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PRISPEVKI ZA NOVEJŠO ZGODOVINO

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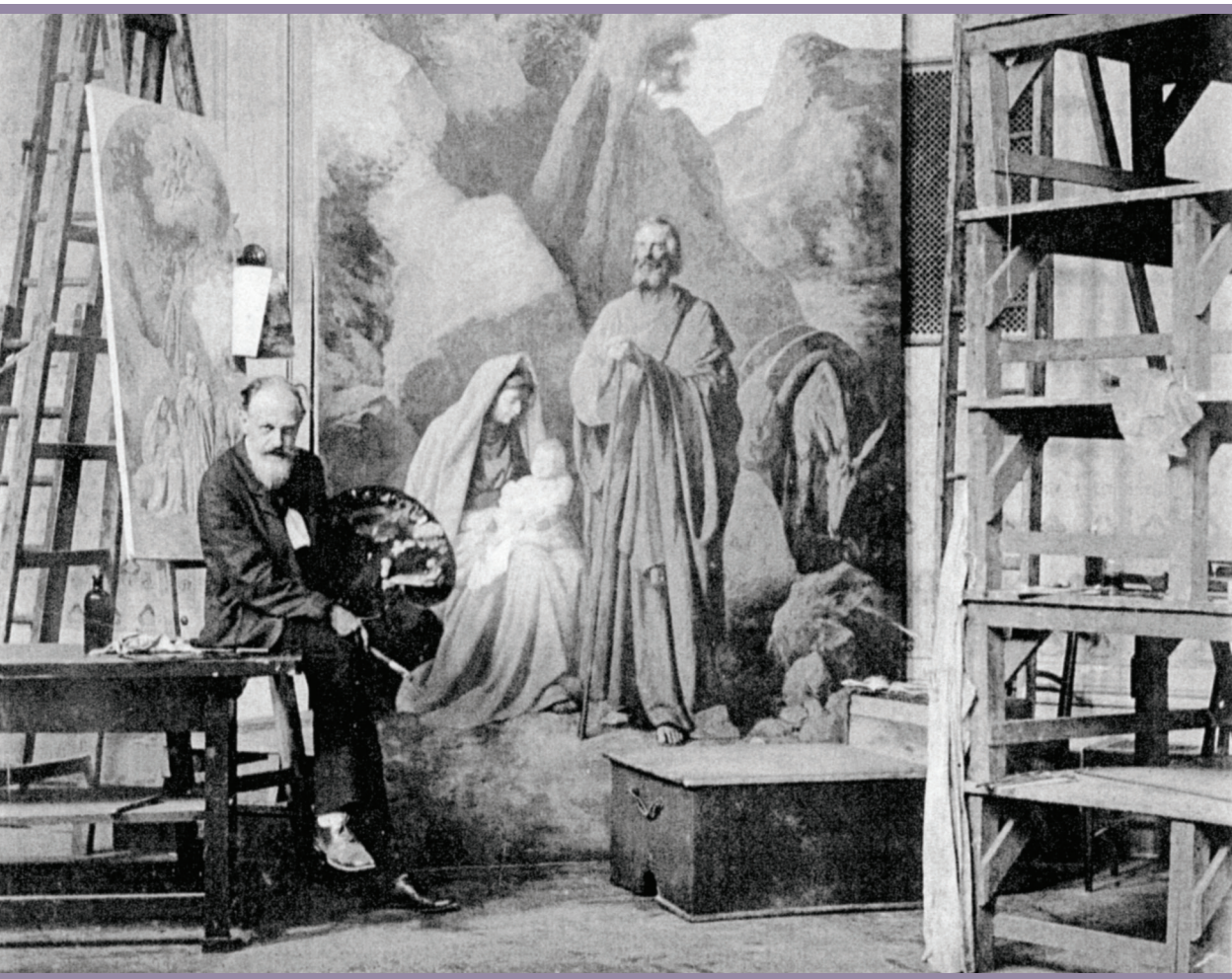

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PRISPEVKI ZA NOVEJŠO ZGODOVINO

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Dragana Gundogan*, Nataša Milićević**

Segregated Special Education for Visually Impaired Children in Socialist Serbia – Isolation and/or Preparation for Life and Work?***

IZVLEČEK

SEGREGIRANO POSEBNO IZOBRAŽEVANJE SLEPIH IN SLABOVIDNIH OTROK V SOCIALISTIČNI SRBIJI – IZOLACIJA IN/ALI PRIPRAVA NA ŽIVLJENJE IN DELO?

Članek obravnava nekatere vidike razvoja posebnega izobraževanja slepih in slabovidnih otrok in mladostnikov v socialistični Srbiji. Ključno vprašanje je, ali je bila izolacija slepih in slabovidnih otrok in mladostnikov značilnost razvoja segregiranega posebnega izobraževanja ali pa je predstavljala način, kako jih pripraviti na samostojno življenje in delo. Raziskava temelji na ustnem izročilu in osebnih pričevanjih uporabnikov segregiranih osnovnošolskih in srednješolskih izobraževalnih ustanov za slepe in slabovidne učence v Srbiji v času socializma. Članek se osredotoča predvsem na življenjske zgodbe in stališča posameznikov ter predstavlja eno od perspektiv ali pristopov k analizi tega kompleksnega vprašanja. Poleg tega je na podlagi enega pričevanja mogoče v raziskovalnem in širšem smislu zajeti in nakazati podobnosti in razlike med republikami socialistične Jugoslavije.

Ključne besede: posebno izobraževanje, socialistična Srbija, segregacija, integracija, ustna zgodovina

* **PhD, Institute for Educational Research, Belgrade, Serbia, stokanicdragana@gmail.com; ORCID: 0000-0001-8823-9582**

** **PhD, Institute for Recent History of Serbia, Belgrade, Serbia, natasa.milicevic@mts.rs; ORCID: 0000-0002-9134-4129**

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ABSTRACT

The article explores certain aspects of the development of special education for visually impaired children and youth in socialist Serbia. The crucial question is whether the development of segregated special education was characterised by isolating such children and youth or whether it served as a means of preparing them for independent life and work. The research is based on oral history and personal testimonies from users of segregated primary and secondary educational institutions for students with visual impairments in Serbia during the socialist era. The article primarily focuses on individual life stories and perspectives, presenting one of the approaches to analysing this complex issue. Furthermore, drawing on one of the testimonies, the paper provides an opportunity to identify and highlight both similarities and differences across the individual republics of socialist Yugoslavia, albeit exploratively and broadly.

Keywords: special education, socialist Serbia, segregation, integration, oral history

Introduction

Critical considerations of special education in theory and practice were widespread. To mention just one of the highly influential authors, Erving Goffman critically analysed total institutions as formal organisations that cared for, isolated,[1] and stigmatised their users-inmates.[2] The goal of the disability theory and the disability rights movement was to demedicalise the theory and practice regarding the treatments and education of people with disabilities. In those writings, disability is perceived and analysed primarily as a socially and politically constructed[3] condition and characteristic, contrary to the medical model focused on mental or bodily insufficiencies and their treatment, correction, and amelioration.[4] The criticism of the medical model resulted in the social model of disability[5] focusing on the individual perspectives of people with disabilities and social factors impeding their full employment, schooling, or other areas of social life. Considering the notions of critical disability studies,[6] we

1 Erving Goffman, *Asylums. Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Anchor books, 1961), 12.

2 Erving Gofman, Stigma. *Zabeleške o ophođenju sa narušenim identitetom* (Mediteran publishing, 2009).

3 Karen Hirsch, "Culture and disability: The role of oral history," in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (Routledge, 1998), 3–24.

4 See more in Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (University of Michigan Press, 2010).

5 More in Kristjana Kristiansen, Simo Vehmas, and Tom Shakespeare, eds. *Arguing about Disability. Philosophical Perspectives* (Routledge, 2009). Mike Oliver, "The social model of disability: Thirty years on," *Disability & society* 28, No. 7 (2013): 1024–26, https://web.archive.org/web/20160211171559id_/http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09687599.2013.818773.

6 Dan Goodley, "Dis/entangling critical disability studies," in Anne Waldschmidt, Hanjo Berressem, and Moritz Ingwersen, eds., *Culture–theory–disability Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies* (Disability

intend to discover how individuals perceived and experienced education and life in segregated educational institutions in Serbia during socialism.

Researchers in the field of the history of education have shown little interest in the schooling of visually impaired children in Serbia between 1945 and 1991. Consequently, the topic has remained "on the margin" of society and historiography, as noted by Ljubomir Petrović.[7] In other fields, Serbian researchers, particularly special pedagogues and psychologists, have followed contemporary trends in the education of children and youth with visual impairments.[8] It is important to emphasise that the efforts of distinguished and prolific pedagogues such as Ljubomir Savić and Sanja Pavlović have led to significant contributions to the exploration of our subject, including analyses of legal and institutional changes, biographies of key figures relevant to the advancement of special education, as well as special educational theories and practices.[9] The authors who studied the history of the Association of Blind People in Yugoslavia and Serbia are particularly pertinent to the topic at hand.[10]

Previous research indicated that in socialist Serbia and Yugoslavia, the social care and education system for children with visual impairments was gradually established. In some Yugoslav republics, such as Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, education was based on traditions from the period before World War II.[11] In other republics, the organised social care system (including education for the visually impaired) was just beginning to develop. However, it is essential to note that shortly after World War II, the state paid less attention to the social welfare and rehabilitation of civilian war invalids than that of war veteran invalids, adversely affecting their opportunities for quality education.[12] This was somewhat understandable, considering the recent war and the need for the newly established Yugoslav government to legitimise the struggle for freedom by introducing social welfare and ensuring the professional re-socialisation of war veterans.

Studies, 2017), 83. Helen Meekosha and Russell Shuttleworth, "What's so 'critical' about critical disability studies," *Australian Journal of Human Rights* 15, No. 1 (2016): 48, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/RussellShuttleworth/publication/258919369_What's_So_Critical_About_Critical_Disability_Studies/links/0deec5296a0d5d7955000000/Whats-So-Critical-About-Critical-Disability-Studies.pdf.

7 The historian Ljubomir Petrović dedicated his work, although marginally, to children with visual impairments as a part of the study of invalids during the interwar period. – Ljubomir Petrović, *Nevidljivi geto: invalidi u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2007), 7.

8 For the purposes of this article, we will only mention some of the authors: Dragan Rapaić, Goran Nedović, Snežana Ilić, and Irena Stojković, "Zakonski okvir i inkluzivna praksa," in Dobrivoje Radovanović, ed., *U susret inkljziji - dileme u teoriji i praksi* (Univerzitet u Beogradu Fakultet za specoijalnu edukaciju i rehabilitaciju- Izdavački centar, CIDD, 2008), 9–25. Vesna Radoman, "Reforma obrazovanja dece sa posebnim potrebama," *Heretikus* 2, No. 3 (2004): 32-44. Radomir Arsić and Ljubica Isaković, "Special pedagogy and its development in Serbia," *KNOWLEDGE–International Journal* (2019): 345–51, https://rfasper.fasper.bg.ac.rs/bitstream/id/8614/bitstream_8614.pdf.

9 Ljubomir Savić, *Istorija slepih Srbije, I deo* (Savez slepih Srbije – Republika Srbija, 1964- [in Cyrillic]). Sanja Pavlović, *Istorija tiflopedagogije pregled istorijskog razvoja opšte i srpske tiflopedagogije* (Univerzitet u Beogradu – Fakultet za specijalnu edukaciju i rehabilitaciju, 2012).

10 Đorđe Vukotić, *Graditelji svoga života. Slepi Beograda od 1941–1981* (Savez slepih Beograda, 1984). Đorđe Žutić and Žika Petrović, Škola-put u život (Savez slepih Jugoslavije, 1959).

11 Petrović, *Nevidljivi geto*, 34–43. Lubomir Petrović, "Pogled na invalidnost kroz istoriju," *Hereticus* 2, No. 3 (2004): 49–76. Dragana Kulezić, "Osobe sa invaliditetom u Kneževini Srbiji," *Beogradska defektološka škola* 21, No. 2 (2015): 79–87. Sulejman Hrnjica, "Vaspitanje i obrazovanje dece i omladine sa smetnjama u razvoju (specijalno školstvo)," *Jugoslovenski pregled: informativno-dokumentarne sveske* 31, No. 9 (1987): 419, 420.

12 Fadil Mučić, *Savez civilnih invalida rata Jugoslavije 1970–2000* (Savez civilnih invalida rata Jugoslavije, 2004), 11.

The political and social context, along with the newly established value system, had an emancipating and liberating character. The situation was therefore favourable for visually impaired children, as the government emphasised everyone's equal right to education, regardless of their social status or other circumstances.

Special education for individuals with visual impairments underwent various stages, to some extent coinciding with the general education changes and the economic development of the new socialist state during the early decades.[13] Moreover, the social position of people with disabilities was influenced by additional factors such as family background and societal prejudices and stereotypes against the disabled. As Sulejman Hrnjica stated, economic conditions not only affected material support for education but also shaped attitudes and values of the environment regarding these issues, the scope of education, and employment opportunities.[14] Therefore, it is evident that the social welfare state and education were not implemented and organised uniformly across the underdeveloped and developed Yugoslav republics or between the urban and rural areas. There were no supreme institutions in the form of committees capable of implementing health care, social care, and educational policies at the Yugoslav level. Each republic, including Serbia, introduced distinct legislation on special education alongside the general law, while the financing methods changed. Ultimately, regulation was delegated to self-managing communities, which impacted the special education system for visually impaired children.

Considering everything, the research into special education for visually impaired children in Serbia represented a complex endeavour. Our goal was to address the historiographical gap to some extent. Firstly, we presented a brief overview of special education and its development, with particular emphasis on the political, economic, and social factors influencing the development of this special education segment. These factors created barriers and obstacles for children with visual impairments and hindered their equal social participation. The primary aim of this paper was to investigate the educational practices and interpersonal relations within certain segregated institutions for children with visual impairments, drawing on personal testimonies and memories from first-hand respondents. This method enabled us to analyse how everyday life was organised in special educational institutions and how it differed from the prevailing theoretical and ideological conceptualisations.

Methods

Methodologically, the topic at hand is explored in two ways. The authors first analysed specific archival and secondary sources as well as literature about primary and secondary special segregated educational centres where visually impaired children were educated and socialised. Secondly, as part of the exploratory analysis, narratives

13 Hrnjica, *Vaspitanje i obrazovanjedece i omladine*, 420.
14 Ibidem, 419.

from the semi-structured interviews conducted with visually impaired individuals educated during socialism were examined. We interviewed respondents, identified through word of mouth, personal contacts, and recommendations, between March and September 2024. Initially, we reached out to the *Association for Blind People of Serbia*, which was extremely helpful and recommended several interviewees. Once we contacted and interviewed the first two respondents, they readily recommended their friends and acquaintances.[15] We met with some of the respondents several times, and as we established trust, we were able to explore their memories together, leading to the emergence of a few more complex issues.

We interviewed five respondents – three women and two men – who had ample experience with the socialist educational system.[16] Two were born in Serbia, one in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while one respondent was from Montenegro. Four out of the five respondents attended the *Veljko Radmanović* boarding school in Zemun, while a single individual completed his primary and secondary education at a boarding school in Sarajevo. His experience with the educational process in Bosnia and Herzegovina was particularly significant, not only for our analysis but also for comparing it to the experiences of the other four respondents, who had been educated at the boarding school in Zemun. Notably, except for a single respondent, they were all born in rural areas and spent their formative years there. Three lost their sight between the ages of three and fourteen, while the other two were born with sight loss.

This research is currently in its exploratory stage, as this is the first time a qualitative approach has been employed in this context. Qualitative approaches, particularly oral history and life stories, are used to analyse personal and individual perspectives and highlight respondents' experiences and attitudes towards their education. For this purpose, we adopted the oral history approach, which, while often overlooked in mainstream historiography and science, proves especially useful for exploring underprivileged and marginalised social groups, such as individuals with disabilities.[17] During the analysis of the interviews, we employed thematic analysis to examine the experiences of visually impaired individuals during their education.

It is crucial for our topic to underline that our respondents attended primary and secondary schools in different decades of the socialist era. This allowed us to follow how the educational system, school climate, and social relations with teachers and

15 Before they agreed to participate in interviews, the respondents were familiarised with the topic and structure of the interview. They were informed that the study was confidential and anonymous. Prior to the interview, we obtained consent from all the respondents, who understood the ethical considerations and were aware they could terminate the interview at any point if they chose to do so. They were encouraged to answer all questions in a manner that felt comfortable and to refuse to respond to any question they deemed too personal or inappropriate. It was agreed that the interviews would be recorded solely for the purposes of scientific analysis. The locations of the interviews varied according to respondents' preferences. The interviews lasted between 45 and 135 minutes.

16 Initially, the plan was to utilise a questionnaire based on a quantitative approach and conduct interviews with ten respondents (five women and five men). However, this presented certain obstacles, particularly regarding the formulation of questions that could be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Additionally, we were unable to ask additional questions that might have been beneficial for our analysis. Furthermore, it proved challenging to find ten respondents as initially planned, primarily due to the age of those educated during the socialist era.

17 See more in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *Oral History Reader* (Routledge, 1998).

peers evolved. Although the number of respondents was somewhat modest, it is not insignificant and nevertheless provides us with an individual perspective on special education during various periods of socialism. It turned out that only a single respondent had not attained a university education. This resulted from the "snowball" method of finding respondents and the fact that some of them knew one another. To provide a better insight into our respondents, we included their main socio-demographic characteristics as a methodological note.

The Context that Influenced the Development of the Special Educational System

The development of special education and the social position of visually impaired individuals in socialist Serbia were influenced by political, economic, and social factors. In the introduction, we have already mentioned some significant factors. However, for our topic, it is imperative to emphasise the rapid development of the educational system in socialist Serbia and Yugoslavia and how it affected special education as its integral part. After World War II, the educational system expanded in terms of the number of schools, students, and employees across all academic levels. This process is described as an "educational explosion."[18] Due to the advancements in education, the decrease in the illiteracy rate was notable.[19] The development of the educational system was prompted by socialist modernisation,[20] alongside rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, as well as the need for a qualified labour force in the industrial sector, administration, and expert occupations.[21] Therefore, education played both an ideological and practical role in legitimising the new socialist order in the context

18 Borisav Džuverović, "Klasni aspekti obrazovanja," in Mihailo Popović, Marija Bogdanović, and Sreten Vujović, eds., *Društvene nejednakosti* (Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta, 1987). Mari Žanin Čalić, *Istorija Jugoslavije u 20. veku* (Clio, 2010).

19 In Yugoslavia, the percentage of illiterate individuals steadily decreased from 25.4% in 1948 to 15.1% in 1971. During the same period, in Serbia, the illiteracy rate fell from 27.9% to 17.2%. Many regional disparities arose due to economic, cultural, and educational differences. For instance, Slovenia had a mere 2.4% illiteracy rate in 1948, whereas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 44.8% of the population was illiterate at that time. In Yugoslavia, the percentage of the population without formal education decreased from 42.0% in 1953 to 24.2% in 1971, while in Serbia, the trend was similar – from 43.2% to 25.9%. Furthermore, in 1971, the coverage of primary education in Serbia reached 94% of school-age children. – Dragomir Bondžić, "Prosveta i nauka u Jugoslaviji 1945–1990," *Istorija 20. veka*, 2 (2008): 392, 418. Ljubodrag Dimić, *Srbi i Jugoslavija: prostor, društvo, politika (Pogled s kraja veka)* (Stubovi kulture, 1998), 93 [in Cyrillic].

20 See more in Sergej Flere, *Obrazovanje za sve, Ogled o obrazovanju kao činiocu društvene strukture* (Novinsko izdavačko preduzeće "Duga", 1973).

21 Due to industrialisation and the agrarian reform, the non-agricultural population increased. The labour force was drawn from the agricultural population, as more than 80% of the pre-war population was rural. According to demographic estimations, over 6% of the total Serbian population between 1948 and 1953 transitioned from the agricultural to the industrial sector. This increase continued in the subsequent period: in 1961, it approached 90.000 inhabitants, which was below the Yugoslav average. Industrial development resulted in a decrease in agrarian overpopulation and also facilitated the swift transition from an uneducated agrarian population to unqualified industrial workers. – Ivana Dobrivojević, *Selo i grad: transformacija agrarnog društva Srbije 1945–1955* (Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2013), 237, 238.

of revolutionary post-war optimism. Firstly, the equal right to free and high-quality education for all constituted a significant aspect of the egalitarian and emancipatory socialist ideology. This was particularly relevant for marginalised and disadvantaged social groups such as women, people from rural areas, the poor, and the disabled. Secondly, education served as a crucial channel for social mobility, especially until the 1960s.[22]

However, special education in Serbia developed in accordance with its internal dynamics. The development of a special educational system undoubtedly resulted in better opportunities for children and youth with disabilities to access education compared to previous decades. Overall, the special education system before World War II had been characterised by a caritative, private, humanitarian, and philanthropic approach related to the medieval construction of disability or the "religious model" of disability.[23] It was marked by private initiatives, humanitarian organisations, and the enthusiasm of individuals such as Veljko Ramadanović (1874–1943).[24] Conversely, the integration and resocialisation of the "blind" after World War II was based on socialist humanism and values such as solidarity, equality, brotherhood and unity, and it ultimately became an integral part of the organised socialist order. In line with socialist ideology, working people emerged as the holders of their self-managing rights and responsibilities, as well as organisers of social welfare and social development related to the class struggle and the building of a socialist society.[25] Given that physical labour, productivity, and the industrial sectors represented a vital aspect of socialist society and modernisation, the primary focus of special education and resocialisation was aimed at preparing individuals for the labour market and ensuring their integration into society through work.[26] Employment represented an opportunity for those with disabilities, as it ensured their material independence, allowed them to develop their skills and become active and valuable members of society, and enhanced their self-confidence and independence.

The primary legislative acts established the institutional framework for the development of special education in Serbia during socialism. We should first mention the 1946 Constitution, which contained a provision regarding everyone's right to education. Furthermore, as the basis of social policy, these institutions emphasised the rights and responsibilities towards children in various social spheres, including education and the implementation of the general right to primary education.[27] Secondly, the General Education Act of 1958 introduced and guaranteed obligatory education for

22 See more in Slobodan Cvejić, *Korak u mestu. Društvena pokretljivost u Srbiji u procesu post-socijalističke transformacije* (Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta, 2006).

23 Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 9.

24 Gordana Lazarević, Tatjana Brzulović Stanisavljević, and Jelena Đurđulov, *Put svetlosti. Brajevo pismo i obrazovanje slepih u Srbiji* (Univerzitetska biblioteka "Svetozar Marković", 2009), 15.

25 Savić, *Istorija slepih Srbije*, 10. Vojislav Minić, *Nova svetlost. Knjiga za slepe u Srbiji* (Republička konferencija Saveza slepih Srbije, 1980), 6. Vukotić, *Graditelji svog života*, 46–48.

26 Vukotić, *Graditelji svog života*, 142.

27 Nevenka Novaković, "Prilograzmatranju o društvenoj brizi za decu sa smetnjama u razvoju," in Nevenka Novaković, ed., *Društvena briga o deci sa smetnjama u razvoju* (Savez slepih Jugoslavije, 1982), 8–11.

persons with disabilities.[28] The 1962 Act addressing special schools in the Socialist Republic of Serbia laid the foundations for the development of special education.[29] The Constitutions of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Socialist Republic of Serbia from 1963 and 1974 introduced decentralisation. From that point onwards, education in each republic was organised separately according to the republics' rulebooks.[30] The economic development disparities between the republics, as well as the institutional and cultural differences between them, influenced the social conditions of people with disabilities and their families.[31]

Despite overall progress, the education of children with sensory impairments remained more underdeveloped than the general educational system. The provision of education for visually impaired children in Serbia prior to World War II was extremely modest. Specifically, only 3.6% of "blind" children attended school.[32] Data indicates that from 1939 to 1961, the number of special schools in Yugoslavia increased from three to nine. By the end of this period, special education included 610 students (a 350% increase), 124 employed teachers, and 39 pedagogues in special educational institutions.[33] During the 1960s, many visually impaired students did not receive any formal education for several reasons (inadequate school capacity and support, resistance from local communities and parents due to stereotypes, and a lack of cooperation between local community officials and parents).[34] This situation was partially resolved with the implementation of the Decree on professional rehabilitation for children of insured individuals in the insurance fund.[35] However, many children remained whose parents were not socially insured.[36] They had the option to request funding from local communities. The number of such children was declining, whereas later, during the 1980s, parents could contribute financially for education and accommodation in boarding schools.[37] By the end of the 1960s in Serbia, 206 of 250 "blind" children received primary education in special schools, while seventeen attended schools alongside the general population. This trend continued in the following two decades: enrolment in special primary education decreased, while the number of "blind" students in regular schools increased.[38] In 1960, every republic had special primary schools. In

28 Pavlović, *Istorija tiflopedagogije pregled istorijskog razvoja opšte i srpske tiflopedagogije*, 323.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 324.

31 It is noteworthy that from 1974 in more developed republics (Slovenia and Croatia) primary education was based on the principles of integration. Even the term special school was abandoned. In Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia special educational system prevailed, as well as the terminology "special schools" and "special education" (see more in Hrnjica, *Vaspitanje i obrazovanje dece i omladine*, 422–24).

32 Savić, *Istorija slepih Srbije*, 196.

33 *Slepi u Jugoslaviji* (Tiflološki muzej Saveza Slijepih Jugoslavije, 1979), 15, 16.

34 Some data shows that in 1961, this number amounted to 302 visually impaired children. Of those, 62% were school-age children. – Đorđe Tutić and Živko Kotarac, *Priručnik o rehabilitaciji defektne dece i omladine njihovom školovanju i zapošljavanju sa odgovarajućim obrascima* (Savremena administracija, 1963), 58.

35 *Službeni list SFRJ*, No. 51/60, 22 December 1960.

36 Tutić and Kotarac, *Priručnik o rehabilitaciji defektne dece i omladine*, 58.

37 Hrnjca, *Vaspitanje i obrazovanjedece i omladine*, 427.

38 Ten years later, the total number of "blind" children was 289. Of these, 207 attended special primary schools, while 23 went to regular schools. In the middle of the 1980s, 172 out of 241 "blind" children were enrolled in special primary education, while 36 attended regular schools (AJ, SSJ, R-37, *Zbirni pregled podataka o slepima za celo područje*

terms of secondary vocational education, professional schools existed in Belgrade (the Department for Blind Physiotherapists in the Middle Medical School) and Zemun (the Institute for General Education and Professional Training of Visually Impaired Children and Youth). Furthermore, it should be noted that culture, values, and prejudices changed more slowly, resulting in enduring discrimination against people with disabilities[39] and adversely affecting their chances for education and employment.[40]

Special education was primarily developed as a parallel, segregated educational system, allowing children with impairments to obtain an education. The programme enforced segregation and socialisation for work and life within the broader community. In a sense, these children were excluded from society.[41] Education for children with visual impairments was largely organised within special schools due to the requirement for specialised didactic materials, architectural regulations, and equipment unavailable in regular schools.[42] Boarding schools represented a suitable solution because public schools lacked the necessary equipment, trained teachers, and safety standards, primarily due to the limited number of students needing special equipment. The oldest and most renowned institution for the education of children and youth with visual impairments in Serbia was the *Zavod za učenike oštećenog vida Veljko Ramadanović* institute in Zemun, founded in 1919.[43] Four of our respondents received their education at this centre. After World War II, this institute was reorganised. Many war invalids were accommodated there for their primary education and professional training. In the following years, this school became an independent institution for the education of children with visual impairments. Meanwhile, a single respondent studied at the Centre for Education of Blind Children and Youth in Sarajevo. Established in 1947, this school was the first institution for educating and rehabilitating visually impaired individuals in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[44] The special, segregated educational system exhibited certain drawbacks, especially in terms of socialisation and integration of children with disabilities, so its characteristics were critically reinterpreted and called into question.[45]

Jugoslavije i po republikama, 1968, 1975, 1985). According to other data sources, during the same period in Serbia (excluding the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo), 125 students attended a dedicated boarding school, while one school for partially visually impaired students had 150 students (Hrnjica, *Vaspitanje i obrazovanje dece i omladine*, 425).

39 Savić, *Istorija slepih Srbije*, 287.

40 AJ, SSJ, R-20, Fadil Mučić, Zakonski propisi povećavaju mogućnost za zapošljavanje slijepih lica, referat, 1980.

41 Branka Jablan and Nataša Hanak, "Iskustvo kao faktor promena stavova dece sa vidom prema slepoj deci," *Istraživanja u defektologiji* 7 (2005): 15–28, https://rfasper.fasper.bg.ac.rs/handle/123456789/1528.

42 Ibid., 15.

43 Officially, the school was founded in Bizerta (Tunisia) during World War I, in 1917, when "blind" and "deaf" soldiers were hospitalised and rehabilitated. After the end of the war, the school continued to operate in Zemun. – Radmila Laban, *Rukama do svetlosti. Sto godina rada škole za učenike oštećenog vida "Veljko Ramadanović" u Zemunu (1917–2017)* (Zemun: Škola za učenike oštećenog vida "Veljko Ramadanović," 2017), 12.

44 JU Centar, *JU Centar za slijepu i slabovidnu djecu i omladinu Sarajevo, učenje za život* (Centar za slijepu i slabovidnu djecu i omladinu Sarajevo, 1987), 38.

45 Jablan and Hanak, "Iskustvo kao faktor promena stavova dece sa vidom prema slepoj deci," 15.

Educational Practices in Primary Special Education

Special primary schools for visually impaired children were organised according to the general primary school curriculum from 1945, adapted for children and youth with visual impairments.[46] Before attending primary school, students participated in a preparatory preschool programme for psycho-physical development intended for children between the ages of five and seven. This programme focused on improving the children's speech, orientation, handcrafts and manual skills, preparing them for literacy education, and developing their work and hygiene habits.[47] In the context of our topic, it is important to emphasise that the number of students in preschool programmes decreased over the years. After 1960, the average number of students was between five and seven, while before that, it ranged from six to twelve.[48] For one of our respondents, the preschool programme was crucial as it allowed her to receive additional care and provided her with adequate adaptation.[49] Regarding primary education, unlike the younger respondents, our oldest interviewee attended primary school for seven years[50] due to the general educational reforms. Subsequently, primary education was extended to eight years.[51]

Special education for visually impaired children involved formal institutional schooling, characterised by both positive and negative aspects, as confirmed by our respondents. What is most striking is that all our respondents stated that education was crucial for their personal growth and socialisation. Most of them hold fond memories of their childhood and education, with more positive recollections of their education and life in boarding schools prevailing. It is vital to note that idealisation and nostalgia for the past are common when studying individual memories. Particularly, perceptions formed at a very young age and accounts from that time are often romanticised in personal and collective memories.[52] The past moments and the memories associated with them are dynamic, which complicates the analysis.[53] Another aspect is that the respondents' memories of their education are portrayed positively due to the economic and institutional obstacles to integration into broader society, especially the labour market. The respondents agreed that the most challenging period for them began after school when they had to integrate into the wider community and, in particular, find employment. Finally, the past is often evaluated from the perspective of the current individual situation and social climate. For this reason, the Yugoslav period

46 Pavlović, *Istorija tiflopedagogije pregled istorijskog razvoja opšte i srpske tiflopedagogije*, 332, 333.
47 Laban. *Rukama do svetlosti*, 75.
48 Ibid., 81.
49 Respodent 5.
50 Ibid.
51 In 1955, the Department for Partially Visually Impaired Children was founded, representing the beginning of education for partially visually impaired children. Further developments followed in 1970 when the "Dragan Kovačević" special primary school started to operate (Pavlović, *Istorija tiflopedagogije pregled istorijskog razvoja opšte i srpske tiflopedagogije*, 344, 345).
52 See more in Ana Petrov, *Sociologija nostalgije* (Zavod za udžbenike 2021).
53 Predrag Marković, "Sećanja na život i rad u jugoslovenskom socijalizmu: između kritike i mita o 'Zemlji dembeliji'," *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju god*. 9, No. 1–3 (2002).

is typically regarded as the "golden age", to use Hobsbawm's term, in contrast to the profound economic and political crisis that followed the dissolution of socialism.

Keeping all this in mind, we can state that all our respondents, educated during various decades of socialism, regard their education as highly valuable. They especially stress how beneficial it was to learn to read and write in Braille, which enabled them to acquire new knowledge. The statements regarding their impressions of the Braille script and books were exceedingly emotional. For example, respondent 3 stated: "In school, I learned what 'blind' people can accomplish. The most crucial priority was to learn how to read and write." Braille books provide individuals with visual disabilities with insights into new experiences and alleviate their loss of visual impressions.[54] Although they appreciate the newer, more user-friendly technologies that offer them greater opportunities, they remain fond of Braille books.[55]

Since some respondents attended both mainstream and boarding schools, they could compare their experiences. They often emphasised the positive aspects of special schools, such as smaller class sizes and the greater attention teachers could provide. Teachers at special schools were experts with special certifications and experience, capable of meeting the needs of their students. Additionally, they could offer professional advice to the students' parents. For example, respondent 1 recalled a situation where a teacher explained to his mother how to approach him and clarify certain concepts, such as river flow, using touch and architectural modelling. Furthermore, respondents noted that specialised schools for students with visual impairments had adapted teaching materials and books that regular schools did not have access to. In special schools, they were provided with facilities and equipment designed to support their educational and intellectual development and needs, which were lacking in mainstream schools. However, they observed that, in reality, the lack of textbooks was evident even in those schools, highlighting the poor condition of boarding schools.

Furthermore, our respondents recalled memories from various school classes, which allowed them to gain new experiences, challenged their abilities, and prepared them for independent life after school. The classes empowered them personally as they acquired practical skills. In this context, the respondents highlighted the importance of sports education. For example, one of the testimonies was: "I loved sports education. We engaged in many activities like jumping on a pommel horse, running, and skipping the rope."[56] The respondent in question could recall the schoolyard and the feeling of joy and freedom. Other classes focused on acquiring and learning practical skills were also frequently mentioned, as the respondents found them more useful or better organised than theoretical classes. Primarily, they mentioned practical skills learned in domestic science classes, recalling how they learned to sew and make simple meals.[57] However, they were also quite critical of the teachers, stating that their

54 Vojislav Minić, *Nova svetlost. Knjiga za slepe u Srbiji*, 26–28.
55 Respondent 4.
56 Respondent 5.
57 Respondent 4.

practical knowledge, teaching methods, and pedagogical approaches were not always satisfactory, and not every teacher could provide high-quality education.

Orientation training was undoubtedly important for all students. The respondents noted that the approach to orientation training kept developing over the years. Thus, the older respondents criticised those lessons more than their younger counterparts. Furthermore, their orientation skills varied, depending on their family socialisation, experience, and self-confidence. Additionally, it became apparent that striking gender differences in orientation practices stemmed from the respondents' early socialisation within the family. Male respondents showed more confidence and ability to navigate the city, while even today, women show less inclination to move independently. Female respondents recounted their early childhood memories of being punished by their parents for attempting to walk alone, which remained ingrained in their minds. They recalled the clearly prejudiced and biased remarks regarding how dangerous and inappropriate it was for (visually impaired) young women to walk alone in the street. These notions highlight that the identity and self-confidence of people with disabilities are not uniform, immutable, or solely dependent on their impairments and bodily conditions; they are instead influenced and shaped by other social characteristics such as gender, culture, and social class.[58]

Special attention was given to music education, which played a vital role and had a long-standing tradition in the education of visually impaired students.[59] For example, the first music school opened at the Zemun centre in 1921.[60] The lower music school in the Sarajevo centre was founded as late as 1974/75.[61] This development aligned with the later establishment of the Sarajevo centre as well as with the material and social circumstances.[62] Exceptionally musically talented students from Bosnia and Herzegovina thus attended schools in Zemun and Zagreb, where the nearest centres were located. Music held particular significance for one of our respondents, who devoted her life to music and is employed as a teacher in a music school. Her own words best describe the role of music in her professional and personal life: "My professor said that when I sat behind the piano, I would not move from it … I remember how happy I was whenever I found out anything new about music notes. Playing the piano demands a lot of time and practice. I read notes with one hand and play with the other. That calls for a lot of time and effort."[63] The influence of music and arts education and their creative and stimulating effect on "blind" individuals has frequently been emphasised in the

58 Especially the gender perspective of disability is often explored by feminist disability authors. For more information, see Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Integrating disability, transforming feminist theory," *NWSA Journal* 14, No. 3 (2002): 1–32.

59 Vukotić, *Graditelji svog života*, 156.

60 In 1979, the music school at the Zemun boarding school became a part of the "Kosta Manojlović" lower music school in Zemun. See Laban. *Rukama do svetlosti*, 91. The lower music school in the Zemun boarding school had tambourine, brass, jazz, and folklore orchestras, as well as four choirs: pioneer, youth mixed, and youth female and central. See Pavlović, *Istorija tiflopedagogije pregled istorijskog razvoja opšte i srpske tiflopedagogije*, 333.

61 The "Vojislav Vučković" lower music school in Sarajevo offered piano, accordion, guitar, violin, and flute lessons (*JU Centar za slijepu i slabovidnu djecu i omladinu Sarajevo, učenje za život*, 71).

62 Ibid.

63 Respondent 5.

relevant literature.[64] Likewise, in other contexts, "blind" singers, musicians, and church organists were common.[65] The historical status of "blind" musicians holds a prominent place in music history, tradition, and mythology. In the Balkan tradition, they were primarily beggars.[66] We should also mention the *biwahiki* singers in Japan.[67]

Extracurricular activities were essential for intellectual and social development and for differentiating professional interests. By engaging in them, students can cultivate their talents, desires, interests, capabilities, and personal characteristics. Apart from developing their professional interests, students can expand their knowledge as well as practical and social skills. The respondents fondly recalled enjoyable and interesting visits to the theatre and their disco club.[68] They had opportunities to make films, act in them, or actively participate in the socialist youth organisations prevalent at that time.[69] They also attended Esperanto lessons, which continue to be a common activity in schools and associations for "blind" people.[70] Esperanto was taught at the Zemun school from 1920, and the first association, named *Nova lumo*, was established in 1927.[71] Chess clubs were also widespread, as they remain today (Respondent 2). The first chess club, *Napredak*, was founded in 1939.[72] The Sarajevo school organised the following extracurricular activities: music, recitation, drama, folklore, sports, arts, household skills, a Marxist class, chess, natural sciences, geography, mathematics, physics, chemistry and radio amateur activities.[73] Although all these extracurricular activities allowed visually impaired students to express themselves, they were typical for visually impaired people. Their list was not extensive, and visually impaired children had limited opportunities to engage in other activities due to organisational and material shortages.

Overall, the respondents underlined the benefits of living in a dormitory for their independence. However, it was a strict system with formal and impersonal rules. The goal was to socialise and encourage students to become independent, but it was not aligned with the students' need for appropriate individualised support and educational programmes, as it failed to address individual needs, characteristics, and feelings. For instance, respondent 1 confessed: "They would keep telling us: 'You should work twice as much as others to prove that you can do everything.'"[74] It was a rigid system that implemented uniform rules and roles, but it provided students with boundaries and guidelines while encouraging them to be flexible, think creatively, and behave differently.

64 Hannah Thompson and Vanessa Warne, "Blindness arts: An introduction," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 38, No. 3 (2018), https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v38i3.6480.

65 Brian H. Nordstrom, "The History of the Education of the Blind and Deaf," (*Report, U.S. Department of education, Educational Research and Improvement*, 1986), 10, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED309614.pdf.

66 Savić, *Istorija slepih Srbije*, 61.

67 Hugh De Ferranti, *The Last Biwa Singer: A Blind Musician in History—Imagination and Performance* (Cornell University Press, 2010).

68 Respondent 3.

69 Respondent 4.

70 Respondent 3.

71 Laban, *Rukama do svetlosti*, 52, 53.

72 Ibid., 55.

73 *JU Centar za slijepu i slabovidnu djecu i omladinu Sarajevo, učenje za život*, 61.

74 Respondent 1.

Educational Practices in Secondary Special Education and Professional Training

Our respondents' testimonies were less focused on secondary education and professional training because all interviewees except one completed higher education. Although their accounts in this regard were more general and less detailed compared to the narratives describing their early childhood and primary education, they nonetheless allow us to highlight their most prominent memories from secondary school. It is important to stress that persons with disabilities were mostly excluded from full participation in society concerning their employment status and professional development. To address this, special attention was given to preparing these students for the labour market as a vital aspect of the socialisation and employment of visually impaired people. Traditionally, standard training focused on traditional occupations for the visually impaired: metalworking, brush making, basket making, spinning, and weaving. Since visually impaired people were perceived as individuals capable only of performing easy and limited tasks, they were trained for simple jobs requiring minimal qualifications.[75]

During socialism, vocational education and professional training underwent significant changes due to the pursuit of an educational model designed to prepare visually impaired individuals for participation in the labour market. This is evidenced by the establishment of the craft school in Zemun and the "*Luj Braj*" school for the education of semi-qualified workers, alongside the creation of a similar centre in Sarajevo.[76] In 1960, the vocational school in Zemun was renamed and became the *Centre for Work Training for Blind People*, which offered new opportunities to visually impaired students and enabled them to acquire manual industrial and craft qualifications. Furthermore, during this period, training programmes for telephone operators, masseurs, physiotherapists, and typists were introduced. Education thus shifted from traditional and lower-paid jobs to roles that were in greater demand within the socialist economy.[77]

75 Nordstrom, "The History of the Education of the Blind and Deaf," 10.

76 The crafts school operated within the framework of the Zemun boarding school until 1948, offering three grades dedicated to theoretical and practical education in various traditional crafts. Later, the "*Luj Braj*" vocational school was established and operated from 1953 to 1960, providing education for semi-qualified manual workers. During this period, 69 students graduated. See Laban, *Rukama do svetlosti*, 77. This school featured four workshops for practical training: brush making, basket making, weaving, and musical instrument repair and tuning. See Pavlović, *Istorija tiflopedagogije pregled istorijskog razvoja opšte i srpske tiflopedagogije*, 334. At the Sarajevo centre, the first and only workshop for the training of visually impaired students opened in 1947 and specialised in brush making. In addition to craft training, the students at the Sarajevo centre learned to read and write in Braille, listened to the radio, played music, produced newspapers, organised discussions, and played chess. See *JU Centar za slijepu i slabovidnu djecu i omladinu Sarajevo, učenje za život*, 31, 35.

77 The training's considerable disadvantage was the ongoing shortage of teachers for vocational classes, leading to defectologists conducting those training programmes. See Vukotić, *Graditelji svog života*, 150. Moreover, the workshop equipment was outdated and unsuitable for training. In addition to a formal secondary programme, a short-term training course for telephone operators was organised from 1956. See Pavlović, *Istorija tiflopedagogije pregled istorijskog razvoja opšte i srpske tiflopedagogije*, 335. Furthermore, the department for "blind" physiotherapists at the Middle Medical School was established in 1956. Prior to this, between 1952 and 1956, a school for masseurs operated at the University for

Let us present some of our respondents' high school and professional training experiences. After completing eight years of primary education at boarding schools, the older respondents enrolled in general gymnasiums, which provided a classical academic education as preparation for university studies. Although they did not struggle to adapt academically, they emphasised that they faced prejudice from teachers towards students with disabilities. One testimony was particularly striking: "We were so backward that a particular math teacher did not want to teach me in high school. He claimed that math is too intellectually demanding, so I should be excluded from the class."[78] Social relations with other students, which will be the topic of the next chapter, are yet another matter. Meanwhile, younger respondents attended secondary school in the 1980s during the economic and political crisis. Regarding the educational system, this period was characterised by the Šuvar reform, specialised vocational training. The relevant respondents explained that the vocational training they completed was intended to facilitate their search for employment. They described vocational training programmes as follows: "I was an automatic data processing programmer-operator. Later, this allowed me to use computers. We also had courses for phone operators and physiotherapists. We had special workshops in Sarajevo. In Belgrade, there was just a single one, and it no longer exists. That was the positive side of communism."[79] Another statement: "I was a TT manipulant for telephone and telegraph traffic. We worked in the centrals; we focused on theory and practice in many subjects."[80]

As we have already mentioned, one of the limitations of our research was that four out of five respondents had completed higher education and possessed considerable educational aspirations. Although some of them attended vocational programmes for visually impaired children, their focus was not on securing and retaining jobs requiring lower qualifications, as they aspired to professional positions. To learn more about training, job experience, and satisfaction with blue-collar occupations, it would be necessary to interview respondents with careers in those fields. However, we can assert that despite numerous debates and reorganisations of secondary educational programmes, integrating visually impaired students into the labour market remained a challenge. Employers were often reluctant to hire visually impaired individuals due to persistent prejudices. For example, in the 1970s, the state introduced regulations to prioritise employment for people with disabilities, along with incentives and deterrents for employers, yet the situation did not improve significantly.[81] Our respondents

Sport. A similar training course for telephone operators, as well as for cardboard and paper packaging, was organised in Sarajevo. See *JU Centar za slijepu i slabovidnu djecu i omladinu Sarajevo, učenje za život*, 35. According to the data from 1952, there were 33 factories for training and employment for "blind" people, employing 440 "blind" and 252 sighted individuals in addition to the operation of 22 shops. See *Slepi u Jugoslaviji*, 8. Additionally, training for manual jobs in workshops aimed at the rehabilitation, requalification, and employment of invalids was organised by the Association for Blind People of Serbia. The Belgrade City Organisation of the Blind was established, along with practical training in factories. See Pavlović, *Istorija tiflopedagogije pregled istorijsko grazvoja opšte i srpske tiflopedagogije*, 2012.

78 Respondent 2.

79 Respondent 1.

80 Respondent 5.

81 AJ, SSJ, R-20, Referat of Fadil Mučić, secretary of Association for Blind People of Yugoslavia, undated. The analysis suggests it was written in the second half of the 1970s.

concur that the most challenging period began after school when they had to assimilate into the broader community and, in particular, secure employment. Our respondent 3 confirms this by stating, based on her own experience, that it was exceedingly difficult to find a job, even in roles such as a telephone operator. She encountered many stereotypical comments and attitudes during job interviews (such as a psychologist declining to interview her for a position) and at the workplace (where colleagues would make inappropriate remarks). Again, these testimonies prove that persistent culturally and socially determined perceptions of disability certainly influenced the lives of our respondents during the period under consideration.

Social Relations with Teachers and Peers

This chapter focuses on the social relations between students and teachers and the interactions among students within specialised educational institutions during socialism. Interaction between visually impaired individuals is burdened by what is referred to as "ocular-centric" representations of blindness,[82] which encapsulates the "dominant epistemological assumptions about sightlessness to reify totalising notions of need that are complicit in dividing blind people from the mainstream population in seemingly innocuous and munificent ways".[83] Consequently, people with disabilities face many obstacles and limitations in their everyday activities. For instance, one of our respondents stated: "If no sighted people were restricting me and telling me what I can or cannot do, I would not have the feeling I am unable to do things or that I am different."[84] An analysis of the respondents' statements frequently reveals discrepancies between the self-perception of visually impaired people and societal perceptions of them. During our interviews, respondents demonstrated a desire to present themselves in a non-stereotyped manner to transform attitudes towards visually impaired individuals. Furthermore, our respondents were often critical of other "blind" people, reproaching them for being passive and positioning themselves as a positive example. This reflects an individualistic viewpoint and a focus on individuals and their families, with little emphasis on collectivist sentiments, akin to what Hirsh[85] characterised as "try harder", "suffer through", and "I'm just like everybody else" in the context of contemporary individualistic culture.

Concerning social relations in special educational institutions, respondents shared their memories of their close relationships with certain teachers, recalling their names, backgrounds, and other personal traits and details. These individuals obviously held

82 David Bolt, "From blindness to visual impairment: Terminological typology and the social model of disability," *Disability & Society* 20, No. 5 (2005): 539–52, https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/bolt-Bolt-From-Visual-Impairment.pdf.

83 Ben Whitburn, and Rod Michalko, "Blindness/sightedness: Disability studies and the defiance of di-vision," in Nick Watson, Alan Roulstone, and Carol Thomas, eds., *Routledge handbook of disability studies* (Routledge, 2019), 219.

84 Respondent 1.

85 Karen Hirsch, "Culture and disability: The role of oral history," *The Oral History Review* 22, No. 1 (1995): 1–28.

a special place in their lives and were crucial for their professional and personal development. They were teachers who exhibited considerable patience, care, and affection towards their students, providing them with ample support. The respondents recounted many informal practices that reflect this. We surmise they remember these situations so vividly because they were distinct from everyday practices. These moments lingered in their memories because they were vital to their development during their formative years. To illustrate, let us quote some examples: "He loved me so much he accompanied me to the hospital and took care of me. I could cry when I think about how he stayed in my mind and how much I owe him (respondent 2)"; "My piano teacher would come to practice with me over the weekends because she was so dedicated, and she expected a lot from me";[86] and "They all wanted to take us home with them and buy us sweets. We would go to the theatre, and they would take us for walks in their free time."[87] Apart from these moments in school with their teachers, the respondents also remembered incidents in the streets or on buses, which are generally considered common, such as how a bus driver stopped the bus to assist them. This indicates that such small moments of patience and empathy are significant to them, albeit infrequent.

Respondents also shared their memories of long-lasting friendships with their peers from boarding schools, recalling everyday details or special moments and emphasising how significant this was for them. For example, respondent 1 recounted: "I was playing with a few friends. We had a ball with a sound in it. We would go for walks, read, and visit the city centre with 'partially blind' children." Friendships were crucial for playing and sharing and represented an opportunity for learning and supporting one another, which provided these children with strength and confidence. Older or partially visually impaired students, who could assist their peers with orientation and learning, played a vital role in that informal education. The following statement attests to this: "Teachers engaged older students to teach us things. A friend, Mara, showed me how to make my bed. Now I keep saying to my wife: 'You should thank Mara!'"[88]

It is important to note that during this period, the beginnings of the integrative approach in theory and practice also became evident, followed by the aforementioned legislative changes. Specifically, as of 1968, the educational system underwent a crucial process of the integration of special schools in Serbia. As a result, children could transition between two educational systems: general and special.[89] The relevant literature from socialist times acknowledges the right of children with disabilities to live alongside their peers without disabilities and to share experiences and knowledge with them, thereby integrating disabled children into society.[90] Even during this period, it was emphasised that it was vital for the social development of disabled children to

86 Respondent 5.
87 Respondent 4.
88 Respondent 1.
89 Rapaić, Nedović, Ilić, and Stojković, "Zakonski okvir i inkluzivna praksa," 9–12.
90 Novaković, "Prilog razmatranju o društvenoj brizi za decu sa smetnjama u razvoju," 9.

remain at home with their parents and siblings and to socialise with sighted children.[91] However, children with visual impairments rarely attended regular schools as part of the integration process.

The respondents emphasised the importance of having friends who experienced similar problems as one of the benefits of boarding schools. This was particularly highlighted by the interviewees, who also had experience attending regular elementary or music schools. They stressed that children from special schools had more friends than students with disabilities who attended inclusive schools. They noted that in regular schools, although they were accepted during lectures, they were usually left behind during school breaks or after school. In boarding schools, they had time to play and talk to other students, which provided them with comfort and security. Unfortunately, even contemporary studies on Serbian schools observe the same trend, namely that students with disabilities in regular schools are less integrated and have fewer friends.[92]

It is important to note that, generally, our respondents were critical of integration and inclusion, primarily because they all stated that segregation was beneficial for independence. They remained committed to the segregated option and continued to advocate for segregated boarding schools. Their negative attitude towards inclusion and integration stems from the poor implementation of inclusion rather than the concept itself. Unable to identify the underlying problem, they concluded that inclusion was not viable in practice. They believed that the current model of integration and inclusion, which was implemented partially and presented as the only possible option, demonstrated that individuals did not actually integrate. Therefore, they wished to return to the safe haven of boarding schools. The relevant literature from that period noted that it was essential not only to change pedagogical practices, introduce differentiated approaches, respect individual differences, and change school organisation but also to alter the mindset and attitudes of the broader society to enable a safe and emancipatory environment for people with disabilities.[93] The same debate is prevalent in modern literature focusing on and advocating for the implementation and improvement of inclusive practices in schools.[94]After probing and establishing more trustworthy relationships between the respondents and interviewers, the negative aspects of living in boarding schools were also addressed, revealing deeper issues indicating serious problems in the broader society outside these specific institutions. For example, the respondents recalled children coming from complete isolation after being hidden from everyone. Furthermore, their negative memories reflect their everyday life in those institutions: lack of space, modest food, and protests against management due to

91 Nordstrom, "The History of the Education of the Blind and Deaf," 8.

92 See more in Rajka Đević, "The social interaction of students with developmental disabilities in primary schools" (doctoral dissertation, Belgrade: Faculty of Arts, 2015), https://eteze.bg.ac.rs/application/showtheses?thesesId=2416.

93 Novaković, "Prilog razmatranju o društvenoj brizi za decu sa smetnjama u razvoju," 9. Ljubomir Savić, "Diferencirani sistem vaspitanja i obrazovanja kao nužan preduslov uspešnije edukativne rehabilitacije ometenih lica," in Nevenka Novaković, ed., *Društvena briga o deci sa smetnjama u razvoju* (Savez slepih Jugoslavije, 1982), 154–57.

94 See more in Milja Vujačić, and Rajka Đević, "Inclusive education: conceptual definition, principles and characteristics," *Teme: Časopis za Društvene Nauke* 37, No. 2 (2013): 753–68, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=160627.

insufficient heating. They also mentioned difficulties with interpersonal relations with strict teachers, such as: "There were some teachers that I would not allow to work with children, but that exists in the mainstream schools as well."[95] They also recalled conflicts among students: "It was difficult when older children abused us because we are smaller."[96] A particularly upsetting memory was an example of abuse, ignorance, and passivity from the school employees: "There was a rumour about maniacs around the dormitory, but nobody believed us and they did not want to admit there was a problem. One afternoon, someone attacked my friend and me in the schoolyard."[97] Attempts to normalise such practices were evident despite the respondents having survived profoundly traumatic experiences. Those in charge would often assert that "regular children" had similar experiences as well, again stressing that disabled children did not differ from others and that they were like "everybody else."[98] However, some respondents were critical of the organisation and atmosphere in those schools and insisted that many relationships, rules, and protocols could have been implemented differently. Experiences from abroad particularly highlighted to them that their education could have been organised in another way. For example, one respondent stressed: "I think that in the West, apart from educating children, they teach them what to do with this education. Here, we do not know what to do with educated 'blind' people."[99]

Conclusion

Due to many economic, political, and cultural factors, special education in socialist Serbia was organised in a specialised, segregated manner. In this paper, we use oral history to present individual life stories, the history of segregated educational institutions for the visually impaired, as well as the social systems and the *Zeitgeist*. We interviewed five exceptional people with strong personalities who have overcome various boundaries and stereotypes. They all lead rich, active personal and professional lives and are politically involved and courageous. They have all benefited from the steadfast support and sacrifices of their families. Generally, they have fond memories of their education, partly because past events are often recalled more positively while negative aspects are minimised. The respondents highlighted many benefits of living in a boarding school, especially for their independence, yet they also remembered many negative aspects of this approach. They recalled curricular and extracurricular activities during primary and secondary education, which were vital to their personal and professional development. Regarding the social relations in segregated special institutions, they emphasised the importance of maintaining close relationships with teachers and fellow students for their personal growth during this formative period.

95 Respondent 1.
96 Respondent 4.
97 Respondent 4.
98 Respondent 1.
99 Respondent 1.

The drawbacks of secondary vocational training were particularly noticeable as conceptions evolved to better prepare individuals for independent living and participation in the labour market. Although visually impaired children and youth had better opportunities to attain and complete their formal education during socialist times than previously, the segregated system presented certain downsides due to the restrictive environment created for its users. Despite numerous debates and reorganisations of secondary educational programmes, integrating visually impaired people into the labour market proved challenging. Employers were often hesitant to hire visually impaired individuals, as many prejudices persisted. It is difficult to ascertain whether special education would have fared better had it been organised differently or whether the primary issue was that society inadequately addressed integration and inclusion due to long-standing prejudices and stereotypes that changed only gradually. The various persistent culturally and socially conditioned perceptions of disability undoubtedly influenced the period under consideration. Finally, it is essential to emphasise that this paper merely presents exploratory research that should be further developed and expanded.

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Respondent 1, interview held in Belgrade on 20. 3. 2024 and 21. 6. 2024.
Respondent 2, interview held in Belgrade on 14. 6. 2024.

100 Methodological Note:
Respondent 1: male, born in a village in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1966, visually impaired from birth; completed the special primary and secondary schools in Sarajevo; graduated from the Faculty of Philology, Belgrade, the Department of German and English language and literature; employed at the Association for Blind People in Serbia.
Respondent 2: male, born in a village in Montenegro in 1936, lost his sight during World War II due to a bomb explosion; completed the special primary school in Zemun and the Integrated Lyceum in Belgrade; graduated from the Faculty of Law, Belgrade; employed at a publishing company as an editor.
Respondent 3: female, born in a village in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1956, lost her sight at the age of fourteen as a reaction to medication; completed the final grade at the special primary school in Zemun and the Integrated Lyceum in Belgrade; graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade, the Department of Psychology; employed at the National Library; active in the International League of Blind Esperantists.
Respondent 4: female, born in a village in Western Serbia in 1966, lost her sight completely at the age of three; completed the special primary and secondary schools in Zemun; worked at a state-owned company in Užice; active in the local Association for Blind People.
Respondent 5: female, born in Belgrade in 1974, blind from birth, prematurely born; completed the special primary, secondary, and lower music schools in Zemun and the integrated music school; graduated from the Academy of Music; employed as a piano teacher at a music school.

Respondent 3, interview held in Belgrade on 30. 7. 2024.
Respondent 4, interview held via telephone call on 14. 9. 2024.
Respondent 5, interview held in Belgrade on 17. 9. 2024 and 20. 9. 2024.

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Dragana Gundogan, Nataša Milićević

SEGREGIRANO POSEBNO IZOBRAŽEVANJE SLEPIH IN SLABOVIDNIH OTROK V SOCIALISTIČNI SRBIJI – IZOLACIJA IN/ALI PRIPRAVA NA ŽIVLJENJE IN DELO?

POVZETEK

V prispevku analiziramo izobraževalne prakse in medosebne odnose v osnovnošolskih in srednješolskih izobraževalnih ustanovah za slepe in slabovidne otroke v socialistični Srbiji. Analiza je temeljila na interdisciplinarnem zgodovinskem in sociološkem pristopu, pri čemer so bili uporabljeni sekundarni in arhivski viri in literatura ter neposredna osebna pričevanja in spomini. Ta pristop omogoča podrobnejši vpogled v zgodovinske dogodke in procese. Čeprav se je izobraževalni sistem v socialističnih republikah zelo razvil, so bile razlike med posameznimi regijami še vedno precej velike. Zakonodaja je vsem otrokom zagotovila dostop do kakovostnega izobraževanja, vključno z zakonodajnimi pobudami za otroke s posebnimi potrebami. Kljub precejšnjim emancipacijskim in naprednim revolucionarnim socialističnim spodbudam se je posebno izobraževanje razvijalo počasneje od splošnega izobraževalnega sistema. Za posebni izobraževalni program je bilo značilno predvsem, da je uveljavljal segregacijo izobraževanja in socializacije. Segregirane internatske šole so poskrbele za vse potrebe invalidnih učencev ob upoštevanju dejstva, da so na izobraževalno politiko poleg finančnih okoliščin vplivali tudi kulturne vrednote, predsodki in stereotipi. Poleg tega so v prispevku predstavljeni učni načrti, obšolske dejavnosti, strokovno usposabljanje ter medosebni odnosi med učenci ter med učitelji in učenci, ki temeljijo na raziskovanju individualnih izkušenj in spominov. Analizirali smo, kako so bile organizirane segregirane izobraževalne ustanove za slepe in slabovidne učence z osebnega vidika ter kako se je slednji razlikoval od teoretičnih in političnih premislekov. Sistem posebnega izobraževanja v Srbiji je vplival na socializacijo in integracijo slepih in slabovidnih učencev. Poudarjeno je bilo predvsem srednješolsko izobraževanje in poklicno usposabljanje, saj sta bila v skladu s prevladujočo socialistično ideologijo delo in zaposlitev pomembna za materialno in socialno neodvisnost slepih in slabovidnih. Vendar pa sta struktura in organizacija posebnega izobraževanja negativno vplivali na socialno in izobraževalno politiko. Koncept srednješolskega izobraževanja slepih in slabovidnih učencev se je skozi desetletja spreminjal, vendar jih ni uspel ustrezno pripraviti na vključitev na trg dela zaradi številnih ovir, ki so presegale izobraževalno politiko in so bile posledica dolgotrajnih zgodovinskih procesov in struktur.