Introduc...
realization of various reform activities in the field of education.

This context leads to the formation of geographical and political fields of activity in which different political actors come together to realize specific objectives of a common agenda, situated between the global agenda (and pressures) and local responses to it (or them). Globalization takes place at several levels and connects with three specific forms of regionalization: in Europe, Asia, and America. In this article, we will focus on the political dimension of globalization in the field of education in the EU, which education science refers to as the Europeanization of education and which is taking place via the establishment of the “European educational space” and/or “European education policy” (Dale, 2009; Nóvoa, 2010). EU member states are developing numerous political tools with which they are attempting to achieve common objectives in the field of education. This means that member states are no longer developing their policies in the context of relatively autonomous countries, but instead that political decisions are an increasingly complex collection of multilevel games that take place above, between, and within national borders (Dale, 1999). We will look at the effects of Europeanization in the case of the qualifications framework in Slovenia, an EU member since 2004. In this way, we hope to contribute to the current discussion on the Europeanization of education in Europe (Alexiadou, 2014; Dale, 2009; Lawn & Grek, 2012; Nóvoa, 2010; Pépin, 2007) and help increase the volume of empirical evidence of the effects of the Europeanization of education in individual European countries (Holford & Milana, 2014).

The concept of the Europeanization of education will serve us as a methodological tool, which we will use to try and understand two things: the role and effects of one of the key tools of European policy in the field of education, namely, the EQF, and the national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) that member states are developing under the influence of the EQF. The main purpose of the EQF is to promote the mobility of the workforce and the learning population via the formulation of common principles in the conception of qualifications. We will attempt to demonstrate that the development of the EQF and NQF has been influenced by two sources: on one hand, by the Anglo-Saxon countries, which were the first to establish a modern type of qualifications framework (Brockmann, Clarke, & Winch, 2008b, 2009; Cort, 2010; Young & Allais, 2009, 2011), and on the other, by global neoliberal policy, through instruments that tend toward the deregulation, marketization, and commodification of education. At the same time, we will try to show that NQFs in continental Europe have resulted, by virtue of their local specificities, in frameworks that differ considerably from qualifications in the Anglo-Saxon countries. It appears that the effects of globalization and Europeanization on education are unpredictable, because policies are never simply copied into national systems. It is always a matter of interpretation, which can also cause the ideas behind a policy to be undermined or altered.

The Europeanization of Education

The concept of Europeanization first appeared in the 1980s in political studies literature and achieved greater recognition in the 1990s, particularly in the field of European studies, although it does not have a single, clear-cut definition (Klatt, 2014; Ongur, 2010; Tabaldi & Calaresu, 2013). One of the most cited definitions of Europeanization is offered by Radaelli (2004), who says,

> Europeanization consists of processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, “ways of doing things,” and shared beliefs and norms, which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures, and public policies. (p. 3)

As noted by Lawn and Grek (2012), Europeanization represents the process of forming the EU; it is a political and network-based phenomenon and a specific element of globalization. Europeanization reflects the complexity of processes that include, first, transnational flows and networks of people, ideas, and practices across Europe in which European, national, and local actors are involved (cf. Castells, 2010; Scaramuzzino & Wennerhag, 2015); second, the direct effects of EU policy that via the open method of coordination are reflected in the field of education in the establishment of benchmarks, quality indicators, and the comparison of statistical data; and third, the Europeanizing effect of international institutions and globalization. In this context, Europeanization also means the process of successful integration of candidate countries for EU membership and the adoption of “European standards” in various fields. When, for example, the former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Slovenia among them) were preparing to join the EU in 2004 and 2007, they were required to accept various EU demands; the most evident example of this process in the field of education is represented by the implementation of the concept of lifelong learning, because this is supposed to contribute to making the EU the most competitive and knowledge-based economy (Mohorčič Špolar, Holford, & Milana, 2014). Something similar is being asked today of Turkey, which is expected to adopt European standards in various fields (Rahigh-Aghsan, 2011), or, for example, Serbia (Ermenec & Spasenović, 2011).

Discussions of Europeanization moved into the field of education at the turn of the millennium. The majority of authors identify the Lisbon Strategy as a key turning point in the Europeanization of education (e.g., Alexiadou, 2014; Dale, 2009; Ertl, 2006; Lawn & Grek, 2012; Nóvoa, 2010; Pépin, 2007). Through it, the EU set itself a fundamental strategic objective for the coming decade: “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (European Council, 2000, Paragraph 5). With the Lisbon Strategy, a
direct call for the modernization of education systems came from the highest level of the EU. The Lisbon Strategy identified lifelong learning as a key factor of the future economic and social development of the EU. A consequence of this has been a greater connection of education policy with economic, social, and employment policy and also more cooperation in the field of education (Fredriksson, 2003; Pépin, 2007; Rasmussen, 2014). The Lisbon Strategy conceptualizes education as part of social, labor market, and general economic policy, and not as an independent “teleological” policy field (Dale, 2009, p. 38).

The Lisbon Strategy, which sets specific future objectives for education systems, states that these objectives can only be achieved at the EU level, because they are a response to common EU problems. The mechanism for achieving these objectives is represented by the open method of coordination (OMC) “as the means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals” (European Council, 2000, Paragraph 37). The OMC is applied in the form of soft law via guidelines, indicators, benchmarks, reciprocal learning, expert opinions, statistical data, comparability of results, and so on. As a policy instrument, it contains quantitative and qualitative instruments, which member states use to exchange information on “best practices,” which leads to the formulation of national education policies in accordance with these practices. As a policy instrument, it also represents a mechanism of soft governance for European education policy—a form of governance “at a distance”—that takes place via the established EU institutions, networks, seminars, expert groups, associations, and so on (Lawn & Grek, 2012, pp. 67-70). Above all, the OMC encourages the discourse of the measurability of education and learning and functions in a manner that helps member states formulate education policies in a “commonly” agreed direction in a field in which—because of the rule of subsidiarity—the EU has no legal competences (Alexiadou, 2014; Nordin, 2014).

The first step in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy in the field of education was the decision of the Council on the common objectives of the future development of EU policies in the field of education and training (European Commission, 2001). The second step, in which the Commission and the Council established a detailed work program on the basis of the common objectives, was a document adopted the following year known as “Education and Training 2010” (Council of the European Union, 2002). After the end of the 10-year period addressed by the Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010), the Commission also defined a strategy for the development of education and training for the next 10-year period (2010-2020) known as “ET 2020” (Council of the European Union, 2009). The latter is part of the broader context of the “Europe 2020” strategy (European Commission, 2010), with which the Commission responded to the growing economic crisis in Europe in 2010 (cf. O’Reilly et al., 2015).

Taking as our starting point the above documents, which form the core of European education policy, we shall now consider the recommendations of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on the introduction of the EQF (European Parliament and the Council, 2008). The EQF is supposed to represent, in the light of these recommendations, a positive response to the economic and social pressures of globalization faced by member states, and also to contribute to greater employability, comparability, and mobility, in other words to the three leading topics that are guiding the EU in the structuring of the European educational space (Nóvoa, 2002).

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

In 2005, the Commission formulated a proposal on EQF, which was issued in 2008 in the form of recommendations by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. The two institutions recommend to member states that they “use the European Qualifications Framework as a reference tool to compare the qualification levels of the different qualifications systems and to promote . . . further integration of the European labour market, while respecting the rich diversity of national education systems” (p. 3), and explain that “this Recommendation does not replace or define national qualifications systems and/or qualifications,” and that “[g]iven its non-binding nature, this Recommendation conforms to the principle of subsidiarity” (European Commission, 2008, p. 7). The EQF is therefore a European instrument designed to enable the comparability of qualifications in European countries and, in this way, to promote the mobility of citizens between countries and enable lifelong learning, which is understood as the key factor of employability and workforce flexibility. It functions as a common European reference framework with eight levels that cover the full range of qualifications, from the elementary level to the postgraduate level. It is intended for all types and categories of qualifications, from general and vocational qualifications to higher education qualifications, and also qualifications obtained in a non-formal or informal context. The eight reference levels are described in terms of learning outcomes, which are defined as statements of “what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process” (p. 3) and are specified in three categories—as knowledge, skills, and competence. The EQF therefore emphasizes the results of learning rather than focusing on inputs such as the length of study, because European education and training systems differ so greatly that it would otherwise be extremely difficult to compare them.

Before adoption of the EQF in 2008, the only countries in Europe to have adopted qualifications frameworks were the Anglo-Saxon countries and France (for vocational and higher education qualifications); following adoption of the EQF, 36
European countries have either already established an NQF or are in the process of doing so (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [CEDEFOP], 2013). The upsurge in the number of qualifications frameworks in Europe in recent years has been remarkable. Efforts to establish NQFs have been supported by various international organizations such as the OECD, the World Bank, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the European Training Foundation (ETF), as well as by the EU. A consequence of this is that at least 142 countries around the world are now in the process of preparing and implementing an NQF, which means that NQFs are becoming a global phenomenon (ETF, CEDEFOP, & UNESCO, 2013). In this way, the NQF has become one of the most important areas of interest of international education policy, despite the shortage of empirical data or evidence showing that NQFs actually achieve their objectives and purposes (Allais, 2010, 2011).

As stated by Young (2005), the first NQFs of the kind that are today being put into place all around the world began to be developed in the 1980s in Anglo-Saxon environments (England, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand). Yet, the idea of qualifications frameworks is not a new one, and indeed in 1985, the Council of the European Union introduced five Community-wide levels of vocational qualifications and certificates for the mutual recognition of vocational qualifications among EU member states (Ertl, 2003). As Allais (2011) explains, these are “old-style frameworks,” while the Anglo-Saxon frameworks mentioned above are “new-style frameworks” (p. 109). The new Anglo-Saxon frameworks were the inspiration for the formulation of the EQF, while this, in turn, was the inspiration for the national frameworks being established since 2008 by other European countries. The EQF was therefore a kind of medium for the transfer of the influence of the Anglo-Saxon type of frameworks to other systems (cf. Bohlinger, 2007/2008; Brockmann et al., 2008b, 2009; Winterton, 2009). The new type of framework differs from the old type in at least three characteristics: (a) Its fundamental starting point is learning outcomes: Even the EQF abandoned the logic of input and replaced it with the logic of output (Méhaut & Winch, 2012): Systems of vocational education and training or qualifications systems differ too much from country to country, embedded as they are in different relationships between the state, the labor market, and employers, for it to be possible or logical to unify them. This is the start of a paradigmatic shift toward learning outcomes, which is characteristic of an ever-increasing number of countries and, consequently, of their NQF (CEDEFOP, 2009; Ermenc, 2014; Ermenc & Mikulec, 2011). (b) The second difference lies in the fact that the EQF is also understood as a mechanism for strengthening lifelong learning, for which reason, it has tried to find connections between formal, non-formal, and informal education and learning, between general, academic education and vocational education and training (Ermenc, 2014; Ermenc & Mikulec, 2011), although precisely because of its development and function, it also transfers its vocational logic into the wider education system (Brockmann, Clarke, & Winch, 2011). (c) The third difference is that the EQF has linked itself to a changed view of the recognition of qualifications: The Lisbon Recognition Convention replaced the concept of nostrification with the concept of equivalence: For a qualification from a sending country to be recognized in a receiving country, it must be similar to the qualification in the receiving country in so far as it either enables access to the labor market in the receiving country or enables access to further education (Ermenc, 2014; Rauhvargers, 2009).

Below, we will focus on the first of the three characteristics described, namely, the idea of learning outcomes, because this is one of the most controversial dimensions and one that goes to the very heart of modern education systems.

The Concept of Learning Outcomes

The concept of learning outcomes is an extremely loose one that can be interpreted in many different ways—both by researchers and by individual countries. Some countries understand learning outcomes as learning objectives, others as occupational standards or standards of competences (Allais, 2010), others again as educational standards, and so on (Brockmann et al., 2009). On one hand, then, we are faced with a global shift toward learning outcomes, which are being implemented in all subsystems of education, including in Europe (CEDEFOP, 2009); on the other hand, important differences exist in the understanding and application of learning outcomes in the different subsystems of education in individual countries and between countries. We believe that it is possible to distinguish between two general types of concept, which differ in terms of the type of regulation of the education system: (a) the continental European type, which is tied to a centralist approach to the regulation of the education system, and (b) the Anglo-Saxon type, characterized by a decentralized system of management of the education system (Ermenc, 2012, 2014). (a) In continental European countries, learning outcomes are usually understood within the formal education system as one of the key elements of curriculum documents and in this way, maintain the “input logic” view of the education system. Their purpose is to set out, in a transparent and comprehensible manner, what knowledge the learner will acquire in the education process and at what level of complexity this knowledge will be. Learning outcomes serve as a guide for the internal and external assessment of knowledge, which aims at ensuring a uniform quality of learning achievements and their comparability and, indirectly, the fairness of the system (in the sense of ensuring equally high-quality results for all). It is also in this sense that Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch (2008a) explain that in centralized systems, learning outcomes are derived from educational aims, which provide
the general purposes for which education is being provided, whether this be for liberal, vocational or civic reasons or a mixture of all of these. By their nature, aims, when they are stated, are of quite a high degree of generality: for example, to promote autonomy, employability, civic responsibility. Within such general statements, curriculum designers are able to develop the content in terms of knowledge, skill, understanding, attitudes, and virtues that the student is expected to acquire or develop in order to fulfil. (p. 101)

(b) In decentralized systems, learning outcomes are understood as both an input and an output concept. As an input concept, they are conceived as stand-alone elements, in other words, independent of education programs and institutions and, at the same time, subject to economic logic: They derive from economic goals and are closer to the direct needs of the market. They frequently take the form of occupational standards. At the same time, however, decentralized systems highlight the importance of understanding learning outcomes as an output concept: The concept of learning outcomes means the actually attained knowledge of the learner. From the point of view of the quality of the system, the quality of the achievements of every learner or educational institution becomes a key issue (which increases competition among learners and institutions), while learning achievements are “measured” in terms of predicted learning outcomes (Ermenc, 2014, p. 198).

Regardless of the conception of learning outcomes, in most cases—particularly in the context of NQFs—they are linked to competences. In some countries, these are divided into several sub-categories—cognitive, functional, social, and so on—or are understood as one of the dimensions of learning outcomes (alongside knowledge and skills; Brockmann et al., 2008a, 2008b; Gehmlich, 2008, Winterton, 2009). Winterton (2009) and Gehmlich (2008) claim that a broader, competence-based understanding of learning outcomes is the basis for a system that leads toward more comprehensive and better quality knowledge and is also closer to the continental European understanding of educational attainment. Nevertheless, even those more comprehensive concepts of competences that are supposed to represent the basis of European and national frameworks first developed in the sphere of vocational education and were then transferred to the education system as a whole. This means a transfer of the type and function of the modern vocational education curriculum to the education system as a whole (Boutsiouki, 2014; Cort, 2009). Even in its most comprehensive form (including metacognitive/cognitive, functional, social, and personal dimensions), it is above all a reflection of the pragmatic concept of knowledge (Ermenc & Mikulec, 2011).

**Critique of Learning Outcomes and NQFs**

The idea of learning outcomes embedded in an NQF has its roots in the competence-based approach to vocational education in England and derives from the belief that all qualifications should be expressed in terms of learning outcomes, independent of education programs. The idea is linked to the appearance of neoliberal economic policies in the 1980s and early 1990s, which emphasized the fundamental role of the private sector in the development of society and expressed dissatisfaction with the model for formulating qualifications, for which educational institutions were responsible (Young & Allais, 2009, 2011). Proceeding from an analysis of NQFs, Young and Allais (2009, 2011) conclude that a common aim of the different NQFs was to reduce the autonomy of educational institutions and encourage them to be more efficient by competing with each other. This would then result in the establishment of a qualifications market in which qualifications function as a commodity. A key role in this process is played by the concept of learning outcomes, because once learning outcomes are “liberated” from the institutions through which they are obtained, education systems will supposedly be closer to the needs of the economy and of people and will be more flexible, whereas qualifications will be more transparent and more transferable. Governments have thus used NQFs to stimulate reform of the education system and at the same time, as a strategy to promote economic competitiveness, social inclusion, and better educational opportunities. In doing so, they have also raised questions about the importance of institutional education (Young & Allais, 2009, 2011, 2013).

On the basis of evidence on how NQFs function, Young and Allais (Allais, 2007; Young & Allais, 2013), and also other authors (Brown, 2011; Edwards & Usher, 1994; Hussey & Smith, 2002, 2008), have undertaken a “radical critique” (Lassnigg, 2012, p. 309) of learning outcomes conceived as stand-alone elements. They have identified, in learning outcomes understood in this way, a harmful and dangerous concept for education systems. They have pointed out that the concept of learning outcomes reduces knowledge to standard units that hinder in-depth and creative learning, and that the epistemological diversity of knowledge is lost (Luke, Green, & Kelly, 2010). It also leads to a negation of the importance of “powerful knowledge” (Young & Allais, 2011, p. 5), which deepens social and geographical differences in access to the knowledge that counts. In the background is a new spatial division of labor and the rise of digital Taylorism: An increased supply of graduates from low-income countries reduces the cost of knowledge, while the knowledge economy routinizes intellectual work, giving only the most talented (coming from high-income countries’ elite universities) “permission to think” and to the rest, the opportunity to “translate innovations into routines.” Learning-outcome-based NQF is one of the tools that enhances this “revolution in standardisation” (Lauder, 2013). Critics also warn that learning outcomes contain false clarity, precision, objectivity, and measurability and underestimate both the value of the learning process and other less predictable results of the educational process that are harder to measure, the value of
learning in schools and other educational institutions, and so on.

Despite the criticisms and evidence of the inadequacies, dangers, and unfulfilled promises of the concept of learning outcomes and NQFs, in the context of the Europeanization of education through the establishment of the EQF, learning outcomes and NQFs have been identified as a “magic wand” capable of resolving many of the difficulties faced by education systems. Moreover, despite the extensive criticisms of the English qualifications framework, it is on this that the EQF has been based (Bohlinger, 2007/2008; Brockmann et al., 2008b, 2009; Winterton, 2009). In this sense, the EQF is not a neutral or technical tool of global policy but a framework that reflects the favoring of a specific educational tradition. The introduction of qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes therefore means, on one hand, the imposition of the English (Anglo-Saxon) tradition of preparation of education programs and curriculum documents, pedagogies, and assessment on the entire European educational space (Raffe, 2009), while on the other, it is a reflection of an ideology that conceals behind its apparent neutrality neoliberal tendencies toward the deregulation, marketization, and commodification of education and represents “a transfer of policies from the ideologically dominating Anglo-Saxon countries” (Cort, 2010, p. 312).

We have thus identified two sources of global pressures and influences that (continental) Europe is experiencing in connection with qualifications frameworks and learning outcomes. At the same time, we have shown that these influences and pressures on a given environment are never expressed directly but instead insert themselves into the existing system and practices: Although learning outcomes have become an important element of the education system in continental European countries, they have not (particularly in the context of formal education) changed the education sector as radically as they would have done if the global and European agenda had been followed more faithfully. Something similar has occurred in Slovenia, an EU member state that shares the continental European understanding of education, where the NQF has not cut as deeply into the education system as envisaged by the idea of the framework itself. We shall attempt to show that the key difference between the EQF and the Slovenian framework (as an example of a continental framework) actually lies in the conceptualization of learning outcomes.

The Slovenian NQF as an Example of a “European NQF Model”

Slovenia began preparations of its NQF on the basis of the recommendations of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on the establishment of the EQF, while financial support for the development of the NQF was provided by the European Social Fund—which is Europe's main instrument for investing in human capital—under the “Operational Programme for Human Resources Development for the Period 2007–2013.” Since 2010, Slovenia, like other member states and candidate countries, has also been receiving financial support from the Commission via the project “Activities of EQF National Coordination Points with a view to implement the EQF at national level.” Between 2009 and 2014, with the help of these financial mechanisms, Slovenia developed its NQF and referenced it to the EQF. Slovenia’s NQF does not represent a reform framework, because it is based on existing education legislation and established practices. The biggest structural and curriculum reforms to the education system in Slovenia’s recent history occurred when the country became independent in the early 1990s, when among other things the concept of a curriculum based on learning outcomes was introduced. The “shift to learning outcomes,” as CEDEFOP (2009) calls it, therefore took place back in the early 1990s, within the continental understanding described above. The Slovenian NQF has not significantly altered this view. The Slovenian NQF is characterized by the fact that it is a comprehensive framework that includes qualifications from all subsystems of initial and further education and training; its purpose is to achieve greater transparency of qualifications in Slovenia and the recognizability and comparability of these in the EU (Mikulec & Ermenc, 2014). According to Raffe (2009), we could categorize it as a “communication framework” (p. 25). The framework contains 10 levels, where level descriptors based on the EQF model are expressed in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences, although their definitions are slightly more precise and adapted to the existing national system. An example of the Slovenian level descriptor for NQF Level 5 is given below (see Table 1).

Consistent with the communication function of the framework, the form of learning outcomes is not prescribed uniformly for all qualifications, although it is a characteristic of all qualifications that learning outcomes are derived from the general aims of education, while in recent years, general aims have frequently been complemented (or substituted in the case of vocational education) by holistic descriptions of competences. Learning outcomes in Slovenia thus represent pre-prepared standardized units of knowledge; they derive from general educational aims; they require educational institutions and teachers to take responsibility for their achievement at a minimum level; and they take the form of learning objectives and standards of knowledge. Learning outcomes are built into the education programs provided by accredited educational institutions. At the same time, rules are prescribed for assessment and progression, conditions for high-quality pedagogical work, teacher training, and so on (Ermenc, 2014; Mikulec & Ermenc, 2014).

Unlike in global and European education policy, which by promoting learning outcomes as stand-alone elements endeavors above all to implement the economic objectives of education (Daun, 2011; Lawn, Rinne, & Grek, 2011), in Slovenia, learning outcomes are understood as built into education programs.
This means that they maintain their original function of achieving greater equality and fairness within the education system (White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia, 1995). This was, in fact, one of the fundamental aims of the reform of the curriculum in the 1990s, which introduced the goal orientation of curricula and standards of knowledge as the basis for national external testing of knowledge, the essential purpose of which is to monitor the quality of schools. Another reason for introducing the goal-oriented concept was to strengthen the autonomy of teachers, who are expected to use their professional judgment to adapt pathways to high-quality learning achievements of a nationwide standard of complexity to the needs of learners (White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia, 1995). Standards of knowledge became the starting point for internal and (national) external verification of learning achievements.

In principle, countries use external verification to ascertain the quality of the learning outcomes achieved, while to increase fairness in education, they frequently also dedicate attention to the quality of the learning achievements of learners from vulnerable social groups. With the establishment of the NQF, which to objectives regarding the quality and fairness of the education system adds the objectives of current European policy, in particular, the transferability and transparency of qualifications and individual learning outcomes, Slovenia is facing the danger that current political objectives will drown out the original objectives that led to the transition into an outcomes-based curriculum concept. This danger exists in particular because the country does not systematically monitor the achievements of all vulnerable groups—it monitors differences in achievements with regard to sex and place of residence, but not with regard to social origin and mother tongue—and because in accordance with the European and global agenda described above, the country is gradually adopting a concept of quality based on learning outcomes: When the quality of a school is only measured by the quality of achievements, the fundamental pedagogical aims of education are most at risk (cf. Sahlberg, 2010).

In its key dimensions, the Slovenian Qualifications Framework is an example of a “European NQF model” (CEDEFOP, 2013, pp. 15-18; Raffe, 2013, p. 149), the essential characteristics of which are that (a) it supports above all the European comparability of qualifications, (b) it represents a communication framework or a communication framework with a small reform component, (c) it is a comprehensive framework that includes qualifications from all subsystems of education, (d) it promotes a strategy of lifelong learning and addresses the needs of education systems to a greater extent than the needs of the labor market (employers), (e) the inclusion of qualifications in the framework is not conditioned by a prescribed form of curriculum, (f) learning outcomes in formal education are for the most part built into education programs (input concept) and are not presented as stand-alone elements (output concept), and (g) learning outcomes are used as outcomes-referenced rather than outcomes-led.

These characteristics of the typical European (or continental European) model of qualifications framework would appear to suggest that qualifications frameworks that share its characteristics will perhaps not realize the objectives that European education policy has identified for them. The question is whether such objectives can make education and training more demand-focused, enhance national competitiveness, support greater mobility of learners and workers, and facilitate the transferability of learning outcomes between different subsystems of education/training and non-formal and informal learning. In the process of “NQF-[europe]phoria” (Raffe, 2013, p. 144), the NQF objective that has to date proved itself to be the most realistic and feasible in European countries is that of referencing NQFs to the EQF, where, however, “we have almost no evidence on whether NQFs will support mobility and ensure access to emerging regional and global labour markets—despite this being a main reason for many countries to develop one” (p. 156).

Although the objectives indicated may simultaneously be the declared objectives of national policies, even national
policies encounter, in their own national contexts, consolidated practices, professional arguments, and established relations of power, which cannot simply be changed. If we think about some of the devastating criticisms, this may actually be good news for citizens and education systems.

Conclusion

On the basis of the concept of the Europeanization of education, we have shown that the impacts of globalization on education in Europe should not be understood merely as a top-down process from the EU to member states, but rather that the Europeanization of education represents a concept that also includes the infiltration of the rules of (influential) member states at the EU level, and the horizontal exchange of policies between networks of people, ideas, and practices across Europe, involving European, national, and local actors. The example of the EQF demonstrates both the power and the powerlessness of the process of Europeanization of education: Its power is evident in the fact that with the adoption of the EQF, all EU member states have themselves begun the process of introducing their own national frameworks, and in the fact that in their structure, these frameworks have followed the European framework fairly faithfully. The proliferation of qualifications frameworks in Europe in just the last few years has been remarkable, and they have become a global phenomenon. Yet, the EQF does not represent a neutral technical instrument of common European policy, because its understanding of learning outcomes and qualifications is taken from the English NQF. This means that we may see it as the reflection of an ideology that, behind its apparent neutrality, conceals the implementation of education policies from the ideologically dominant European countries.

However, the case of Slovenia, analyzed here, also points to the powerlessness of the Europeanization process: Although national frameworks in Europe have developed on the basis of the EQF proposal and with the help of European financial mechanisms, when it comes to implementing the European agenda, national policies come up against existing practices, arguments, and power relations, which, particularly in the case of centralized countries with a highly regulated education system, are difficult to change. Clearly, the state continues to be a space for the “interpretation” of the rules that are formulated in the context of European education policy: Although the EQF has promoted the introduction of NQFs in European countries, the Slovenian model is close to the model of other continental European countries. The model that we have called the European NQF model is characterized by the fact that learning outcomes are used as a reference and not as the starting point for systemic reform or curriculum reform. At the same time, this model gives priority to the objective of Europe-wide comparability of qualifications. In this sense, the European model does not, in our view, represent a powerful neoliberal tool for the deregulation, marketization, and commodification of education, which has been the essential criticism of qualifications frameworks in the Anglo-Saxon countries and countries where the Anglo-Saxon approach has served as a model (see Young & Allais, 2013). Proceeding from the example of the implementation of the NQF in Slovenia, we may conclude that European education policy provides at least a superficial harmonization in the field of qualifications frameworks, with the help of established mechanisms, while at the same time, it is evident that its effects are relatively small. It appears that the rule described above also functions here: No solution that arises as the result of European education policy can simply be copied into a national system. Not only is such a solution necessarily an interpretation of the policy in question, it may even undermine and alter its ideas.

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