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## ORGANIZATIONAL SCHOOL CLIMATE IN CITY HIGH SCHOOLS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS<sup>\*\*1</sup>

**Abstract:** A positive organizational school climate is recognized as a significant factor in teacher well-being and student learning outcomes. This research examined the quality of the organizational school climate in high schools in the Republic of Serbia. A sample of 149 teachers from nine high schools completed a self-report questionnaire (77.9% male, and 22.1% female). Measures included the Organizational School Climate Scale – factors: School management and interactions ( $\alpha = .96$ ), and School commitment ( $\alpha = .90$ ). The results showed that the quality of the organizational school climate was high: School management and interactions ( $M = 4.30$ ); School commitment ( $M = 4.44$ ). Also, differences in the evaluation of the organizational school climate concerning the schools' locations were confirmed. Regarding the subscale School management and interactions, the results favored schools outside Belgrade  $t(147) = -3.64, p < .01$ , as well as regarding the subscale School commitment, where the commitment of

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teachers was more pronounced in schools outside Belgrade  $t(147) = -4.75, p < .01$ . The findings of this research have the potential to encourage reflection on the importance of promoting positive interactions among school members so that the school can achieve its mission and vision of positive education and upbringing of children.

**Keywords:** *high schools, teachers, organizational school climate, commitment and interactions, Republic of Serbia.*

## Introduction

The concept of organizational climate was developed in the late 1950s, while interest in studying school climate began in the 1960s when the *Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire* (Halpin & Croft, 1963) was constructed to examine the effects of organizational school climate on student achievement (Tadić, 2023; Tadić, 2024). Halpin and Croft's (1963) work became the foundation for further research on school climate. Since then, the field of school climate research has expanded to investigate its relationship with teachers' job satisfaction, commitment, work motivation, and efficiency (Đurišić, 2020), as well as its connection to phenomena such as school attachment, engagement, aggressiveness, and the like (Zullig, Koopman, Patton, Ubbes, 2010). In accordance with the development of the research field, the initial concept proposed by Halpin and Croft (1963) has undergone certain conceptual and operational changes over the decades. As certain authors point out (Tadić, 2024; Tadić & Kordić, 2024), the decades-long tradition of studying school climate and applying various models aimed at its improvement has resulted in a series of review articles that highlight disagreements about the definition of the phenomenon itself and the indicators that should be used to measure school climate (Cohen, Pickeral, McCloskey, 2009; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013; Zullig et al., 2010). According to one of the definitions, the school climate is determined as "the quality and character of school life [...] based on patterns of people's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, Pickeral, 2009: 10). As Hoy (1990, for a review: Dolegowski, 2022) points out, the organizational school climate represents a set of internal characteristics that distinguish one school from another and influence the behavior of its members; that is, school climate is the relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perceptions of behavior in schools. A school has an organizational climate just as an individual has a personality (Halpin & Croft, 1963, for a review: Bentea, 2013).

Theorists believe that when determining the organizational school climate, it is necessary to make a clear distinction from the notion of organizational school culture. School culture theorists mostly agree that the separation criterion between culture and

climate is determined by the principle of the difference between shared assumptions (culture) and “perceptions of behavior” (climate) in schools (Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe, Aelterman, 2008; Maslowski, 2001; Tadić, 2024; Tadić & Kordić, 2024). Some authors viewed school climate as an indicator of school culture (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017), while other authors do the opposite (Gonder & Hymes, 1994). Although climate and culture both refer to the general atmosphere or feel of the school, they evolve from different perspectives, use different research strategies, and concentrate on different organizational aspects (Hoy, 1990).

In this paper, organizational school climate was conceptualized as the perceptions of teachers about the relationships in schools between teachers with each other and the teacher and school management. One dimension of climate defines teacher-teacher relationships (e.g., trust, support, respect, and cooperation) and teacher-principal relationships (e.g., participatory decision-making, opportunities for professional development, communication support). Also, one dimension defines school commitment (loyalty, advocacy for success, sharing of common values). Generally, according to Herzberg’s theory of motivation, the school climate is a factor that affects work behavior and efficiency (Alston, 2017). The nature of the interactions that the principals establish depends on the perception of organizational support, which is one of the significant factors that influence the application of teaching strategies aimed at student development and meeting educational standards (Alston, 2017; Tableman & Herron, 2004). Numerous studies have shown that the support that teachers have, whether in the academic, social, affective, or physical environment, positively affects their effectiveness over time (Kraft, 2014); relationships with other colleagues (Thapa & Cohen, 2012); and student learning outcomes/effective learning (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Tableman & Herron, 2004). Also, teacher productivity is influenced by other factors, such as participatory decision-making, trust between teachers and principals, and others. These factors not only affect the empowerment of teachers to discuss problems, needs for improvements, and other issues of common interest (curriculum, assessment, etc.) but also generally affect the school’s capacity to make adjustments to improve teaching and learning (Alston, 2017; Ryan & Ostreich, 1991).

The issue of collegiality (cooperation and collaboration) among teachers is also an issue that principals influence by creating an inclusive social and affective climate. Principals who are collegial, friendly, open, supportive, and committed establish norms and standards that encourage cooperation among school personnel, thereby creating a climate conducive to learning (Hoy, 1990). Collaboration between teachers is recognized as an important factor in improving teaching practices and achieving better results (Barth, 1990; Hoy, 1990; Hoy & Hannum, 1997), because collegial relationships based on trust and support encourage openness to change, new ideas, and improvement (Johnson, 1990). The authors emphasize that a culture of trust is the key to the effectiveness of schools (Tarter, Sabo, Hoy, 1995). Collegial teachers are committed to the school, colleagues, and their students. They set high but achievable

academic goals and are cohesive and cooperative rather than critically oriented (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). These characteristics are related to student achievement (Little, 1987). Commitment to work is an issue that is most influenced by the overall school climate and the nature of established interpersonal interactions. Some authors point out that teachers who work in a positive environment show higher levels of persistence, effort, motivation, and performance on various tasks, even when teaching students who require an increased investment of energy and resources (Alston, 2017; Sass, Seal, Martin, 2011). Therefore, commitment to the organization is highlighted as a significant success factor (Tella, Ayeni, Popoola, 2007).

Some authors suggest that school atmosphere varies independently in the following words: “Researchers who visit several schools notice how schools are sensibly different and see each and every school has a unique individuality” (Memduhoğlu & Şeker, 2011: 1). This approach can be used to indicate differences between schools in relation to the quality of the organizational school climate and the degree of commitment of employees to the organization, and according to certain sociodemographic variables. This, above all, refers to differences between schools according to location and age of employees. According to the specificities that are present in less urban areas (e.g. towns/small cities), such as, for example, smaller school sizes, greater connections between the school and the community, better mutual knowledge and identification among community members, close collegial relationships, etc., previous research shows that schools in less urban areas have a more positive organizational climate, greater job satisfaction, and a greater degree of involvement in work (Burns & Machin, 2012; Wang, Lin, Liang, 2017). Also, in less urban schools, there is greater commitment to the organization (Shah & Mahmood, 2021), while in urban areas, teacher turnover is higher (Whipp & Geronime, 2017). When it comes to the relationship between teacher age and loyalty and commitment to the organization, research indicates that younger and less experienced teachers are more stressed about the challenges of teaching than their older colleagues and that their level of commitment to work is lower – the highest loyalty is shown by teachers who are over 50 years old, and the lowest by teachers under 30 years old (Jonathan, Darroux, Masseur, 2013).

In this paper we examine how teachers perceive the organizational school climate in city high schools and high schools in other towns in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, and whether there are differences in assessment between city schools in the territory of Belgrade and schools in other, territorially and demographically smaller areas (towns) in Serbia.

## **Method**

*Study design.* The main objective of the research was to examine the quality of the organizational school climate in high schools. The research was conducted in person during the first semester of 2021/2022 in selected high schools in the Republic

of Serbia using questionnaires constructed in collaboration with professional associates from the Section of Psychologists of Professional Associates of High Schools (Tadić, 2023; Tadić & Kordić, 2024). Questionnaire items were selected based on initial concepts of organizational school climate (NSCC, 2015; Mowday, Steers, Porter, 1979) by choosing indicators and instruments that measured them. Specifically, the indicators included in the research were Leadership and Professional Relations (NSCC, 2015) and Organizational Commitment (Mowday, Steers, Porter, 1979). The expert team, consisting of professional associates, psychologists, and pedagogues from the high schools included in the sample reviewed the questionnaire items, removed certain items, and reformulated others to adapt them to cultural specificities and the population in our environment (Tadić, 2023; Tadić & Kordić, 2024). Additionally, the members of the expert team conducted the research in their respective schools. The aim was to have approximately 20 teachers from each school participate in the research. This research is part of a broader research on school climate, prosocial behavior and safety in high schools in the Republic of Serbia (see: Tadić, 2023).

*Participants.* The total sample consisted of 149 teachers from the nine high schools in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The sample of teachers was not uniform in terms of gender and consisted of 77.9% female and 22.1% male respondents.<sup>2</sup> The following schools are included in the sample of city high schools in the Belgrade territory: The Second Economics School, Belgrade; Sveti Sava Gymnasium, Belgrade; Technical School of Leather Design, Belgrade. The following schools are included in the sample of high schools in towns outside the Belgrade territory: Trade and Hospitality School, Leskovac; Technical School, Požega; Art School, Užice; Secondary School of Economics, Sombor; Economic and Trade School, Bor; School of Economics, Čačak.<sup>3</sup>

*Measures.* The Organizational School Climate Scale (Tadić, 2023) contains 32 items with responses on a five-point Likert scale. It measures two dimensions of organizational school climate: school management and interactions, and school commitment. School management and interactions encompass teacher-teacher

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<sup>2</sup> The age of the teacher was not a sociodemographic variable, because, considering the size of the sample in individual schools, the anonymity of the respondents would be called into question.

<sup>3</sup> The classification of schools into city schools and schools in towns was carried out according to the manual: *Applying the degree of urbanization – methodological manual to define cities, towns and rural areas for international comparisons* (EU, 2021). This manual proposes a simple division of the territory according to the degree of urbanization classification, such as cities, towns and semi-dense areas, and rural areas. Generally, countries make a classification between urban and rural areas (e.g. most often a city is designated as an urban area and a village as rural). The degree of urbanization classification tries to accommodate these intermediate areas and different points of view to emphasize that towns and semi-dense areas are halfway between a city and a rural area (EU, 2021: 33). So, in this paper, we consider Belgrade as a city (more than 1.5 million inhabitants), and other urban settlements as towns (less than 150 thousand inhabitants).

relationships (e.g., trust, support, respect, and cooperation) and teacher-administration relationships (e.g., participatory decision-making, opportunities for professional development, and communication support). Examples of items for this dimension are (Tadić, 2023): “School employees help each other in tasks related to teaching”; “School employees cooperate well with each other”; “School employees trust each other”; “The school management includes the staff in decision-making”; “The school management pays special attention to the development of staff expertise”; “School management supports teachers and employees”. School commitment refers to commitment to the organization (loyalty, commitment to success, sharing of common values). An example item for this dimension is: “Toward this school, I would accept additional responsibilities to continue working for this school”; “I feel loyalty to this school”; “I would accept additional responsibilities to continue working for this school”. The reliability measured by the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is very high for both dimensions: School management and interactions ( $\alpha = .96$ ) and School commitment ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

## Data analysis

The data were processed using multivariate statistics. By analyzing the main components according to Zorić and Opačić (Zorić & Opačić, 1997) analytical operationalization of Cattell’s scree criterion, a decision was made on the number of significant factors. Based on the Organizational School Climate, two factors were extracted that explained a total of 57.065% of the variance (School management and interactions = 50.051% of the variance; School Commitment = 7.014% of the variance) (Tadić, 2023). The multicollinearity between the factors was examined using Pearson’s correlation coefficients. Using the T-test analysis, the differences in the assessment of the organizational school climate in relation to the location of the schools were examined. A *p-value* < .01 was considered statistically significant. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0 (IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 20.0).

## Results

Table 1 shows correlations and descriptive indicators for the given dimensions. Based on descriptive statistics, it can be concluded that high scores were achieved for both dimensions: School commitment ( $M = 4.44$ ) and Organizational school climate ( $M = 4.30$ ). Also, both dimensions demonstrate a highly statistically significant relationship ( $r = .74$ ), which suggests the compactness of the examined phenomenon and the possibility of observing two separate factors as one.

*Table 1. Pearson's correlation coefficient and mean values*

		K1	K2
School management and interaction	K1		.74**
School commitment	K2	.74**	
Mean		4.30	4.44
SD		.62	.61

Note. \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 2 shows the differences in the assessment of the organizational school climate concerning the schools' locations. The schools were divided into two groups – one group consisted of city schools (i.e., the teaching staff of city schools in the Belgrade territory), and the second group of schools (i.e., the teaching staff of schools in towns outside the Belgrade territory).

*Table 2. Differences between city schools in Belgrade and schools in other towns*

	Schools	N	M	SD	F	t	df	P
School management and interactions	city schools	46	4.02	.68	8.57	-3.64	147	< .01
	schools in towns	103	4.43	.544				
School commitment	city schools	46	4.05	.76	25.34	-4.75	147	.00
	schools in towns	103	4.62	.43				

Note. \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Based on the obtained results, we can conclude that statistically significant differences exist between the two groups of schools mentioned above and the dimensions of the organizational school climate. Regarding the dimension of School management and interactions among employees, the results favor schools in towns ( $t(147) = -3.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ), as well as regarding the dimension of School commitment, where the employees' commitment is more pronounced in schools in towns ( $t(147) = -4.75$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

## Discussion

With this research, we examined how teachers evaluate the organizational school climate in city high schools and high schools in towns. According to the research results, the average score for the organizational school climate is  $M = 4.37$ , indicating that the quality of school leadership and interpersonal relationships in the

collective is high (Tadić, 2023). The School commitment dimension is somewhat more pronounced than the School management and interactions dimension. The results of a survey conducted by the National Center for School Climate (NSCC, 2015) on a sample of American elementary school teachers regarding the two dimensions we used in our research show that the mean value on a five-point scale for teacher-rated school climate is individually for the Leadership ( $M = 4.38$ ) and Professional relations ( $M = 4.70$ ) subscales. The above results support the findings obtained in our research. We can conclude that a positive school climate among employees is reflected in good communication, trust, participative decision-making, support, and opportunities for professional development by the principal, as well as in the mutual cooperation of teachers and the provision of help and support (Tadić, 2023). These qualities are closely related to teachers' dedication and job satisfaction, and students' academic achievements (Othman & Kasuma, 2016; Raman, Chi Ling, Khalid, 2015; Trepatharath & Tayiam, 2014).

The relationship between school management and interaction with a greater commitment to work and vice versa was also confirmed in our research by the Pearson correlation coefficient. Studies of variation in teacher effectiveness and improvement over time have shown that teachers working in supportive professional environments improve their effectiveness compared to less supportive environments (Alston, 2017). Namely, teachers need support in the academic, social, affective, and physical environment to successfully apply teaching strategies necessary to educate children and meet rising standards (Alston, 2017). Nir and Hameiri (2014) point out that support within the above four dimensions is reflected in different forms of director influence. In terms of academic climate, teachers' pedagogical abilities are influenced by school principals' problem-solving capacities, as well as knowledge of relevant pedagogical practices; in terms of affective climate, the perception of teachers' emotional state is influenced by the principal's capacity to inspire and support teachers; while the social/physical climate implies an organizational path that refers to the formal structure of the school and the organization of work processes and procedures (Nir & Hameiri, 2014, for a review: Alston, 2017).

Previous research suggests that collegiate principals who are friendly, open, supportive, and committed, along with teachers who are cohesive and cooperative, committed to students, their peers, and their school, create a climate conducive to student learning (Hoy, 1990). A study on collaboration interventions showed that positive collaboration entails participatory decision-making, improved perceptions of school climate, and improved achievement (Cohen et al., 2009). Also, the organizational school climate significantly affects student behavior because, in schools with a positive climate, students value and respect their teachers more (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, 2011). In some studies, principal support has been recognized as a factor in teacher commitment and effective learning (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Kelley, Thornton, Daugherty, 2005; McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Teachers who are committed to a school will want to continue working for a given school and invest their energy regardless of other employment opportunities (Weihui & Zhao, 2011). Teacher commitment and student well-being are crucial aspects of



school effectiveness (Hoy, 1990; Hoy & Hannum, 1997). On the other hand, when the climate is perceived as negative, teachers' teaching performance and student achievement may be weaker (Burns & Machin, 2012). In other words, the absence of principal and colleague support factors is associated with a lack of satisfaction, even depersonalization and classroom dysfunction (Alonso-Tapia & Ruiz-Díaz, 2022; Benita, Butler, Shibaz, 2019). A negative school climate, among other things, is associated with increased teacher turnover, which consequently affects student achievement (Ronfeldt, 2013).

When it comes to the differences concerning the examined dimensions in relation to the location of the schools, differences were found in the teachers' assessments in city high schools in the Belgrade territory and high schools in towns outside the Belgrade territory. Both dimensions are more pronounced in high schools in towns outside Belgrade (Tadić, 2023). Previous research has indicated a more positive organizational climate, greater job satisfaction, and a greater degree of involvement in work in less urban areas (Burns & Machin, 2012; Wang, Lin, Liang, 2017). Also, in less urban schools, there is a greater commitment to the organization (Kumari & Jafri, 2011; Raj & Lalita, 2013). However, some authors did not find differences in school commitment among teachers in urban and rural schools (Garipağaoğlu, 2013; Suki, 2011). The existence of differences in the perception of the organizational school climate can be explained by the assumption of a spirit of community that is more present in smaller communities. The dynamics and way of life in smaller communities dictate the nature of the relationship toward work and between people. Slower dynamics, more free time, and a greater degree of mutual knowledge and identification, and therefore the appropriateness and congruence of belief patterns, values, attitudes, expectations, ideas, and behavior, create interpersonal relationships in terms of good communication, cooperation, and support, but also provide an opportunity for greater commitment to work (Tadić, 2023). Also, in less urban areas (e.g. towns), there are fewer schools, with a smaller number of employees and students and smaller cultural differences, which are significant factors that affect the quality of the organizational climate. Kaya and Selvitopu (2019) report that sharing common values and culture is associated with better classroom management skills. Other authors also advocate the thesis of the spirit of community (Burns & Machin, 2012; Wang, Lin, Liang, 2017). Being a teacher in a less urban school means being a part of the community, since members in smaller communities know each other better, identification is easier, and the involvement and participation of the administrative leadership in the work and life of the teacher is greater (Wang, Lin, Liang, 2017). In contrast, the dynamics of life in general and the organization of school life in city are different: people are predominantly faced with a multitude of obligations and activities, they are focused on procedures and decisions, the number of employees and students is greater, and cultural diversity is more ubiquitous. In such an organization, the conditions that promote collegiality and commitment of management and teachers are often less present (Tadić, 2023). In general, the involvement of administrative management in the life of teachers is less (Wang, Lin, Liang, 2017).

Certain studies, supporting the above-mentioned, show that teacher turnover is higher in cities (Kardos & Johnson, 2001; Whipp & Geronime, 2015). This is especially characteristic for young and new teachers who typically report higher stress levels related to discipline problems, low student ability and general responsibilities (Burns & Machin, 2012), and lack of support and feedback from principals and staff (Kardos & Johnson, 2001). This is supported by data indicating that approximately 50% of teachers in America leave the profession within ten years due to poor working environments, lack of support, etc. (Mitchell, Bradshaw, Leaf, 2010; for a review: Alston, 2017). Some authors recognize the importance of collegiality, including good relationships between principals and employees, as the most important factor for teacher retention and success (Little, 1982; Lloyd & Sullivan, 2012; Rhodes & Camic, 2009). Such a relationship implies a supportive and interactive environment, imbued with participatory decision-making, cooperation (sharing expertise, planning cooperation, support for beginning teachers), and reduced stress at work (Alston, 2017; Tadić, 2023). In other words, collegiality means that teachers discuss problems and difficulties, share ideas and knowledge, exchange techniques and approaches, observe each other's work, and collaborate on teaching projects (Hoy, 1990). In schools where collegiality is the norm, interactive relationships and collaborative work among teachers on activities to improve the school's academic performance are promoted (Hoy & Hannum, 1990; Little, 1982).

## **Conclusion**

The research we conducted pointed to the high quality of the organizational school climate in high schools in Serbia. It showed that teachers cooperate with each other, trust each other, and provide mutual support. The relationship between teachers and principals is reflected in good communication, participative decision-making, support, and opportunities for professional development provided by the principal. Also, the teachers are dedicated to their work and loyal to the school. These characteristics of a positive organizational school climate are somewhat more pronounced in schools in towns. Such findings are very significant when considering that schools are social organizations that, due to their position in society, are responsible for children's socialization, education, and upbringing (Pavlović & Tadić, 2024; Tadić, 2023; Tadić, 2024). For schools to be academically efficient and effective, a positive climate in the organization is necessary because relationships at the school level are also reflected at the classroom level. Teachers satisfied with their work will be ready to devote themselves to students and their achievements, and students will respect and appreciate their teachers more. The responsibility for creating such a climate lies primarily with the principal and their management skills. Supporting the obtained findings is that the principals consented to their school's participation in the research without fear of evaluation, indicating the quality of school management and interpersonal relations (Tadić, 2023). Certainly, the conducted research has certain limitations related to the sample size and the fact that the

principals did not complete the organizational school climate survey, so no comparison could be made between the teachers' and principals' assessments. In future research, it would be significant to make this comparison and examine the relationship between organizational school climate and student achievement.

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## **ОРГАНИЗАЦИОНА ШКОЛСКА КЛИМА У ГРАДСКИМ СРЕДЊИМ ШКОЛАМА ИЗ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ НАСТАВНИКА**

### **РЕЗИМЕ**

Позитивна организациона школска клима препозната је као значајан фактор благостања наставника и постигнућа ученика. Овим истраживањем испитали смо квалитет организационе школске климе у средњим школама у Републици Србији. Узорак од 149 наставника из девет средњих школа на територији Републике Србије попунио је упитник самопроцене (77,9% узорка чинили су мушкарци, а 22,1% узорка жене). Мере су укључивале Упитник организационе школске климе – факторе: Школско руковођење и интеракције ( $\alpha = 0,96$ ) и Посвећеност школи ( $\alpha = 0,90$ ). Резултати су показали да је квалитет организационе школске климе висок: Школско руковођење и интеракције ( $M = 4,30$ ); Посвећеност школи ( $M = 4,44$ ). Такође, утврђене су разлике у процени школске климе у односу на локацију школа. Када је реч о супскали Школско руковођење и интеракције, резултати иду у корист школа ван територије Београда  $t(147) = -3,64$ ,  $p < 0,01$ , као и у погледу супскале Посвећеност школи, где је посвећеност запослених израженија у школама ван Београда  $t(147) = -4,75$ ,  $p < 0,01$ . Резултати овог истраживања имају потенцијал да подстакну на промишљање о значају промовисања позитивних интеракција међу члановима колектива како би школа могла да оствари своју мисију и визију, а то је позитивно образовање и васпитање деце.

**Кључне речи:** *средње школе, наставници, организациона школска клима, посвећеност и интеракције, Република Србија.*