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OVERVIEW OF CULTURAL SITUATIONOF SOUTHERN SERBIA BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS¹

Abstract:In Southern Serbia, the cultural situation between the two world wars lagged behind other parts of the Yugoslav state. The small number of students in schools, lack of awareness about the need for schooling, lack of financial resources and teaching staff, as well as a large number of illiterates determined the cultural landscape of Southern Serbia. The Yugoslav state had made efforts to improve the situation. Schools and courses for the illiterate were supposed to improve educational opportunities. Laws on education were passed, schools were rebuilt and built, but even this was not enough to overcome the decades-long backwardness of Southern Serbia compared to other parts of the Yugoslav state. State and historical jubilees were celebrated, such as the school slava of St. Sava, the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Southern Serbia, the liberation of cities from the Turks and so on. Associations and societies were established that were to improve the population in national, cultural and health terms. In the article, with the help of archival sources and literature, I give an overview of cultural situation, with an emphasis on Kosovo and Metohija, the modernization of which was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War.

Key words: Culture, Educational situation, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Metohija, Southern Serbia.

Educational opportunities

At the time when the Serbian state was under the Turks, any economic and cultural progress was prevented, and Serbian education was persecuted along with the church. Most of the schools were monastery schools, because the Turkish authorities did not allow anything other than religious education, so secular schools in many cases worked in secret. From 1890, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, with Stojan Novaković at the head, took care of Serbian schools in Turkey according to the plan and program from Serbia. However, schools were closed and teachers were persecuted. After the Balkan wars, there was more intensive work in schools, but progress was slow. School municipalities were formed, children were enrolled and funds were obtained for work. The First World War broke out just as a more modern education system was being implemented and everything

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was interrupted (Vukadinović & Bogavac, 2001: pp. 53-55). Education and schooling in Kosovo and Metohija in the period after the First World War were conditioned by the specific political, cultural and social situation in the country and in that area (Bondžić, 2008:p.21; *Osnovni statistički podaci o razvoju i stanju školstva u Federativnoj Narodnoj Republici Jugoslaviji*, 1957:pp.3-10). The "cradle of Slavic literacy and education", as this area was in the Middle Ages, was on the back burner in the interwar period (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p.368).

In the period from 1929, the Yugoslav state was divided into banovinas, and the area of Kosovo and Metohija was part of three banovinas - Vardarska, Moravska and Zetska. The issue of education in Kosovo and Metohija was very important in order to break the awareness of the temporary Serbian presence established by Albanian, Bulgarian, Turkish and Austrian propaganda (Dimić, 1997:pp.93-94). Therefore, in addition to spreading literacy, the school, according to the educational and cultural plan of King Aleksandar Karađorđević, had the task of "national education", the teaching staff was supposed to be "nationally conscious", and the educational supervisors to control the "loyalty of educators to the national idea" (Dimić, 1997a:p.118).

With the Law on Public Schools of 5 December 1929, teaching in public schools became general and mandatory throughout the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The national school included elementary and high school, both lasting four years (Isić, 2005: pp. 18-57; Pejić, 1999: pp. 585-587). The law provided, although unrealistic, for the opening of primary schools where there are at least 30 children required to attend school in a radius of 4 km, as well as that in areas where access is difficult, the school can be opened with 20 students (Dimić, 1997; pp.123-125). In Kosovo and Metohija, the network of schools was rare in 1930/31. Each school had an average of 354 households and 2,296 inhabitants, although one school covered 45.16 km², with 5.89 settlements (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p.368). The network of kindergartens was underdeveloped and unknown to the wider population. The establishment of kindergartens on a wider scale was relatively recent. It is 1939/40 in Kosovo and Metohija, there were 4 kindergartens (166 in Vojvodina), with 6 classes, 331 children and 7 teachers (Osnovni statistički podaci o razvoju i stanju školstva u Federativnoj Narodnoj Republici Jugoslaviji, 1957: p. 6).

From 1929/30. the schools were financed from the municipal budgets, and since the municipalities were poor, the maintenance of schools had the characteristics of general economic conditions, and most often the fees were paid in the second half of the year when taxes were collected (Dimić, 1997: p.88). The school buildings in Kosovo and Metohija were the least suitable for school needs (103 or 22.20%), as we learn from the report of school supervisors (Dimić, 1997:p.81). Many schools were opened in private houses, abandoned buildings of Turkish dignitaries, church buildings, but also in taverns (Jovanović, 2011: p.419). Considering the allocation of money for school buildings, school furniture was not in the first place, so the schools were inadequately equipped. The furniture in the schools was quite old, dilapidated and unhygienic. Schools usually had only the most necessary equipment (Isić, 2005: p. 217; Isić, 2009: p. 92). According to the Law on

Public Schools, school buildings had to have apartments for teachers, which was especially necessary in Kosovo and Metohija so that teachers could stay as long as possible and dedicate themselves to their calling (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p. 374). Only some newly built buildings had teachers' apartments, and only one at most (Isić, 2005: p.185).

The role of schools and teachers in the South was labeled "missionary", because the authorities tried to "raise national awareness" through it, so they sent teachers with a "correct past, nationally clean and morally correct", "depoliticized", professional and familiar with the mentality population (Dimić, 1997: p.94). The teacher was in a very difficult position in the village, because he or she was in an environment where people were fighting for survival. In the village, many people were illiterate, so, for example, they often called the teacher to write them a letter(*Vardar*, 21 June 1934: p. 4). According to the place of origin, most of them were from Southern Serbia, then from Northern Serbia and from the Banovina of Zeta (Marković & Ivanović, 1937: pp. 928-929). Teachers were reluctant to stay in Kosovo and Metohija due to weak communications, poor railway connections, insufficient maintenance of schools, distance from doctors, poverty, remote villages, as well as lack of accommodation, so there could be no talk of serious educational work (*Vardar*, 9 July 1935: p.7).

School supervisors often managed to influence the teaching in elementary schools with constructive remarks, so that it would become more regular and intensive and, therefore, the general success would be improved. In order to "awaken the national patriotic feeling", attention was paid mostly to the teaching of history and the Serbian language. However, in elementary schools in Kosovo and Metohija, it was very important that students have a practical benefit from classes, because 99% of peasant children stayed at home after finishing elementary school, so it was necessary to adapt education to such circumstances (Isić, 2005: p.444). The provisions of the Law on Public Schools prescribed the obligation to give land to the school for a school garden, so schools in Kosovo and Metohija received large plots of several hectares of fertile land. In this way, schools became economically stronger, school children got to know new agricultural cultures, and the rural population got the opportunity to accept rational cultivation of the land (Dimić, 1997: p.102).

Children were often absent from school due to the ignorance and lack of enlightenment of their parents, poverty, distance, severe and prolonged winter or illness, and in the spring due to doing agricultural work. Most of the primary schools in the Nerodimlje region did not work on Saturday afternoons because then it was a market day, so students did not come to school (Isić, 2005: p.318). Children in towns attended school more regularly than those in rural areas, and the Serbian, Albanian and Turkish population attended school most regularly (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p.377). Settlers sent their children to school most regularly(Čupković, 1940: p.510). The state government had the right by law to force parents to send their children to school. Punitive measures for children's absence from school were tightened by the Law of 5 December 1929; the measures included a warning and then a fine for the parents (Isić, 2005: p.320).

As for secondary schools, according to the Secondary Schools Act of 1929, these schools were supposed to be state or self-governing, while the possibility of opening private secondary schools was excluded (Dimić, 1997: p.154). The enrollment procedure was determined in 1935, and tuition was paid according to the annual tax (*Vardar*, 1 September, 1936: p.4). Compared to primary schools, secondary schools were in better circumstances. However, they also had problems with the conditions and maintenance of the buildings (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p.378). These were usually rented, converted houses inadequate for school use. Such were the gymnasiums in Priština and Prizren, the state gymnasium in Kosovska Mitrovica, the state gymnasium in Peć, as well as the Đakovica civil school.

During the personal regime of King Alexander Karadjordjević, there was a reduction in the number of high schools. As a consequence of the implementation of the Law on Secondary Schools, which proclaimed the aspiration to rationalize the school network in order to prevent further "fabrication of the intellectual proletariat", many gymnasiums were abolished or turned into self-governing ones, as was the case with the gymnasiums in Kosovska Mitrovica and Peć (Bazić, 2009: pp.163-175). The new law also abolished high schools in Đakovica and Uroševac, as they did not meet the appropriate legal requirements. However, it did not take much time to realize that the abolition of gymnasiums was too hasty. There were not enough teaching staff, the eight-year schooling was not implemented, so the schools were overcrowded with students who came from abolished high schools. Therefore, some gymnasiums were reopened (full gymnasiums in Prizren and Priština, and incomplete ones in Peć and Kosovska Mitrovica) (Marković & Ivanović, 1937: pp.935-936).

In addition to gymnasiums, there was a lack of schools that served to raise the educational level of the wider population (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p. 380). Thus, at the end of 1931, the Law on the opening of civic schools was passed, which were predominantly vocational (Marković & Ivanović, 1937: p.939). They gave the student practical knowledge, general education and were supposed to prepare him for commercial, craft-industrial or agricultural occupations in life, so the garden and at least one less respectable good had to be the basis of that work. All civil schools were on the budgets of their municipalities (Dimić, 1997: p.171). Civil schools were opened mostly in places where gymnasiums were abolished (*Službeni list Vardarske banovine*, 1930: p. 6). Thus, they were opened in Gnjilane, Uroševac, and Đakovica (Marković & Ivanović, 1937: pp.940-941). However, despite the efforts of the educational authorities to direct the schooling process towards civil or professional schools, whose educational profiles were necessary for Yugoslav society - there were big problems. Inadequate treatment of civil schools (lack of buildings, furniture and classrooms) influenced the increasingly frequent complaints that they did not prepare for practical life, as well as the opinion that "a child who goes to school must be a clerk", and therefore these schools were not adequate accepted by the people (Dimić, 1997: p.189; Jovanović, 2011: p.428).

Among secondary schools, the Prizren Theological Seminary should be singled out, which between the two world wars took the leading place among

theological seminaries in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and its progress can be followed based on the annual reports of the Theological Seminary (after 1906, the first printed report was made for the school year 1929/30). The seminary library had a great cultural and educational role in Prizren, because books were used not only by students and teachers of the seminary, but it was also a public library (Bovan, 2007; Slavković, 2018: pp.58-69).

The situation with teaching staff in secondary schools was similar to that in primary schools. Many wanted to move because of the distance (Prizren was called "Yugoslavian Siberia"), cultural backwardness, difficult and expensive living conditions and lack of housing. In addition, there was no allowance for the southern regions and no recognition of double years of service. The number of teachers was insufficient in relation to the number of classes. The gymnasium in Prizren left the best impression in terms of the expertise of the teachers, while the teachers in the gymnasium in Priština were emphasized to "not operate with cases and our syntax". Where the teaching staff consisted mainly of female staff, as was the case in the high school in Kosovska Mitrovica, it was considered that they did not have sufficient authority over the students (Slavković Mirić, 2018: pp. 381-382).

As for the students who attended grammar schools, there were a large number of those who came unprepared from elementary schools, so according to a report from 1931, a number of students in the first grade did not know how to read Latin or use a multiplication table. The discipline of pupils was also "unsatisfactory and lax" (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p. 382). School attendance was not adequate for the same reasons as in primary schools; first of all, a large number of children came from the countryside and the outskirts, and therefore, for example, in the high school in Gnjilane and in Peć, it was necessary for classes to be held before noon. A small number of village children attended high schools, only 2–3% of the total number of students (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p. 382).

Illiteracy

The underdeveloped school network and the low enrollment of children in compulsory education favored the survival of illiteracy in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Bondžić, 2008: p. 24; Bondžić, 2008a: pp. 390-435; Janjićijević, 1984: p. 23; Jugoslavija: 1918-1988: statistički godišnjak, 1989: p. 39, 95; Osnovni statistički podaci o razvoju i stanju školstva u Federativnoj Narodnoj Republici Jugoslaviji, 1957: p. 7; Pejić, 1999: pp. 585-587). According to the 1921 census, the average illiteracy of the population over the age of ten amounted to 95.5% (Pejić, 1999: pp. 585-587). According to the 1931 population census in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, there were 44.6% of illiterate persons over the age of 10, and the percentage of illiterate women was 56.4%. In Kosovo and Metohija in 1931, 84.2% of the population over the age of 10 were illiterate, and 93.9% were women (Bondžić, 2008: pp. 21-22; Osnovni statistički podaci o razvoju i stanju školstva u Federativnoj

Narodnoj Republici Jugoslaviji, 1957: pp. 3-10). Among the literate population, the majority were settlers (Ristić, 1971: p.134).

Precisely because of the low percentage of literacy, special attention was paid to public education in the Law on Public Schools. The law obliged all persons up to the age of 25 to attend courses (for illiterate adults) that had to be opened at all village folk schools (Dimić, 1997; p.132; Isić, 2005; p.38). In addition to the national language and arithmetic, the participants also learned geography, history and hygiene. It was especially requested that illiterate housewives and girls attend these courses. Illiterate courses were organized for the illiterate soldiers of the 24th and 31st Infantry Regiments in the military barracks in Kosovska Mitrovica (Vukadinović & Bogavac, 2001; p. 107). The Law on Public Schools forbade private cultural and educational societies to organize these courses, so their number was small. From the report of school inspectors, it can be seen that illiteracy courses were poorly accepted by the people, and some were suspended due to insufficient funds (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p.385). The educational authorities were not satisfied with the results achieved - after four months of the course, the peasant could not write his name, which means that the main goal of literacy, the use of books, was not achieved (Dimić, 1997: p.113). The peasant was very conservative and traditional, and that prevented any progress. The most important thing was for them to understand that the only way to progress was through school. In the middle of 1940, 83.31% of all literates in Kosovo and Metohija were literate in school, 85.95% of all women (Isić, 2005: p.497).

Libraries and reading rooms were in the first place in terms of enlightenment, because it was very important that children do not lose their connection with school and teacher after finishing school (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p. 386). However, if a parallel were drawn between them and the public schools, it would be seen that there was a disproportion (about 70 schools to one library) (Marković & Ivanović, 1937: pp.951-956). In addition, they were not sufficiently supplied with books, and care had to be taken in the selection of books because the content had to be understandable and accessible to the people. It was difficult to maintain them because the peasants were reluctant to give money for the purchase of books and newspapers (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p. 387). Teachers initiated activities for the purchase of books with gifts and the participation of parents and benefactors (Vukadinović & Bogavac, 2001:p.76). The Cultural Home of Mining Workers in Trepča had the most well-stocked library in the interwar period (Vukadinović & Bogavac, 2001:p.108).

In addition to libraries, various courses were opened - home economics, agriculture, and cultural societies were founded. Housekeeping courses were more popular than illiteracy courses, because it was seen how much they influence the education of rural women and girls (Isić, 2009: pp.352-359; Marković & Ivanović, 1937: pp.951-956). National universities were opened, which were supposed to educate the "common masses", and which were necessary in the countryside. Lectures on economy, health, agriculture, forestry, culture, medicine, family, education, ethnography and social policy were organized. Of importance was the establishment of humane and temperance societies that worked to suppress gambling, drunkenness and

idleness. There have been efforts to organize foreign language learning outside of school. The initiative came from intellectuals, but it did not meet the understanding of the environment. Later, with the opening of the Trepča mine, the situation changed. The learning of foreign languages, especially English, was encouraged, so in 1932, a course for learning foreign languages was opened in Kosovska Mitrovica (there were 120 students and professors and engineers taught) (Vukadinović & Bogavac, 2001: pp.107-108).

Despite the constant increase in the number of primary schools and the efforts of the Yugoslav state, there was a large number of illiterate citizens, precisely because of the lack of teachers and non-attendance at school. *Pravda* pointed out that "it is a shame that in terms of literacy, Southern Serbia, the birthplace of our old enlightenment, still ranks among the most backward parts of our country" (*Pravda*, 9 March 1940: p.2).

Celebrations and festivities

In Kosovo and Metohija, the celebrations of historical and state jubilees had, first of all, national overtones. In schools, with the financial help of merchants, artisans, industrialists, prominent citizens and intellectuals, the school's saint day (slava) Saint Sava was celebrated (Denda & Dželetović Ivanov, 1993: p.24; Urošević, 2009: p. 77-78). The celebrations of the cities' liberation from Turkish rule had a special symbolic weight. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Southern Serbia, a big celebration was organized, and the Ban authorities asked the Ministry of Education to dismiss all primary and secondary school students for a week. The result of the celebration was the publication of the Memorial of the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Southern Serbia 1912-1937, in which Southern Serbia was described in all aspects (*Politika*, 29 October 1937: p.1). Cities also celebrated their liberation anniversaries, as in 1932 in Prizren and Kosovska Mitrovica (*Pravda*, 27 October 1932). Together with the city command, the military barracks and with the participation of military bands, 1 December, Unification Day, was marked with events in the officers' and sokol's guarters. After the king's death, this day was celebrated solemnly, but sadly; thanksgiving was held in all churches, mosques and synagogues (Vardar, 4 December 1934: p. 2). Crown Prince Peter's birthday was also celebrated with a torchlight and parades (Vardar, 10 September 1933: p. 1-2; Vardar, 10 September 1936: p. 2). When the king died, there was mourning in all the cities of Kosovo and Metohija (*Vardar*, 11 October 1934: p.2; *Vardar*, 22 November 1934: p.6).

Associations and societies

There was a large number of associations and societies in Kosovo and Metohija, some of which existed before liberation, and some of which were founded in the interwar period (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p.394). Most of them

participated in humanitarian actions, opening of schools, educating and enlightening the population. In order to coordinate all the efforts to enlighten the people and to organize this work in a planned way, it was planned to create a Union of Cultural and Educational Societies in the area of the Vardar banovina (*Skopski glasnik*, 21 April 1934; *Vardar*, 17 May 1934). These were humanitarian societies, such as "Dečja radost" from Uroševac and "Srpska majka" from Prizren (Pavlović, Pantelić, Antonić&Milikić, 2012: p.38; *Politika*, 22 September 1940). An important society that helped churches and monasteries and the enlightenment of women was "Princess Ljubica" from Štimlje (Pavlović, Pantelić, Antonić&Milikić, 2012: p.39; *Vardar*, 26 June 1934: p.4). An association with a tradition that helped enlightenment, schools and churches was the "Kolo srpskih sestara" (*Vardar*, Calendar of the Circle of Serbian Sisters for the regular year..., 1906-1941).

Numerous societies were founded with the same goal - enlightenment in the national, educational and health aspects. Such were the societies from Kosovska Mitrovica "Meraklija", the sub-committee "Prosveta", "Red Cross", "Sveti Sava", "Sober Youth Society" and "Narodna Odbrana", as well as the "Seljačko društvo" from Peć (Vukadinović & Bogavac, 2001: pp.164-180; Pavlović, Pantelić, Antonić&Milikić, 2012: p. 48, 52). Within high schools there were numerous associations and sub-committees, the members of which were students who were engaged in various fields (the Red Cross youth group, the student literary group "Kosovo", the "Adriatic Guard" youth group, the "Kosovo Peony" youth group, a branch of the "Ferial Union"), and in 1938 the student organization "Slovenski jug" was founded in Peć (Ilustrovani državni almanah-šematizam Zetske banovine, 1931: pp. 339-365; Pavlović, Pantelić, Antonić&Milikić, 2012; p. 49). Special societies dedicated to enlightening the Muslim part of society were "Gajret" and "Merhamet" (Skopski glasnik, 27 April 1929: p.1; Hadri&Avramovski, 1979: pp.176-177).

Cultural and artistic, singing and literary societies were also active in Kosovo and Metohija. Such was the case with "Kosovo", as well as the singing groups "Car Uroš" from Prizren and "Nušić" from Kosovska Mitrovica (*Vardar*, 23 October 1936: p.2; Vukadinović & Bogavac, 2001: p. 188; Pavlović, Pantelić, Antonić&Milikić, 2012: pp. 45-47). In the 1930s, workers' associations were formed, such as the "Abrašević" and the music society "Trepča" (Vukadinović&Bogavac, 2001:p.188; Pavlović, Pantelić, Antonić&Milikić, 2012: p.43; Hadri&Avramovski, 1979:pp.173- 174,176).

Conclusion

In the end, I can conclude that cultural conditions in Southern Serbia, with an emphasis on Kosovo and Metohija, between the two world wars were in the process of modernization. Nevertheless, the struggle of the Yugoslav state with the traditional customs of the population, as well as with decades of lack of awareness about schooling, yielded slow results. New laws on education were adopted, school buildings were renovated, new ones

were built in accordance with the possibilities, compulsory primary education was introduced. However, there was a lack of professional teaching staff, because many avoided going to the southern part of the Yugoslav state due to poor living and working conditions, also, an insufficient number of children attended schools, because most of them were also engaged in household chores. Illiteracy was also a big problem, which affected cultural and educational opportunities and with which the state struggled. Some progress was achieved, which was temporarily interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War, because the war brought a new reality and a different life.

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