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Institutional education of blind, deaf and speech-disabled children in Slovenia until World War II

Edukacja instytucjonalna dzieci niewidomych, niesłyszących i z wadami wymowy na Słowenii przed II wojną światową

Streszczenie

Cel: Cel artykułu może wydawać się dość nietypowy, ponieważ są nim tak zwane rodziny zastępcze osób niewidomych, niedowidzących, głuchych i niedosłyszących w Słowenii w okresie międzywojennym. W Słowenii rodziny zastępcze reprezentowane były przez instytucje, które zajmowały się również utrzymaniem oraz edukacją do rozwoju i edukacją praktyczną. Nauczyciele–eksperti starali się umożliwić niewidomym i głuchym dzieciom korzystanie z tego specjalnego traktowania.

Metody: W oparciu o dostępne materiały archiwalne i odpowiednią literaturę autorzy śledzą ścieżki niewidomych i głuchych dzieci od wczesnej młodości do zdobycia zawodu, co umożliwiało im bycie niezależnym w ich przyszłym życiu i pozwalało na integrację w ramach relacji międzypokoleniowych.

Wyniki: Autorzy upewnili się, że niewidome i głuche dzieci, jak również dzieci z wadami mowy, umieszczone w odpowiednich edukacyjnych i szkolnych procesach w pierwszej dekadzie dwudziestego wieku miały lepsze szanse na to, by stać się nieza-

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leżnymi członkami społeczeństwa. Większość z nich zdawała sobie sprawę z tego, że instytucje te dawały im doskonałą życiową lekcję, która wykraczała poza aspekty samej tylko wiedzy i umiejętności.

Wnioski: W podsumowaniu autorzy podkreślają, że pomimo ustaw, które obejmowały obowiązkową edukacją również dzieci niewidome, głuche i te z wadami mowy, tylko połowa z nich korzystała z kształcenia i szkolnictwa specjalnego przed końcem II wojny światowej. Główną przyczyną tego stanu rzeczy był brak wiedzy rodziców o możliwości otrzymania przez ich dzieci takiej edukacji. W związku z tym wskazać należy, że główną przyczyną tego stanu rzeczy były ograniczone możliwości instytucji: krótko po ich założeniu okazało się, że jedynie ich program nauczania jest odpowiedni. Kierownictwo nie zdawało sobie sprawy z tego, że edukacja specjalna i zadania społeczne muszą być realizowane tak szeroko jak to tylko możliwe, jednak ich wysiłki, aby tego dokonać nie były wysłuchane aż do drugiej połowy lat 40. XX wieku. Uczniowie w ogromnej potrzebie zdobycia specjalnych umiejętności otrzymali równą edukację dopiero po II wojnie światowej, kiedy to poradzono sobie z ograniczoną przestrzenią dostępną dla obu instytucji, jak również innymi problemami.

Słowa kluczowe: dzieci niewidome i głuche, dzieci z wadami mowy, edukacja i szkolnictwo, Słowenia, 1918–1945.

Abstract

Aim: The purpose of the following contribution may be somewhat atypical, as it deals with the so-called substitute families of the blind, visually impaired, deaf, and hearing-impaired children in Slovenia in the period between the world wars. In Slovenia, substitute families were represented by the institutes that also encompassed boarding facilities with an educational-developmental programme apart from the educational-practical component of schooling. The expert teachers strived to ensure that as many as possible blind and deaf children could benefit from this special treatment.

Methods: Based on the accessible archive materials and appropriate literature, the authors follow the path of blind and deaf children from their early years to the gaining of their professions, which guaranteed the individuals' independence in their future life and ensured their integration into the intergenerational relations.

Results: The authors have ascertained that the blind, deaf, and speech-disabled children who were included in suitable educational and schooling processes during the first decades of the 20th century had a better chance of taking an independent part in the society. Most of them were aware that the institutes had given them excellent life lessons that transcended the mere acquisition of knowledge and physical skills.

Conclusions: Despite the legislation that prescribed compulsory education also for the deaf, speech-disabled, and blind children, less than a half of these children received any special education and schooling before the end of World War II. The main reason for this was the ignorance of many parents, who were unaware that the possibility for the schooling of their children even existed. In this regard it should be pointed out that the leading cause of this was the limited capacity of both institutes: as it happened, soon after their establishment, it turned out that they were appropriate only in the sense

of their programme. The management staff was aware that the specialised educational and social tasks should be carried out to the greatest extent possible, but their efforts to ensure this kept falling on deaf ears with the state until as late as the second half of the 1940s. The pupils who were in dire need of special skills would receive equal education and schooling opportunities only after World War II, when the spatial constraints of both institutes were addressed, among other issues.

Keywords: blind, deaf and speech-disabled children, education and schooling, Slovenia, 1918–1945.

Introduction

In the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, school was compulsory for blind as well as deaf and speech-disabled children ever since the Primary Education Act of 1869¹. However, as no suitable educational institutions existed in Slovenia until the beginning of the 20th century, those (few) Slovenian children who would receive monetary contributions from charitable organisations and individuals would be educated in institutions, located (particularly) in the Austrian part of the Monarchy (Vienna, Linz, Graz, Klagenfurt, Innsbruck)². For a long time, the public as well as the professional community would keep expressing reservations in this regard, as the teaching language in the aforementioned institutions was German and therefore the children were separated from their Slovenian language and culture. On 19 June 1915, the *Slovenec* daily newspaper wrote the following:

“Now imagine these poor blind children so far away from home, alone among strangers: they do not see anything, understand anyone, and nobody understands them! Gradually they manage to comprehend German and learn what they can in it; but when they come back home, they cannot communicate properly in the Slovenian language”³.

The first Slovenian institution for children with special needs was founded in Ljubljana in 1900. It was intended for the education and schooling of deaf and speech-disabled children. When the new institution opened, the expert newspaper *Učiteljski tovariš* emphasised contentedly that it was no longer necessary for these children to be sent abroad. Moreover, it rejoiced in the fact that the teach-

¹ *Reichsgesetzblatt für das Kaiserthum Oesterreich*, 20 May 1869, Gesetz vom 14. Mai 1869, durch welches die Grundsätze des Unterrichtswesens bezüglich der Volksschulen festgestellt werden, p. 277.

² *Zavod za slepo in slabovidno mladino: zgodovinski oris 1919–1989*, Zavod za slepo in slabovidno mladino, Ljubljana 1989, p. 2.

³ “Slovenec: političen list za slovenski narod”, 19 June 1915, vol. XLIII, No. 137, p. 3, *Za uboge slepce*.

ing language at the institute for the deaf-mute was Slovenian exclusively⁴. After the end of World War I, a nursery for the blind and partially sighted was established in Ljubljana as well. The fundamental principles of both institutions were to encourage the children's creativity and facilitate the development of their personalities in accordance with the social and human values. The work process was thus based on education, schooling, and rehabilitation. The teachers saw their mission in enabling the blind, deaf and speech-disabled to become full and equal members of society. However, this very society did not have much tolerance for the blind, deaf and mute at the time: in their wider living environment, such children would often even be a laughing stock. As they were not familiar with their children's psychological development, even the parents, no matter how loving they might have been, did not always know how to help their children or bring them up correctly. After their arrival at the institution, most of these children were therefore skittish and wary at first, but they would soon discover a new world. One of the girls educated at the institute for the deaf-mute described her feelings about her life before and after the arrival to the institute as follows:

“I simply could not comprehend the meaning of this horrible silence: I was not ready to accept that apart from my nearest and dearest the whole of nature was quiet as well, even animals. [...], while children would avoid and fear me. Only the farm animals that I would often talk to while they were grazing were not afraid of my company [...] When it was time for me to go to school, my mother took me there, but I could only tolerate it for a week or so, because I represented the target of ridicule and mischief for the village children. Good people took pity on me and advised me to attend a school for children like me, meaning the institute for the deaf-mute. When I finally got there, I was the happiest kid among equals. For whatever I am now, I owe an enormous debt to all my teachers, educators, and simultaneously my parents during my schooling”⁵.

The subsequent legislation addressed blind and deaf-mute children as well. In 1930, the National Schools Act set the foundations for the operation of schools for children with special needs in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia⁶. The Act stipulated that these schools, organised in accordance with the boarding school principle, should be attended by those children who were unable to keep up with the teaching in the national schools. The schools for children with special needs were financed by the state and the Banate⁷. Their programmes and

⁴ J. Armič, *Zavod za gluhošeme v Ljubljani*, “Učiteljski tovariš”, 10 November 1900, vol. XL, No. 32, pp. 1–2.

⁵ *Živeti s tišino*, [in:] B. Jakopič (ed.), *Zavod za usposabljanje slušno in govorno motenih*, Ljubljana 1993, pp. 20–21.

⁶ *Uradni list kraljevske banske uprave Dravske banovine*, 28 January 1930.

⁷ After the state-legal ties with the Habsburg Monarchy had been severed, the majority of the Slovenian nation lived in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, which only existed for a very

educational methodology were prescribed by the Minister of Education with a special regulation.

The pedagogical process

In Slovenia, no suitable professional institutions existed for the blind and deaf-mute pre-school children in the period under consideration. Before they could enrol in the institutes, the children stayed at home, where – as we have already mentioned – they were often misunderstood and brought up inappropriately. Experts were well aware that ignorance regarding the psychological development of these children could lead to serious mistakes in their upbringing, which is why they argued in favour of institutionalising the pre-school education. Their efforts in this regard bore fruit, as both institutes introduced the so-called preparatory classes in the school year of 1937/38. The deaf-mute children in the preparatory class had to be at least five years old⁸. In this regard, it should be emphasised that before their enrolment into the preparatory class, they had to pass an entrance exam, which took place in front of a commission consisting of expert teachers as well as the institute's resident doctor. The examination consisted of two parts: an intelligence test, and a doctor's examination that revealed the child's physical and psychological capabilities. By means of this examination, the children's capabilities for schooling could largely be established, even though the results that they would eventually achieve during their education did not always correspond to the commission's opinions. Some children would be unable to follow the lessons even though they had passed the entrance exam, which is why they could be dismissed from the institute in the middle of the year.

short time before the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established on 1 December 1918. In: J. Perovšek, *Slovenska samostojnost v Državi SHS*, [in:] Jasna Fischer (ed.), *Slovenska novejša zgodovina: od programa Zedinjena Slovenija do mednarodnega priznanja Republike Slovenije 1848–1992*, Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, Ljubljana 2005, p. 186. After the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of SHS), the Slovenian autonomy, achieved in the former State of SHS, was not preserved. For Slovenians, the introduction of the King's dictatorship was a particularly painful development in the administrative-political field. In January 1929, the previous administrative unit self-government was abolished, while the Ljubljana and Maribor administrative units were merged into a new administrative unit: the so-called Drava Banate. In the administrative sense, the new entity encompassed the majority of Slovenia. The other Banates were organised in such a manner as to divide the individual Yugoslav historical territories and national individualities administratively and territorially. Ljubljana was the seat of the Drava Banate, while Belgrade was the capital of the Yugoslav Kingdom. In: J. Perovšek, *Dravska banovina in banski svet*, [in:] Jasna Fischer (ed.), *Slovenska novejša zgodovina...*, op. cit., p. 327.

⁸ D. Dobaja, *Gluhonemnica v Ljubljani 1919–1940*, [in:] A. Škoro Babič, M. Jeraj, M. Košir, B. Balkovec (eds.), *Zgodovina otroštva, Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije*, Ljubljana 2012, p. 391.

The preparatory class education was based on games that made the children aware of their own capabilities. Teachers at the institute for the deaf-mute would primarily resort to speech⁹. In this manner, the children would gradually learn how to lip read and realise that speech was a means of communication. In order to facilitate contact and control, children would resort to natural gestures that were their only means of expression at this age. Because the blind and deaf-mute children are normally unable to take part in the games of those who are not visually or hearing impaired, their imagination cannot develop properly and is therefore modest or non-existent. The teachers in the preparatory class had to pay attention to this as well. Fairy tales – narrated in words for the blind and pictures for the deaf-mute – were a vital accessory for the development of the blind and deaf-mute children's imagination. In the preparatory classes, teachers would also familiarise the children with logical thinking and manual dexterity. They would also emphasise the importance of physical education in the upbringing of deaf-mute and blind children. These children's impairments also had a detrimental influence on their physical condition, as they would usually have difficulties walking and would therefore not exercise much in their earliest years, which, in turn, resulted in poor blood circulation and increasingly serious health issues¹⁰. The described methodology of teaching the preparatory class was successful in the cases of the majority of pupils. In the first generation of children, fifteen of the seventeen children proceeded to the first grade; two pupils were held back; and their average final grade was very good¹¹.

The blind and deaf-mute children, who were at least six but not more than fourteen years old and in good physical and psychological condition, were included in the regular process of education and schooling. In accordance with the National Schools Act, the registries for the acceptance of children to the schools for the blind and deaf-mute had to be kept by the headmasters of the schools for children with special needs and submitted to the local commissioner every year¹².

⁹ The children at the institute for the deaf-mute were taught in accordance with the voice and speech method, based on the argument that deaf-mute children nevertheless possessed healthy speech organs, represented by the lungs, the trachea with the larynx, as well as the oral and nasal cavities. Deaf-mute children cry, scream and laugh just like all other children. In such cases, the voice of a deaf-mute child is no different from the voice of a child without any disabilities. This realisation gradually developed into the efforts to use the voice of the deaf-mute for speech as well. However, this goal called for hard work on the part of the teachers as well as the students. In: D. Dobaja, *Gluhonemnica v Ljubljani 1919–1940*, [in:] A. Škoro Babič, M. Jeraj, M. Košir, B. Balkovec (eds.), *Zgodovina otroštva...*, op. cit., p. 390.

¹⁰ D. Dobaja, *Gluhonemnica v Ljubljani 1919–1940*, [in:] A. Škoro Babič, M. Jeraj, M. Košir, Bojan Balkovec (eds.), *Zgodovina otroštva...*, op. cit., p. 392.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² SI AS 1460, *Zavod za slepo in slabovidno mladino Ljubljana*, t. e. 1, Konferenčni zapisnik (2 April 1930 – 22 April 1932), Zapisnik, 2 September 1931.

The first and second grades represented the lower level in the education and schooling of the blind and deaf-mute children. At this level, the deaf-mute children learned pronunciation and lip reading. They also learned how to read, write, and do arithmetic up to twenty. They would also familiarise themselves with their immediate surroundings and learn how to refer to body parts, clothes, school necessities, teaching aids, classroom accessories, and names of their schoolmates. The blind first-grade and second-grade pupils were taught how to read and write in Braille, express themselves eloquently with speech and narration, and do arithmetic up to twenty.

At the medium and higher levels of primary school education, the teachers of deaf-mute children focused primarily on speech. However, at the same time they would strive to expand the spiritual horizons of their pupils by teaching them about the wider surroundings and elaborating on arithmetic, geography, history, and nature. Particularly in the higher grades, the teachers would emphasise the practical knowledge that could help the students find employment after the conclusion of their education. Thus the children were taught, for example, about agriculture, farming, tools, machines, etc., while they also possessed enough manual dexterity to produce simple handicraft items¹³. After their graduation, they could find jobs where being deaf-mute did not represent an obstacle –which included in particular those occupations that called for manual dexterity.

Apart from reading, writing, and arithmetic, the blind pupils of middle and higher primary school grades were also familiar with the basics of geography, history, and nature. The teachers strived to ensure a greater emphasis was put on physical education, orientation exercises, open-air education (during the so-called school excursions in the natural world), as well as on training the hands and fingers for work. Because the institute for the blind did not have its own gym, the children were physically active only in summer or when the weather allowed them to exercise in the garden¹⁴.

Apart from the primary school, an advanced crafts school with wickerwork and brush making workshops was organised at the institute for the blind as well. Josip Kobal, the primary school headmaster at the time, was particularly in favour of the advanced crafts school, as he believed that it could provide the blind with suitable professional qualifications and thus with the possibility of finding a job¹⁵. The brush making craft was abandoned during the 1920s. Thus the blind learned wickerwork, but with various degrees of success. It turned out that making wickerwork products was difficult for them, especially for the girls.

¹³ J. Zakovšek, *Šolska doba gluhoemega otroka*, [in:] R. Dostal and D. Supančič (eds.), *Štirideset let gluhoemnice v Ljubljani 1900–1940*, Ravnateljstvo gluhoemnice v Ljubljani, Ljubljana 1940, pp. 52–54.

¹⁴ M. Šorn, *Zavod za slepe otroke in mladino v Kočevju*, "Kronika" 2009, vol. 57, p. 268.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 266.

Thus the school leadership decided to train the girls in easier and finer crafts that were more appropriate for them. Only as late as in the beginning of 1937 did the school manage to find a handiwork teacher, able to instruct the girls how to sew, knit, etc. At the beginning of 1941, housekeeping classes also began¹⁶. Occasionally, advanced and expert courses would be organised for the boarders as well. Their purpose was to provide the children with at least a modicum of general theoretical and technical education apart from practical knowledge.

The institute for the deaf-mute and the institute for the blind both used identical teaching aids and accessories as were used in the ordinary, public schools – except that the visual representation and tactile characteristics were given more emphasis. Due to financial problems, the leaderships of both institutes kept underlining the proper use of teaching aids and accessories. For example, teaching aids at the institute for the deaf-mute were also discussed at the teachers conference on 24 September 1920, and headmaster Fran Grm urged the teachers that only the existing stock should be used. The things that were not in store but were urgently required would have to be purchased. However, the headmaster complained that due to increasing prices, the institute could only barely function with the allowance that it received for this purpose. He believed that the institute's budget could be unburdened somewhat, at least as far as teaching aids were concerned. He proposed that at least the wealthier of the children's parents should be called upon to make contributions, which would – even if very modest – contribute to the improvement of the institute's financial situation¹⁷. However, the authors of the present article were unable to uncover any information in the available materials as to whether any concrete agreements with regard to the headmaster's proposal were reached. They have concluded, though, that the wealthier parents as well as private benefactors did indeed help the institutes purchase teaching aids.

Life in the institute

As is already apparent from the introductory quote describing the deaf-mute girl's feelings before and after her enrolment in the institute for the deaf-mute in Ljubljana, both of these boarding schools – the institute for the deaf-mute as well as the institute for the blind in Ljubljana – functioned like a big family. The leadership and the teachers assumed that the institute was everything to these children: their home, school, and church. This sense of home and familiarity was, among other things, also evident from the instructions stated in the conference minutes by the headmaster of the institute for the deaf-mute, where he often

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 269.

¹⁷ D. Dobaja, *Gluhonemnica v Ljubljani 1919–1940*, [in:] A. Škoro Babič, M. Jeraj, M. Košir, B. Balkovec (eds.), *Zgodovina otroštva...*, op. cit., p. 389.

substituted the term “institute” with the word “home”. Thus we can read sentences like: “When the children return home...”¹⁸. The teachers were well aware that the newcomers had to be treated especially thoughtfully and that a feeling of security and acceptance had to be instilled in them. They believed that the feeling of being at home was a precondition for the successful instruction of these children. Despite the teachers’ efforts, in the first days the novices would hang around the institute with downcast eyes, sullen faces, and teary eyes. Their disposition would improve very slowly. At first, the teachers started introducing the institute order to the newcomers, which could involve all kinds of difficulties. For example, many children found it difficult to walk in shoes or slippers, because the young persons that arrived to the institute mostly from the countryside were used to walking barefoot.

Apart from the feeling of belonging and security, the preconditions for the successful upbringing, supervision and education of these children included the professional training of the teaching staff that both of these institutes could boast at the time. The profession emphasised that children with special needs could only be taught by those who had the special gift of being able to instruct groups and individuals properly. They had to be educated in pedagogy, psychology, psychopathology, and similar sciences. Although both institutes operated in very modest circumstances, their efforts to ensure the additional professional education of their teachers were admirable. The considerable qualifications of the teaching staff at the institute for blind and partially sighted young persons were, among other things, also confirmed by the representative from the Ministry of Education in Belgrade in June 1935, who gave an excellent evaluation to all the teachers after his visit to the school¹⁹. This recognition was all the more important because in 1922 the institute was relocated from Ljubljana to Kočevje, where the working conditions were much worse than in Ljubljana (in 1922, the Ministry of National Health had purchased the institute’s facilities in Ljubljana and assigned them to the Gynaecological Hospital)²⁰.

Headmaster Franc Grm, who had implemented educational reform after World War I, played a significant role in the education of the teachers at the Ljubljana institute for the deaf-mute. A great emphasis was also placed on the regular professional education and training of the teaching staff, particularly abroad, as well as on the familiarisation with new methods of teaching the deaf-mute. For example, during their visit to the institute for the deaf-mute in Vienna, the teachers familiarised themselves with the work of the pedagogue Baldrian. During the 1932 study excursion, headmaster Grm also met the French phonetician Marichel and visited his laboratory in Paris, where he finally de-

¹⁸ SI AS 2032, *Zavod za gluhe in naglušne Ljubljana*, t. e. 2, Zapisnik lokalne učiteljske konference z dne 30.12.1918.

¹⁹ M. Šorn, *Zavod za slepe otroke in mladino...*, op. cit., p. 267.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 266.

cided on phonetics as being the foundation for speech instruction²¹. This was the vision that the institutes for the deaf-mute and for the blind in Ljubljana adhered to in their work. Therefore, the reputation of both institutes at home and abroad kept increasing in the interwar period, until they were known as the best institutes of their kind in Yugoslavia.

Let us take a closer look at how everyday life unfolded in these schools or boarding schools – the institutes for the blind and deaf-mute. The workday began very early. At eight in the morning, breakfast was followed by classes. After lunch it was time for the midday break that the children could also spend outside in the garden when the weather was nice. At two in the afternoon, the pupils would return to the institute and spend the afternoons revising what they had learned. On pleasant days they would head out for learning excursions, which represented an important part of the education and schooling, as they allowed the children to familiarise themselves with a variety of new things and concepts. The boarders were free between six and seven in the evening, and then it was time for supper. Afterwards they would clean their shoes and clothes, wash up, and go to bed. Before sleep, they would also pray²².

The teachers would do much more than simply focus on the pupils during classes: they dedicated a lot of time to the children in the context of the boarding school as well, as they were in charge of the pupils' intellectual capabilities, their physical, health, and work education, their interest groups, moral and aesthetic education, as well as their cultural and social life. They were convinced that the children had to be as active as possible at all times. The conference minutes of the institute for the blind of 25 January 1935 state the following:

“The boarders should never be allowed to start pondering (brooding) due to idleness: they should be given as many opportunities as possible to engage in music, exercise, games, playfulness, and good literature”²³.

Therefore Sundays, holidays, and other free days would start early for these children as well. Education, religious instruction and letter writing were followed by games, though domestic chores were obligatory as well. The girls were in charge of patching up the pupils' clothes and bed linen, while the boys' chores depended on the seasons. During the winter or when the weather was unpleasant, the boys would tidy up the vicinity of the institute, make tools as well as doing a variety of repairs in the institute, and saw wood. The school garden was not

²¹ SI AS 2032, *Zavod za gluhe in naglušne Ljubljana*, t. e. 2, Zapisnik redne mesečne konference učiteljskega zbora državne gluhonemnice v Ljubljani dne 27.01.1937.

²² D. Dobaja, *Gluhonemnica v Ljubljani 1919–1940*, [in:] A. Škoro Babič, M. Jeraj, M. Košir, B. Balkovec (eds.), *Zgodovina otroštva...*, op. cit., pp. 392–393.

²³ SI AS 1460, *Zavod za slepo in slabovidno mladino Ljubljana*, t. e. 1, Konferenčni zapisniki (30 May 1932 – 22 January 1937), Zapisnik, 25 January 1935.

intended merely for entertainment: it was also where the children learned gardening and beekeeping.

Music lessons were a part of the extracurricular activities in the institute for the blind and partially sighted. The teachers were confident that music strengthened the characters of blind children, and held an important conviction that “by practicing various musical instruments, the children’s fingers are not only practicing music, but will thus also be fit for any other manual labour”²⁴. The children would learn piano, zither, violin, cello, and music theory. Girl students would assist the teachers in music instruction. The boarders liked to sing and did it well: they would convince the audiences of this fact at a variety of events as well as via the church choir. The institute for the blind and partially sighted would present itself to the public regularly on the radio. The main purpose of these broadcasts was to raise the listeners’ awareness about blindness and the lives of blind children. Apart from performing on the radio, the institute’s pupils and teachers would also regularly organise a variety of other events and festivities. Besides theatre and music performances, the exhibitions organised in the institute at the end of every school year were known far and wide, as well. At these exhibitions the boarders would present artisanal products that they had made during the school year. The information about the successful sales of wickerwork attests to the high quality of their efforts.

However, informing the public and acquiring revenue were not the only reasons for these events: the teachers considered them as being an important teaching moment, in particular from the viewpoint of psychology and pedagogics. All such events represented a pleasant change in the otherwise monotonous everyday life. They encouraged the feeling and sense of beauty and good in children and prompted them to engage in mental activity and develop their imaginations.

Every December, the institutes were all the more pleasant. Every year, on the eve of his holiday, St. Nicholas would visit the children and bring them small presents. The Christmas Eve festivities were quite a treat as well: the children would decorate a Christmas tree, sing, and recite Christmas songs. This was followed by a feast. Every pupil would receive a modest present (a handkerchief, socks, etc.). The poorer among them would be given clothes and laundry, and the money for this came from the institute’s support fund, or the cloth was contributed by the state. At the end of 1935, the manager of the institute for the blind and partially sighted gave the teachers the following advice:

“As Christmas holidays are just around the corner, I recommend that the teachers prepare the children for this festive Christmas time. They should be aware of the significance of these holidays, know that this is a holiday of peace, and that during this time they should be particularly careful not to behave inappropriately. During the holidays, the pupils should mostly engage

²⁴ M. Šorn, *Zavod za slepe otroke in mladino...*, op. cit., p. 269.

in fun and games. However, as the holidays are also very long, they should also receive certain tasks: but these should be in the form of games²⁵.

As has already been pointed out, both institutes would constantly struggle with the shortage of financial resources. Therefore it was all the more important that the children were taught how to keep the facilities clean as well as maintain an appropriate attitude towards the school inventory. Fran Grm, the headmaster of the institute for the deaf-mute, kept calling upon the teachers to instruct the children in the proper use of school accessories as well as other facilities: toilets, water, electricity, furniture, etc.²⁶ Cleanliness was important as well, as it was – especially shortly after World War I – difficult to acquire doormats, rags, dustpans and detergents. Naturally, hygiene was also very important for health. In the morning, after every chore, and before bed, the children had to wash themselves in the washroom. Every boarder owned a personal towel, a glass for rinsing the mouth, and a toothbrush. Apart from cleanliness, playing outside in the institute gardens was vital for the children's wellbeing as well: there they could exercise or play freely. In the event of poor weather, the headmaster advised the teachers to tell the children to at least walk around the building a few times in order to get some fresh air²⁷.

Family visits

The majority of children would arrive to the institutes under consideration from far away, which is why contacts between them and their parents were limited. Some parents would visit their children during the school year, in so far as they were able to, of course. However, most personal contacts took place during (summer) vacations.

The institutes' administrations would also take care of suitable vacation spots with "good as well as nationally-aware" families for those boarders who did not have their own families. Each such family would be reimbursed for taking care of these children. The teachers would instruct their pupils how to behave while they were away. They were told to be decent, polite, moderate with food, and diligent at work. They were also taught about health, infectious diseases, poisonous plants, dangerous animals, etc.

²⁵ SI AS 1460, *Zavod za slepo in slabovidno mladino Ljubljana*, t. e. 1, Konferenčni zapisniki (30 May 1932 – 22 January 1937), Zapisnik, 20 December 1935.

²⁶ SI AS 2032, *Zavod za gluhe in naglušne Ljubljana*, t. e. 2, Zapisnik učiteljske konference z dne 19.09.1921.

²⁷ SI AS 2032, *Zavod za gluhe in naglušne Ljubljana*, t. e. 2, Zapisnik lokalne učiteljske konference z dne 30.12.1918.

Before they would go on their way, all pupils were given a message for their parents or guardians, in which the administration of the institute underlined the duties that the caretakers had towards the blind and deaf-mute children during vacations. The teachers expected the parents to take care of the children during the time they spent together, protect them, and bring them back to the institute safely and promptly at the end of the vacations. At the instruction of the state administration, the institutes' leaderships would also turn to the municipalities and asked them to watch over their children – particularly to ensure that they did not fall victim to any abuse such as begging as well as psychological and physical violence. With the letter of 31 May 1933, the state administration allowed those children who could not be taken care properly at home to stay in the institute during vacations²⁸. Such children would focus on crafts and work in the workshop in the mornings, while in the afternoons they would engage in recreation and read.

During the school year, children could also maintain contacts in the form of letters, which was something that the teachers encouraged eagerly. The deaf-mute children would write to their parents several times a month as well as during the various national holidays. In these letters they would describe their life and education at the institute. They would start writing as soon as they learned a few words, which is why the postcards written by children in the lower grades were full of short sentences that nevertheless said a lot and thus brought joy to their parents. The parents would write letters in return and include postcards and stamps in the envelopes²⁹.

Conclusion

Despite the legislation that prescribed compulsory education for the deaf, speech-disabled, and blind children, until the end of World War II less than a half of these children received any special education and schooling. One of the reasons for this was the ignorance of many parents, unaware that the possibility for the schooling of their children existed at all; while the main cause was the limited capacity of both institutes: soon after their establishment it turned out that they were only appropriate in terms of their programmes. The management staff's awareness that the special educational and social tasks had to be carried out to the greatest extent possible kept falling on deaf ears with the state until as late as the second half of the 1940s. The pupils who were in dire need of special skills would receive equal education and schooling opportunities only after

²⁸ SI AS 1460, *Zavod za slepo in slabovidno mladino Ljubljana*, t. e. 1, Konferenčni zapisnik (30 May 1932 – 22 January 1937), Zapisnik, 19 June 1933.

²⁹ SI AS 2052, *Zveza društev gluhih in naglušnih Slovenije*, t. e. 1, a. e. 1.

World War II, when the spatial constraints of both institutes were addressed, among other issues.

The blind, deaf, and speech-disabled children who were included in suitable education and schooling processes during the first decades of the 20th century had a better chance of taking an independent part in the society. Most of them were aware that the institutes had given them excellent life lessons that transcended the mere aspects of knowledge and physical skills. The words of a former boarder at the institute for the deaf-mute confirm that this was indeed the case:

“I often ponder and keep reliving my youth, when we walked around the immediate surroundings of Ljubljana in the company of our class teacher Mr Grm. There he would instil in us the first concepts of natural sciences, the first lessons in geography... We discussed so many things. [...] He also explained the meaning of the saying ‘patience and fortitude conquer all things’, and I have adhered to this motto in all my actions and pauses. I have experienced and keep experiencing countless moments when my will and courage falter... But I remember what my class teacher had taught me – and persevere”³⁰.

Summary

In the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, school was compulsory for blind as well as deaf and speech-disabled children since the primary education act of 1869. However, as no suitable educational institutions existed in Slovenia until the beginning of the 20th century, those (few) Slovenian children who received monetary contributions from charity organisations and individuals were educated in institutions, located (particularly) in the Austrian part of the Monarchy (Vienna, Linz, Graz, Klagenfurt, Innsbruck). For a long time, the public as well as the professional community kept expressing reservations in this regard, as the teaching language in the aforementioned institutions was German and therefore the children were separated from their Slovenian language and culture.

The first Slovenian institution for children with special needs was founded in Ljubljana in 1900. It was intended for the education and schooling of deaf and speech-disabled children.

After the end of World War I, a nursery for the blind and partially sighted was established in Ljubljana as well. The fundamental principles of both institutions were to encourage the children’s creativity and facilitate the development of their personalities in accordance with the social and human values. The work

³⁰ *Živeti s tišino*, [in:] B. Jakopič (ed.), *Zavod za usposabljanje slušno in govorno motenih*, Ljubljana 1993, pp. 10–11.

process was thus based on education, schooling, and rehabilitation. The teachers saw their mission in enabling the blind, deaf and speech-disabled to become full and equal members of the society. However, this very society did not have much tolerance for the blind, deaf and mute at the time: in their wider living environment, such children would often even be a laughing stock. Only in each of the institutes dedicated to them could these children start feeling accepted and at home. Their inclusion among peers with similar disabilities and professionally trained teaching staff were the preconditions for their successful education and schooling.

In the interwar period, the status and schooling of children with special needs, including the blind and the deaf-mute, was subject to the 1930 National Schools Act, which stipulated that the schools for children with special needs should be attended by those children who were incapable of keeping up with the education in the national schools. The schools for children with special needs were financed by the state and the Banate. Their programmes and educational methodology were prescribed by the Minister of Education with a special regulation, and they were organised as boarding schools.

Despite the legislation that prescribed compulsory education for the deaf, speech-disabled, and blind children, before the end of World War II less than a half of these children received any special education and schooling. One of the reasons for this was the ignorance of many parents, unaware that the possibility for the schooling of their children even existed; while the main cause was the limited capacity of both institutes: soon after their establishment it turned out that they were only appropriate in terms of their programmes. The management staff's awareness that the special educational and social tasks had to be carried out to the greatest extent possible kept falling on deaf ears with the state until as late as the second half of the 1940s. The pupils who were in dire need of special skills would receive equal education and schooling opportunities only after World War II, when the spatial constraints of both institutes were addressed, among other issues.

The blind, deaf, and speech-disabled children who were included in suitable education and schooling processes during the first decades of the 20th century had a better chance of taking an independent part in the society. Most of them were aware that the institutes had given them excellent life lessons that transcended the mere aspects of knowledge and physical skills.

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