represented only 6.1% of population, children of clerks represented 34.2% of students in secondary schools. In contrast, agricultural workers represented 14.2% of population but children from these families represented only 1% of students at secondary schools. Příhoda therefore called for a unified lower secondary school, which would “for the first time in the history of nation embrace the entire nation until the age
of 15” (Příhoda, 1945: 5). In a similar manner, Zdeněk Nejedlý, Minister of Education for the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, argued: “What is the point of the unified school? To evaporate that meaningless segregation of youth when by a ten-year old boy it is decided whether he will or will not be a gentleman. That is the main reason for a unified school and a unified lower secondary track” (cited in Mertlík, 1947: 13). The policy solution of an undifferentiated unified school was also indirectly inspired by the progressivist movement. It mimicked polytechnic Soviet unified labor schools, which drew on the educational theories of Georg Kerschensteiner and John Dewey, as well as Marxist ideology (McClelland 1989: 116).

The proposal of the unified school and the subsequent bill draft faced the sharp opposition from secondary school teachers, parents with a high level of social and cultural capital, as well as many cultural elites (Mertlík 1947: 2, Greger 2005: 5). Robert Mertlík, the spokesman for the secondary school teachers formulated the main criticisms in his book The Danger of the Comprehensive School (Mertlík 1947). Mertlík dubbed the main argument in favor of the reform – promotion of national unity and ease of segregation – demagogic fallacies. Quality of education was his major counterargument to the reform. He believed that the quality of education at the unified school would be even lower than the quality of education in civic schools. He called for the preservation of the gymnasia and real-schule and even called for greater selectivity of these schools, which would turn them into schools for the most gifted children. Furthermore, as the bill proposal called for abolition of schools administered by churches, these were also vocal opponents of the act (Greger 2005: 5). All debates were put to an end in 1948 after the bloodless communist coup d'etat. The law nr. 95/1948 Coll. effectively postponed tracking to the age of 15. Following the Soviet model, a single and uniform school covering the whole compulsory education period was introduced.

In 1990 the debate on the ideal age of tracking resumed without explicit references to the macro-narrative of less selective schooling. The re-introduction of highly stratified educational system in 1990 was enabled by an external shock in the form of the collapse of the communist regime. One of the leading mottos of the reforms in 1989 was the Deconstruction (or even destruction) of the communist comprehensive school (Greger, 2005: 6), which was viewed as a symbol of the socialist egalitarianism (Greger et al., 2009: 51). The “unified school” was therefore abolished in 1990, only few months after the collapse of the communism. The law enabled establishment of private and church schools and re-introduced eight-year gymnasia for gifted children – so the age of tracking was moved back to the age of 10. The spontaneity of the reform process is documented by the fact that the establishment of multi-year gymnasia predated the actual policy debate on the educational reform. This was only subsequently supplied by a policy document arguing that the comprehensive schooling at all types of secondary schools did not respond to different functions of these schools and different abilities of their students and suggested to secure both within- and between-school differentiation schooling (Ústav pro informace ve vzdělávání 1991: 12, 13). This has been the dominant argument of the anti-later tracking coalition in the following two decades in both successor states to Czechoslovakia, which dissolved itself peacefully on December 31, 1992 into two successor states – the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

4.3 Czech Republic 1993-2013

In the Czech Republic, the Pro-Later Tracking coalition began to form in the 1990s, which witnessed increasing amount of complaints from the primary school teachers, who pointed out that the departure of students to multi-year gymnasia decreased the quality of students and their motivation and, as a result, worsened the teaching conditions at primary schools (Matějů and Straková, 2003: 629, Greger, 2005: 7). These opinions were repeatedly
echoed in the annual reports of the Czech School Inspectorate: segregation of more talented pupils from those who continue their studies at basic schools leads to a gradual decrease in achievement of this part of school population and negatively affects the standards of educational processes in basic schools (ibid). A more formal conceptualization of the problem was offered by OECD (1996) with its main policy recommendation to abolish multi-year gymnasia and meet the educational needs of the gifted children in basic schools with differentiated streams.

The Ministry was initially not sympathetic to the idea. In 1999 it re-stated the position that multi-year gymnasia meet special educational needs of gifted children. However, in 2000 there was an important policy dimension shift when it imported arguments from another proximate linked subsystem (OECD). In 2000 OECD published the results of the first PISA testing. The results undermined the widespread belief that Czech students were above-average. The results of 15-year old Czech students were slightly below average in reading and mathematical literacy and slightly above average in scientific literacy (OECD, 2000). Furthermore, the PISA results debunked the myth that multi-year gymnasia serve the special needs of gifted children (ibid). In response to this PISA shock, Minister Eduard Zeman (Czech Social Democratic Party) proposed gradual elimination of multi-year gymnasia. “I believe that early selection is wrong. By diverting elite to a single type of school, it penalizes all other types of schools,” he argued (idnes.cz 28 June 2000). Starting from 2002, the Government White Paper suggested no new students should be admitted to the first year of these types of general secondary schools (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy České republiky (MŠMTČR), 2001: 30).”

This shift in the official narrative engendered a heated policy debate from 2000 to 2013. Two advocacy coalitions dominated the debate (Table 1). The Pro-Later Tracking coalition was led by the Ministry of Education and regions, which gained new competencies, such as the right to establish primary and secondary schools, as a result of the decentralization in education, which began in 2000. The high number of public policy documents produced by regions reflects the fact that regions are obliged to publish long-term plans for education and development of education network in the region (“Dlouhodobý záměr vzdělávání a rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy v kraji”) on a bi-annual basis. Education experts were also prominent members of the Pro-Later Tracking coalition. The abolishment of multi-year gymnasia was vehemently opposed by the Anti-Later Tracking coalition, which was led by teachers, their associations and multi-year gymnasia.

Table 1: Advocacy Coalition Composition, Czech Republic, 2000-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro-Later Tracking</th>
<th>Anti-Later Tracking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regions</td>
<td>Teachers, schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 (45%)</td>
<td>6 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education and its organizations</td>
<td>Political parties, MPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 (26%)</td>
<td>5 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational experts</td>
<td>Regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (17%)</td>
<td>3 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties, MPs</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and its organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and their associations</td>
<td>Educational experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53 (100%)</td>
<td>19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total of Policy Narratives = 72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to note that the issue of later tracking was highly politicized and the official narrative depended on who was in the government. For example, Petra Buzková (Czech Social Democratic Party), who held the office of the Minister of Education from June 2002 to September 2006, opposed the abolishment of multi-year gymnasia. This official stand was reflected also in the number of public policy documents, which significantly dropped under her ministry and resumed only when the Ministry of education began to push for the reduction of multi-year gymnasia again (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Frequency of Policy Narratives by Coalition over Time

Macro-narrative

There is no evidence of convergence towards the macro-narrative of less selective schooling, which we measured as the number of meso-level narratives with narrative elements of the macro-level narrative as a percentage of total (see Table 2). Only 21% of policy narratives produced by the Anti-Later Tracking coalition referred explicitly to OECD, whereas 34% of those produced by the Pro-Later Tracking coalition did. Furthermore, all policy narratives produced by Anti-Later Tracking coalition contested the OECD macro-narrative. There were also stark differences between the casual mechanisms: 45% of policy narratives produced by the Pro-Later Tracking coalition adopted the causal mechanism of the macro-narrative, indicating the historical/structural cause as the main source of the problem, whereas none of the narratives produced by the Anti-Later Tracking coalition did. Similarly, 88% of policy narratives produced by Pro-Later Tracking coalition adopted the policy solution suggested by the macro-narrative.

Table 2: Number of meso-level policy narratives with narrative elements of the macro-level narrative (% of total)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Anti</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference to OECD</td>
<td>18 (34%)</td>
<td>4 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal mechanism suggested by OECD</td>
<td>24 (45%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy solution suggested by OECD</td>
<td>45 (88%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of total</td>
<td>53 (100%)</td>
<td>19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our findings challenge the view that gradual accumulation of expert information, such as a scientific study or policy analysis, leads to learning across advocacy coalitions and a belief change (Bennett and Howlett 1992; May 1992; Sabatier 1987). The OECD supported the macro-narrative of less selective schooling by the rich body of empirical evidence. This evidence was made publicly available also in the Czech Republic in the national language in the form of national PISA-studies (Straková et al. 2002, Palečková and Tomášek 2005, Palečková et al. 2007, 2010), as well as studies utilizing data from PISA (Matějů and Straková 2003, 2006, Straková 2010a, 2010b). Furthermore, the results of PISA testing, as well as academic papers, were widely covered by the media. There is only limited evidence that accumulation of expert information altered the core beliefs of the members of the Anti-Later Tracking coalition. For example, in 2000 Walter Bartoš promised that the Civic Democratic Party declared that his party would vote against Zeman’s proposal to eliminate multi-year gymnasia. In 2010 this veteran head of the school parliamentary committee argued that multi-year gymnasia are unjust and create artificial ghettos, where gymnasium students are isolated from the real world, living in the glasshouse (denik.cz 26 March 2010). However, the change of attitudes among policymakers was not universal and did not spread beyond the policymaking circle. This argument can be supported by the results of the survey conducted in 2008, full 12 years after the first OECD’s (1996) recommendation to abolish multi-year gymnasia in the Czech Republic: 76% agreed or strongly agreed that teachers at the primary school cannot pay individual attention to needs of gifted students and therefore it is good that gifted students can study at multi-year gymnasia; and only 27% agreed or strongly agreed that when better students leave for multi-year gymnasia, it is unfair for the students who remain in the primary school (Greger et al. 2009: 57, 59).

Why this lack of policy learning across coalitions? First, the ACF hypothesizes that cross-coalition learning is more likely to occur when there is a professional forum, which is prestigious enough to make experts from opposing coalitions to participate and which is dominated by professional norms (Brown & Stewart, 1993; Olson et al., Weible 2008: 129). The forum for the discourse between educational experts was provided by peer-reviewed scholarly journals, such as Czech Sociological Review or Orbis Scholae. Although these journals were dominated by Pro-Later Tracking coalition, scholars from Anti-Later Coalition participated in the debate (for example, see Kaščák and Pupala 2011; Štech 2011). Our results thus support the view that professional forums do not necessarily facilitate cross-coalition learning (Brown & Stewart; Litfin; Munro, 1993; Nagel, 2006). We believe that the effectiveness of professional forums is limited by high political conflict (Meijerink 2005) and intractability of policy issues at the meso-level (Ladi, 2005; Meijerink 2005). We document the intractability of the issue of later tracking by intercoalitional differences.

Intercoalitional differences

The overall intractability of the policy context is reflected in intercoalitional differences in the use of narrative elements (McBeth et al., 2005, Shanahan et al. 2013), narrative strategies (McBeth et al., 2007, Shanahan et al. 2013) and policy beliefs (Shanahan et al. 2008, 2013). The Pro-Later Tracking and Anti-Later Tracking coalitions in the Czech Republic demonstrate differences in their use of narrative elements (see Table 3).

A policy narrative typically offers a solution to solve the policy problem. Both coalitions produced narratives with a high rate of policy solutions. Anti-Later Tracking coalition consistently employed the same solution throughout the examined period (do not reduce the number of multi-year gymnasia) but the Pro-Later Tracking coalition shifted policy solutions. Initially, it adopted the policy solution proposed by OECD (abolish multi-year gymnasia). However, following the fierce protests of parents and schools, the initial “hard”
solution was replaced by the “soft” solution (introduce 5-10 percent quota on the number of children allowed to enroll to multi-year gymnasias).

Table 3: Intercoalitional Differences among Narrative Elements and Narrative Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advocacy Coalition</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pro</td>
<td>Anti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STORY TYPE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>29 (55%)</td>
<td>19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>24 (45%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53 (100%)</td>
<td>19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAUSAL MECHANISM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentionality</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>15 (79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadvertence</td>
<td>29 (55%)</td>
<td>4 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical or structural</td>
<td>24 (45%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53 (100%)</td>
<td>19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLUTION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>46 (87%)</td>
<td>19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7 (13%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53 (100%)</td>
<td>19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science/evidence</td>
<td>19 (36%)</td>
<td>5 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy surrogate</td>
<td>10 (19%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy symbols</td>
<td>14 (26%)</td>
<td>4 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the total</td>
<td>53 (100%)</td>
<td>19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean use of characters per narrative (number of policy narratives)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroes</td>
<td>0.02 (53)</td>
<td>0.05 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villains</td>
<td>0.02 (53)</td>
<td>0.57 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims</td>
<td>1.85 (53)</td>
<td>1.84 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion (concentrated benefits and diffused costs)</td>
<td>6 (11%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Containment (diffused benefits and concentrated costs)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As already noted above, the Pro-Later Tracking coalition supported the proposed policy solution by scientific evidence and references to the macro-narrative of less selective schooling. However, even the Pro-Later Tracking coalition used science in only 36% of its narratives. This is in line with the previous NPF research that evidence-based decisions are not reflected in how policy realities are constructed (Shanahan et al. 2008, 2013).

Whereas policy solutions and science provide the structural scaffolding of the policy blueprint, story types and causal mechanisms reflect the style of architectural artistry (Shanahan et al. 2013: 468). The Anti-Later Tracking coalition used exclusively the story of decline which offers reasons for battle: multi-year gymnasias are a great achievement of the post-communist period and their reduction will be detrimental to the development of gifted
children and reduce the quality of education. In contrast, only 55% of policy narratives produced by the Pro-Later Tracking coalition relied on the story of decline: if we do not reduce the number of multi-year gymnasia, the quality of basic schools will fall. The rest of the narratives used the story of control, which offers tools for fixing the problem: reduction of multi-year gymnasia will improve equality of educational opportunity.

Accompanying the story type is the causal mechanism connecting independent variables with the dependent variable (Shanahan et al. 2013: 468). Interesting differences were found in the use of causal mechanisms by advocacy coalitions in the Age of Tracking policy subsystem. As already noted above, the Pro-Later Tracking coalition adopted the casual mechanism implied by the macro-narrative of less selective schooling: 45% of policy narratives used the structural causal mechanism (social patterns tend to reproduce themselves). Additionally, 55% of policy narratives emphasized inadvertent causes, or the unintended consequences of willed human action. For example, majority of regional long-term plans for education and development of education network suggests that multi-year gymnasia were created to cater for the needs of the gifted children but the growing percentage of the age cohort enrolling to these gymnasia undermined the quality or financial sustainability of basic schools. In contrast, Anti-Later Tracking coalition almost exclusively used the intentional causal mechanism, which tells a story of victims and the action willfully taken by their oppressors: 79% of policy narratives suggested that the Ministry of Education or regions attempt to reduce the number of multi-year gymnasia despite the fact that these gymnasia work and that this reduction is an assault on freedom of school choice. Remaining 21% used the inadvertent story, in which the growing number of students leaving to multi-year gymnasia is a mere consequence of the falling quality of basic schools.

The choice of the causal mechanism affected the use of characters. Complex causes involve so many components and people that it is impossible to assign blame to a single actor (Stone 1989: 288). Similarly, stories of inadvertent causes are soft versions of blaming the victim, as they imply unintended consequences of what might have been good intentions (Stone 1989: 286). As a result, there was an exceptionally low number of villains in the policy narratives of Pro-Later Tracking coalition (see Table 3). In contrast, the Anti-Later Tracking coalition used villains to a greater extent, mostly assigning blame to the Ministry of Education or regions. There were no significant differences in the use of victims or heroes.

The type of causal mechanisms, as well as scientific evidence used by the Pro-Later coalition had an impact on the narrative strategies used by both coalitions. These narrative strategies aim to either expand the coalition or maintain the status quo. As the structural and inadvertent causal mechanisms did not enable the Pro-Later Tracking coalition to assign blame, it used policy symbols and policy surrogates more extensively than the Anti-Later Tracking Coalition (26% and 19%, respectively). To reduce the scope of the policy issue, the Pro-Later Tracking coalition framed it as a technical rather than political conflict (Nie 2003: 323). Particularly regions framed the reduction of the number of multi-year gymnasia as "rationalization", "stabilization" or "optimizing" of the educational network. Furthermore, the Ministry and regions gradually decided to wrap the issue of later tracking in the broader developmental discourse. This was particularly true in traditionally industrial regions, whose representatives believed that children should be re-directed from multi-year gymnasia towards technical or vocational tracks (regionpress.cz 4 March 2011, respect.cz 6 March 2011). The reduction of multi-year gymnasia was thus expected to reflect the needs of the local companies: “This region has been fed by industry for 200 years and it will probably be also in the future,” argued one local representative. “We will need technicians more than gymnasiun-graduates” (respect.cz 6 March 2011).

In contrast, the Anti-Later Tracking coalition used policy symbols scarcely (11% of policy narratives). Instead, it relied on the devil shift, a policy story exaggerating the power
and “evilness” of an opponent while understating the power of the narrating group (Sabatier, Hunter, & McLaughlin, 1987, Shanahan 2013). This view can be supported by the significantly higher use of villains in the policy narratives of the Anti-Later Tracking coalition than in those produced by the Pro-Later tracking coalition (see Table 3).

Interestingly, neither of coalitions relied extensively in what is believed to be the strongest narrative strategy of diffused costs and concentrated benefits of the opposing policy alternative (Shanahan et al. 2011). Only 11% of policy narratives produced by the Pro-Later Tracking coalition told the story, in which children of posh, elite parents reap the benefits of the existence of multi-year gymnasia at the cost of all other children, who are left behind at basic schools.

4.4 Slovakia, 1993-2013

The history of the reform process in Slovakia was much similar to the Czech experience. In 1990 the Ministry of Education (Ministerstvo školstva, mládeže a telesnej výchovy Slovenskej republiky) introduced the document titled “Duch školy” (School Spirit), which presented first ideas about the future of the Slovak educational system. According to the document, each person was supposed to be free to choose his/her educational path (MŠMtv 1990: 9-10). Mobility and removal of barriers between various levels, cycles and areas of education were emphasized. However, in the mind of authors the flexible educational system without dead ends did not equal to more comprehensive education. One of the authors argued that it was necessary to “reduce averaging of personal, emotional and intellectual levels of students at all levels and types of schools (…) to fight uniformity, (…) to create “special schools for exceptionally talented and gifted students (…) no fear of being accused of production of elitist groups.” These thoughts were partly re-stated in the reform strategy “Konštantín”, which emphasized the free choice of educational path and free supply of educational opportunities (Ministerstvo školstva a vedy SR 1994). Although the unified schools were criticized as unable to meet all educational needs, the reform proposal suggested postponement of the tracking. It was argued that occupational decision at the end of the eighth grade of the primary school (age of 14) increases the risk of wrong decisions and the subsequent loss of motivation and failure. The first decision about the future occupation should be therefore taken at the age of 14 to 16, i.e. between eighth to tenth year of schooling. However, the replacement of the Minister put the project to the halt.

The Pro-Later Tracking Coalition began to form truly only at the end of the 1990s when the Ministry adopted the macro-narrative of less selective schooling: „We agree with the opinion of the OECD commission of experts (who recommended abolishment of eight- and six-year gymnasia in the Czech Republic) that these gymnasia restrict the basic principle of democracy – equality of chances and fair access to education, segregate students, negatively affect the quality of education in primary schools, degrade the primary schools to second-rank schools, change the status of the secondary technical schools and have a negative impact on the quality of the overall educational system” (MS 2002: 13). Between 1999 and 2013, Ministry of Education and its institutions led the Pro-Later Tracking coalition (see Table 4). The Anti-Later Tracking coalition consisted of teachers and their associations, Bratislava self-governing region and a civic association Nové školstvo.
Table 4: Advocacy Coalition Composition, Slovakia, 1999-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
<th>Anti</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government and government institutions</td>
<td>19 (79%)</td>
<td>Teachers and their associations</td>
<td>3 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-governing regions</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>Self-governing regions</td>
<td>3 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>Nové školstvo (civic association)</td>
<td>3 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>Government, MPs</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>24 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>11 (100%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand Total of Policy Narratives = 35

Despite a heated public debate, the total number of policy narratives produced by both coalitions is smaller compared to the Czech Republic (see Figure 2). There are also greater gaps in the temporal distribution of policy narratives. There are several possible explanations of the small number of public policy documents. First, the Ministry, as a leader of the Pro-Later Tracking coalition, often put its plan on hiatus in response to protests. Second, members of coalitions often relied on conventional lobby tactics. For example, primary school teachers typically directly contacted elected officials. Finally, the small number of policy narratives could simply reflect the weak tradition to use policy narratives as a way to indirectly influence public opinion.

Similarly to the case study of Czech Republic, there is no evidence of convergence towards the macro-narrative of less selective schooling (see Table 5). Only 33% of policy narratives produced by the Pro-Later coalition and 18% of those produced by Anti-Later Tracking coalition referred explicitly to OECD. Whereas Pro-Later Tracking coalition used the macro-narrative of less selective schooling to establish scientific certainty, Anti-Later Tracking coalition contested it. Similarly to Czech Republic, there were differences in the use of the causal mechanism: 42% of policy narratives produced by the Pro-Later Tracking coalition adopted the structural causal mechanism of the macro-narrative, whereas none of none of the narratives produced by the Anti-Later Tracking coalition did. Finally, 71% of
policy narratives produced by the Pro-Later Tracking coalition adopted the policy solution suggested by the macro-narrative and none of those produced by the Anti-Later Tracking coalition did. We believe that the lack of convergence can be explained by intractability of the policy issue at the meso-level, as documented by intercoalitional differences.

Table 5: Number of meso-level policy narratives with narrative elements of the macro-level narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Anti</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference to OECD</td>
<td>8 (33%)</td>
<td>2 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal mechanism suggested by OECD</td>
<td>10 (42%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy solution suggested by OECD</td>
<td>17 (71%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of total</td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
<td>11 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Intercoalitional Differences**

There were only minor differences in the use of narrative elements and narrative strategies in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (see Table 6). Similarly to the Czech Republic, both coalitions produced narratives with a high rate of policy solutions. However, the Pro-Later Tracking coalition tended to shift policy solutions more. In addition to reduction of multi-year gymnasias, it also proposed a softer solution of equalizing the funding of multi-year gymnasias and basic schools to ensure greater equality of opportunities. However, even this solution triggered protests from Anti-Later Tracking coalition, which tried to maintain the status quo. Neither of coalitions used scientific evidence extensively to support the policy solution.

There were differences in the types of stories and causal mechanisms used by opposing coalitions. The Anti-Later Tracking coalition exclusively used the story of decline (100%) and intentional causal mechanism (91%) to mobilize opposition to the proposals to reduce the number of multi-year gymnasias. In contrast, the Pro-Later Tracking coalition often used the story of control (42%) and victory (4%), which were typically coupled with the structural causal mechanism (42%): we used to believe that the reproduction of social inequalities was out of our control but now we know that we can control it through intervention in the process of educational stratification. The story of decline (54%) was typically used with inadvertent causal mechanism (58%).

There were some differences between the use of narrative strategies in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. First and foremost, neither of coalitions tried to expand the policy issue by concentrated benefits and diffused costs. Rather, both coalitions relied on the use of policy symbols and policy surrogates. Anti-Later Tracking coalition used policy symbols in 55% of policy narratives. It framed later tracking as "typically socialist" (SME 10.04.2001) or a “social engineering” (Humajová 2008). This way, it often wrapped the issue of later tracking in the broader discourse on democracy: 27% of policy narratives used policy surrogates. Furthermore, the Anti-Later Tracking coalition used also the devil shift, consistently depicting the Ministry of Education as the villain in its policy narratives.

Pro-Later Tracking coalition used policy symbols in 17% of its narratives and policy surrogates in 29% of them. In an opinion piece for the daily Pravda (15.4.2012), Minister of Education Dušan Čaplovič framed multi-year gymnasias as "vacuum cleaners of quality from basic schools." Even more importantly, Mr. Čaplovič began to repeatedly draw a link between economic development and technical education. Reduction of general tracks, including multi-year gymnasias, was thus wrapped in the larger developmental discourse. This narrative strategy was associated with the successful policy change.
Table 6: Intercoalitional Differences among Narrative Elements and Narrative Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advocacy Coalition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STORY TYPE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>13 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>10 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CAUSAL MECHANISM</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentionality</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadvertence</td>
<td>14 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical or structural</td>
<td>10 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOLUTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21 (88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science/evidence</td>
<td>8 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy surrogate</td>
<td>7 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy symbols</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the total</td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean use of characters per narrative (number of policy narratives)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroes</td>
<td>0,21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villains</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims</td>
<td>1,83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion (concentrated benefits and diffused costs)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Containment (diffused benefits and concentrated costs)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Conclusions

In this paper we examined how macro-narrative of less selective schooling produced by OECD shaped policy outcomes at the meso-level in the post-communist Czech Republic and Slovakia. To this end, we examine how the Pro-Later Tracking and Anti-Later Tracking coalition strategically construct their narratives to influence the policy outcomes in these two countries. Our findings provide several contributions to NPF scholarship.

First, the macro-narrative was imported to Czech Republic and Slovakia by the Ministries of Education following the accession to OECD. In the Czech Republic, the Pro-Later Coalition began to form after the PISA shock of 2000, which debunked the myth that multi-year gymnasia serve the needs of gifted children. Interestingly, Slovak Ministry of Education also changed its stand on the multi-year gymnasia in response to OECD
recommendations to the Czech Republic. Although the official stand of the Ministry in both countries tended to fluctuate and depended on the attitude of the Minister who currently held the office, our findings show that the institution producing the macro-narrative is able to successfully transfer this macro-narrative to the meso-level.

Second, we do not observe any convergence towards the macro-narrative at the meso-level. In both countries, macro-narrative was adopted by the Pro-Later Tracking coalition and contested by the Anti-Later Tracking coalition. We believe that this lack of policy learning across coalitions was a result of intractability of policy issue at the meso-level.

Third, the intractability of the policy issue of later tracking at the meso-level is documented by intercoalitional differences. In line with previous NPF research, we document intercoalitional differences in the use of narrative elements (McBeth et al., 2005, Shanahan et al. 2013) and narrative strategies (McBeth et al., 2007, Shanahan et al. 2013). In both the Czech Republic and Slovakia, opposing coalitions used different types of stories and causal mechanisms. There was also a difference in the use of the villain characters in the policy narratives and the use of science.

Fourth, the intractability of the policy issue at the meso-level influenced also the use of the expert-based information. The macro-narrative of less selective schooling was supported by empirical evidence from PISA testing, which was available also in national language in both countries. However, the evidence failed to establish the scientific certainty and was contested by the Anti-Later Tracking coalition. This finding is in line with the view that in adversarial subsystems, information will be used for political purposes.

Fifth, when the Pro-Later Tracking coalition found itself unable to sell the macro-narrative to the general public, it adopted narrative elements and narrative strategies complementary or alternative to the macro-narrative. In line with OECD recommendations, Pro-Later Tracking coalitions in both countries initially proposed abolishment of multi-year gymnasia. As this policy solution triggered fierce protests, Pro-Later Tracking coalitions in both countries opted for alternative, “soft” solutions, such as reduction of the number of multi-year gymnasia or equalizing of financing of multi-year gymnasia and primary schools. Furthermore, the Czech Pro-Later Tracking coalition began to exceedingly frame the issue of later tracking as a technical rather than political issue to contain the policy issue. Reduction of the number of multi-year gymnasia was thus framed as ”rationalization”, ”stabilization” or ”optimizing” of the educational network. In contrast, the Slovak Pro-Later Tracking coalition tried to expand the issue and framed the opposing policy solution of multi-year gymnasia as ”vacuum cleaners of quality from primary schools”. Over time, Pro-Later Tracking coalitions in both countries began to exceedingly wrap the issue of later tracking in the broader developmental discourse. Rather than talking of equality of educational opportunities, they spun a story of decline if we fail to manage the education network to meet the needs of employers.
References


Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu Slovenskej Republiky. 2007 November 22.

“Minister školstva sa stretol so zástupcom generálneho tajomníka OECD.”


UNESCO (1945) UNESCO Constitution.


Appendix A: Abbreviated Coding Sheet
Policy narrative number:_____ Date of narrative (month and year):_____ Coder initials:_____ 
Advocacy Coalition: Pro-Later Tracking Coalition_____ Anti-Later Tracking Coalition_____ 
Group or individual within the coalition authoring the policy narrative:_____________________
Document type (circle one): press release; newsletter; editorial; YouTube; speech; other:_____ 

CORE STORY ELEMENTS
1. HERO/ALLY. Who is/are the direct or implied hero(es)/allies identified in the narrative? _____ TOTAL
   _____1a. Ministry of education and its institutions
   _____1b. Self-governing regions, which establish and dissolve secondary schools
   _____1c. Education experts
   _____1d. Teachers, schools and their associations
   _____1e. Elite parents
   _____1f. other heroes not in above categories:
2. VILLAIN. Who is/are the direct or implied villain(s) identified in the narrative? _____ TOTAL
   _____2a. Ministry of education and its institutions
   _____2b. Self-governing regions, which establish and dissolve secondary schools
   _____2c. Education experts
   _____2d. Teachers, schools and their associations
   _____2e. Elite parents
   _____2f. other heroes not in above categories:
3. VICTIM. Who is/are the direct or implied victim(s) identified in the narrative? _____ TOTAL
   _____3a. specific: children from families with low socio-economic background
   _____3b. specific: gifted children
   _____3c. specific: teachers from multi-year gymnasias
   _____3d. specific: taxpayers
   _____3e. general: quality of education
   _____3f. general: general: equality of opportunities
   _____3g. general: democracy
   _____3h. general: schools (multi-year gymnasias, basic schools, technicums)
   _____3i. other victims not in above categories
4. STORY TYPE. 
   Does the narrative have a story type(s)? Yes or No
   If yes, what kind?
   a) stymied progress; b) story of decline; c) change-is-only-an-illusion; d) helplessness and control; e) conspiracy; f) blame-the-victim; g) truth claim; h) victory
5. CAUSAL MECHANISM.
   Does the narrative have direct or implied causal theory/theories? Yes or No
   If yes, what kind?
   a) intentionality; b) mechanical; c) inadvertence; d) accidental; or complex causes: e) complex systems; f) institutional; or g) historical/structural
6. SOLUTION.
   Does the narrative offer a policy solution? Yes or No
   If yes, what is the solution?
7. SCIENCE/EVIDENCE.
Is science/evidence cited in the narrative? Yes or No
If yes, what science is being used?
Is the science used to a) support their argument, b) refute an argument, or c) matter-of-fact

8. REFERENCE TO MACRO-NARRATIVE
Does the meso-narrative refer to macro-narrative? Yes or No

POLICY NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

9. COSTS.
a. Does the narrative imply or suggest that there are costs to their policy solution?
   If yes, who/what entities bear the bear the cost(s)?
   Are the costs a) concentrated or b) diffused?
b. Does the narrative imply or suggest that there are costs to the opposed policy solution?
   If yes, who/what entities cost(s)?
   Are the costs a) concentrated or b) diffused?

10. BENEFITS.
a. Does the narrative imply or suggest that there are benefit(s) to their policy solution?
   If yes, who/what entities bear the benefit(s)?
   Are the benefit(s) a) concentrated; b) diffused?
b. Does the narrative imply or suggest that there are benefit(s) to the opposed policy solution?
   If yes, who/what entities bear the benefit(s)?
   Are the benefit(s) a) concentrated; b) diffused?

11. CONDENSATION SYMBOLS
Does the narrative reduce issue into loaded, dichotomous symbol? Yes or No.
If yes, what symbols are being used?
   a) characterization symbols; or b) issue symbols?

12. POLICY SURROGATES
Does the narrative wrap an issue in larger normative issues? Yes or No.

13. STANCE. On the whole, what kind of policy stance does the document or video portray
   or construct?
   a) winning stance (winning the “war”)
   b) winning the battle, losing the war
   c) losing stance