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THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN YUGOSLAV AND SERBIAN SPORT: IDEA, REALITY AND (DIS) CONTINUITY³

Položaj žena u jugoslovenskom i srpskom sportu: ideja, realnost i (dis)kontinuitet

ABSTRACT: *The paper analyses the position of women in Yugoslav sport through analysis of archival material and compares it to the position of women in Serbian sport half a century later. The subject and the goal of the paper are exposed in the introductory part of the paper, and the methods used in the paper are exposed in the special part of the paper. The results, discussion and conclusion are the remaining three parts of the paper. Authors conclude that despite the progressive policy conducted first by the post-WW2 Yugoslav government and then by the Serbian government in contemporary Serbia, the position of women in sports has remained essentially the same. Prejudice, misunderstanding and overall gender inequality are typical of both periods. This fact reveals the weaknesses of progressive policies lacking an adequate material basis, since the social conditions of rural areas are the main reasons for such inequality. Furthermore, authors point to the complexity and significance of the phenomenon and prove that the struggle for gender equality in sports is far from over, as the position of women in Yugoslav and Serbian sport has shown only slight improvement since the difficult initial steps.*

KEYWORDS: *sports, women, emancipation, Yugoslavia, Serbia*

APSTRAKT: *Rad analizira položaj žena u jugoslovenskom sportu kroz analizu arhivskog materijala i upoređuje ga sa položajem žena u srpskom sportu pola veka kasnije. Predmet i cilj rada su navedeni u uvodnom delu rada, a korišćeni*

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metodi rada su navedeni u posebnom delu rada. Rezultati, diskusija i zaključak čine preostala tri dela rada. Autori zaključuju da uprkos progresivnoj politici koju je vodila najpre jugoslovenska vlada nakon Drugog svetskog rata, a potom i Vlada Srbije u savremenoj Srbiji, položaj žena u sportu je ostao u suštini isti. Predrasude, nerazumevanje i uopšte rodna nejednakost su tipični za oba perioda. Ova činjenica otkriva slabosti progresivnih politika kojima nedostaje adekvatna materijalna osnova, s obzirom na to da su socijalni uslovi ruralnih područja glavni razlozi za takvu nejednakost. Pored toga, autori ukazuju na složenost i značaj fenomena i dokazuju da je borba za rodnu ravnopravnost u sportu daleko od kraja, jer je položaj žena u jugoslovenskom i srpskom sportu pokazao samo malo poboljšanje od početnih koraka.

KLJUČNE REČI: *sport, žene, emancipacija, Jugoslavija, Srbija*

Introduction

As a social phenomenon of great significance, sport has had an important role in the process of women's emancipation (Drinkwater, 2000; Juhas, 2016a: 9–20). Today, sport is often regarded as conservative in that respect (Tannsjo, 2007: 347–358; Mijatov, Radenović, Marković, 2019: 61). However, in many periods throughout history it was highly progressive. One of these was the post-WW2 period, when the struggle for women's rights became more dynamic. In addition, the first post-war years were also a period of strong development of sport, both in Yugoslavia and worldwide. Two such important and complex social phenomena could not exist and develop without mutual interaction.

In socialist states, including Yugoslavia, the issue had its specifics which are to be found primarily in their socialist ideology and social conditions. The ideological imperative was clear: the building of socialism. However, since Yugoslavia was a dominantly rural society, the ideology of socialism and the Yugoslav Communist Party itself were not appealing to the youth. The first step in building socialism was attracting people to its ideology and the party that represented it (Mijatov, 2019: 97).

One of the key instruments for this was set by President Josip Broz Tito himself; discussing how the party could obtain the support of the youth, he stated, 'Sport, joy, fun... That is what the youth want' (Meeting of Politburo: 25/11/1945). A new kind of sport was being built for the new, socialist Yugoslavia. The very ideology of socialism was crucial for the new sport, which was completely ideologically based and was meant to serve as an instrument for the state in the process of building socialism. The key ideological features of sport were its mass character (it should be widespread and practised by every citizen of Yugoslavia), its availability (it should be possible for anyone to choose and practise sport that he/she likes), and its universality (an individual should not be an expert in just one sport but a complete athlete) (Mijatov, 2019: 107). Both the idea and the practice of such sport led to a gender issue – the complex position of Yugoslav women in Yugoslav sport.

Furthermore, according to numerous researches (Milojević and Berić, 1983: 10–180; Koković, 2005: 18–31; Đorđić, Brkljač, Pavjančić, 2011: 14–66; Juhas, 2016b: 161–177, Radenović, 2016: 143–160), the complex position of women in sport is also present in contemporary Serbia, the main successor of Yugoslavia. The official policy, guided by EU, underlines gender equality that has its reflections on Serbian sport and the role of women in it, while the reality reflects the presence of prejudice towards women athletes and women sport officials. The subject of the paper is the continuity of progressive gender policies that span from socialist Yugoslavia up until nowadays Serbia. The main goal of the paper is the analysis of the reality in which women are still marginalized in sports through concrete examples. According to current knowledge, the complex position of women in sports from the period of socialist Yugoslavia until today has not been explored through the prism of the continuity of progressive gender policies.

Methods

In order to perceive the idea as well as the reality of women in Yugoslav sport in its socialist period, the chosen methods will be the comparative historical method and the theoretical analysis method. The nature of women's participation in sport as well as government policy towards this issue will be analysed on the basis of reports, memos and other material available in the Archives of Yugoslavia and Serbia and will be compared to the position of women in Serbian sport half a century later. In addition, the desired model of the female 'fiskulturnik' and the overall idea of the woman's role in socialism as seen through sport will be perceived through the analysis of party publications, written by both politicians and sports experts. When it comes to Serbia, the main successor of Yugoslavia, the method of theoretical analysis will be used in sociological considerations of this topic. The position of women in sports in contemporary Serbia will be illustrated and interpreted through the relevant theoretical consideration and concrete examples. The most important documents that confirm the existence of progressive gender policies will be considered, as well as data on the representation of women in different segments of society in contemporary Serbia.

Results

The Idea

Socialist Yugoslavia was very progressive when it comes to the women's issue. In the spirit of socialist revolution, Yugoslav women began their emancipation process vigorously. First, by the constitution of 1946, designed according to the Soviet model, the women got the right to vote and to be elected. The new socialist government of Yugoslavia firmly believed in the rights of women and in the significant role that women were to have in the new socialist state. Many

women who were former members of the Partisan movement were now key political figures (such as Mitra Mitrović, Spasenija Ceca Babović and Milka Minić). By giving these women such prominent roles, the government set a positive example (Pantelić, 2011: 71–72).

In the struggle for emancipation, sport was meant to be an instrument for the women's issue, and the role model was found in the USSR. An imperative was set – strong, independent, athletic women who would equally participate in the process of building socialism, an imperative that was originally set in the Soviet model of physical culture (Riordan, 1977: 56–67). Sport was meant to be a powerful yet quiet tool of emancipation, particularly in the rural areas. In the predominantly Muslim regions of Yugoslavia, every change in women's fashion which could come through sport was a small revolution. When it comes to ways of dress, sport was crucial in the process of liberating woman from Sharia law. A woman would more gladly take her hijab off to participate in a sports event than be ordered to do so by the Communist Party.

The Party recognised the clergy as its key opponent. Curiously, in the struggle to obtain the support of the youth, both the Party and the clergy acknowledged the significance of sport. For example, some clerics gave sports balls to the youth (Meeting of CC CP B&H: 27/03/1952). Yet, they were conservative with regards to women's participation. It was believed that 'it is shameful for women to participate in sport.' In rural areas, they went even further; they believed that participating in any sport event would have a negative effect on the upbringing of a woman (Annual Report for Pirot and Vojvodina: 1946). Finally, the biggest obstacle was the Islamic tradition, predominant in Bosnia and Kosovo, where a woman was obliged to take off her hijab in order to participate in a sports event. Unfortunately, there are no saved recollections provided by the muslim women of that era. However, there is the testimony of Vera Nikolić from the mainly Orthodox town of Čuprija in Serbia, dating from the 1960s. As a girl, she started practicing athletics. She kept it as a secret from her parents, though; 'I had to lie to them, because back in 1962–3 it was not appropriate for a girl aged 14 or 15 to wear shorts in public' (Nešić and Radenović, 2016: 169).

If the before mentioned facts are taken into consideration, it is obvious that the Party did not have an easy task. They tried with positive examples. The most illustrative one was the case of Šemsa, a young Bosnian girl who took off her hijab in order to participate in Tito's relay. She was the example of what the Revolution had brought to Yugoslav women: 'if it hadn't been for the Revolution, Šemsa would have put her hijab on that every year.' She not only carried the baton but also ran races along side male participants. Although Šemsa was just one girl, through her participation in this sports event she was meant to represent the women of all Bosnia who had taken off their hijabs and accepted the new ideology of socialism. The change was meant to be permanent because Šemsa 'never again would have to wear the hijab' (10 Years of Tito's Relay, 1956: 35–36).

Another policy was to agitate through the existing organisations. Many women had started working in industry and the following step was to involve

them in sports activities. In the Yugoslav Trade Union Federation, sport was seen as a part of the overall education of Soviet men (and women). They stated that it was wrong to think that sport was bad for a woman's body, especially for childbirth – quite the contrary, it was beneficial. Consequently, one of the missions of the Trade Union Federation was to educate both women and men and make them view sport in a different manner (Central Committee of ITUoY: 31/01/1949).

The Reality

The idea itself was progressive and optimistic. But what was the reality of women's recreational sport in socialist Yugoslavia?

Behind the large numbers of participants in sports events there were mainly male participants. If we look at the archival material which states how many women participated for example in cross-country running, which was very popular back then, we find a percentage of 19% of female participants. A closer look at the data found in the Archives of Yugoslavia clearly shows that the percentage is significantly lower in rural areas, such as Macedonia (9%) and the Kotor area in Montenegro (11%) (Physical Culture Committee Report for Macedonia and Montenegro, 1948). Furthermore, the number of female workers who participated in sports associations in the year 1948 is also significantly low in comparison with the number of male participants (see Table 1).

Table 1 Statistical reports of ITUoY for 1948, 31/01/1949.

Republic	Number of participants	Male athletes	Female athletes	Percentage of female athletes
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3916	3053	863	28%
Croatia	8692	6346	2346	37%
Macedonia	2374	1876	498	26%
Serbia	10 037	7595	2442	32%

In general, the numbers are not great. Yet, it is clear that the conservatism of the predominantly rural areas, Bosnia and Macedonia, comes out as the main reason for the small numbers of female participants.

Still, a further analysis is necessary. The number of female students involved in the process of schooling new sports experts in the for e.g. 1945–1953 period was also very low – 24% (Physical Culture Committee 1948: 30/03/1948, 10/09/1948). Given the fact that the scientific approach to sport was first implemented in Yugoslavia only in 1946 – the year when the Yugoslav Institute of Physical Culture was founded – the small numbers of female students are not that surprising. The real problem would arise upon the completion of education. Female sports experts were rare. Nevertheless, they could be found amongst top managerial positions in Yugoslav sport. In this period, the percentage of female sports managers was notoriously low – only around 4% (Republican Institute for sport 1945–1982: number of archival unit 22).

The answer is yet again in rural society. The role of a housewife and mother could not cope with the role of a sports manager or even just an athlete. Even though a small number of females had participated in sport and later completed sports studies, at either secondary or tertiary levels, they could not expect to find jobs in this field. When another aspect – socialism – is taken into consideration, this phenomenon becomes even more complex. Unlike common people and sports managers, the state leaders, including Tito himself, recognised the importance of sport in the process of women's emancipation. Furthermore, the Women's Antifascist Front (WAF), an organisation that was specially established by the Government for the promotion and support of the women's issue in rural Yugoslavia, did not recognise sport as a powerful instrument for their mission, their focus was dominantly on literacy (Pantelić, 2011: 59; Pantelić 2012: 139–141; Dodić 2006: 9, 27; WAF Archives 1945: f-1). Even though there were many initiatives by sports organisations to engage WAF in the struggle for spreading sport among women, these remained unanswered (WAF Archives 1948: 20/03/1948, 24/04/1948, 07/05/1948,, 02/11/1951.). The only sport federation in Yugoslavia that WAF had some relations was the Yugoslav Shooting sport federation, for which the reason is not in the emancipatory potential of shooting sports, but the imperative of militarization of the Yugoslav society that was mainly conducted through shooting sports and pre-military training (WAF Archives 1948: 18/06/1948). Yugoslav shooting sport federation was favoured by the government and Tito himself as the militarization of Yugoslav sports was at its peak in years 1945–1950 (Mijatov, 2017: 171). WAF ceased to exist in 1953 in its Fourth Congress and formed Alliance of Women Societies instead (Pantelić, 2011: 127). Still, through its existence in post-war years, WAF had not establishing relations with any other sport federation or even recognized the powerful potential of sports in the struggle for women emancipation.

Discussion

(Dis)continuity?

As regards the women's issue, we believe that sport as an element of the physical culture system in Yugoslavia was the one of the emancipatory powers of its socialism. Moreover, we claim that this trend has continued even after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Hence, in Braudel's tradition, insisting on the greater involvement of women in sport can be seen as a 'long-standing phenomenon.'

Since the 1970s, there has been an evident rise in the number of activities, declarations, researches and conferences worldwide as well as in Serbia and the rest of the Yugoslav successor states. These academic gatherings offer guidelines for the integration of a large number of women in all domains of sport. Namely, the main goal is the immediate participation of women in sports; however, it is also important to engage women in the decision-making bodies that lead various sports organisations (Juhás, 2016b: 161–162). The monitoring of the current position of women in Serbian sport mostly is the result of the non-

governmental sector. The Commission „Women and Sports” of the Olympic Committee of Serbia has played a crucial role. The Commission was formed in June 1999 and immediately began with numerous activities such as seminars and conferences (Juhas, 2016b: 162–163). One of the most important researches on the representation of women in sports in the Republic of Serbia was carried out in 2001. Let us mention the main results: only 11% of the members of branch associations were women; although it was more difficult for female athletes to reach the category of top professional athletes, once they did, they were more successful than male athletes; only 8% of women were in top managerial positions; only 9% of women were leaders of expert teams; 13.5% of women were present in selector functions; only 6% of the coaches were women; only 5% of sports referees were women; less than a third of the employees in the branch government bodies were women (Juhas, 2016b: 170–171; Raič, Lukman, Pavlović, Koković, 2002). The essential documents are the Strategy for the Development of Sport in the Republic of Serbia in the period 2014–2018 (2015) and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy (2015), both of which insist on the inclusion of a larger number of girls in sports activities as well as on the larger number of female athletes and women in the top management positions in sports organisations.

We refer to some recent data on the representation of women in different segments of society in contemporary Serbia in 2016: out of the total population of the Republic of Serbia 51.3% are women and 48.7% are men; university teaching staff consist of 47% of women and 53% of men; in the Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, 32.7% of the members are women and 67.3% are men; of the total number of entrepreneurs in Serbia, 31.7% are women and 68.3% are men; 25.8% of women have managerial roles in business while 74.2% are men; among the heads of municipalities only 4.5% are women, and as many as 95.5% are men; in the Serbian Association of Physical Education and Sport Teachers, 14% are women and 86% are men; 13% of women and 87% of men figure in the Board of the Olympic Committee of Serbia; among the coordinators of the Serbian School Sports Federation, 12% are women and 88% are men; only 9% of the Executive Committee of the Serbian Association of Sports Journalists are women and even 91% are men; finally, the Administrative Committee of the Sports Federation of Serbia (cycling, water polo, sailing, kayaking, fencing, volleyball, table tennis, shooting, taekwondo, tennis, etc.) there are no women at all (100% of men) (Đorđić, 2016). Having in mind these data, it can be noticed that despite the large number of mentioned declarations, seminars and conferences that represent one form of the operationalization of progressive gender policies, a small number of women in leading positions in sports organizations in contemporary Serbia can still be stated. It can be concluded that one of the main reasons for small number of women in leading positions in sports organizations is the presence of gender inequality in the field of sports as a segment of society (Radenović, 2016: 143–160). Namely, for a long time throughout the history of sports as a specific socio-cultural and historical phenomenon, women have been excluded from actively playing sports. The exclusion of women from sports activities was justified by a

moral, medical and aesthetic argument because playing sports was characterized exclusively by the dominance of masculinity, muscularity, strength and readiness to compete. In many cultures, women's participation in sports was considered dangerous to health because women were considered as individuals with no physical potential to compete (Juhas, 2016a: 10–11). Women's competition was not acceptable in the dominant public morality, so physical education was developed exclusively for the male population. With the inclusion of physical education in the school system of Western and Central European countries, the number of girls included in physical education increased in the 19th century, which later gave an incentive to increase the number of women who are physically active. Thus, it can be concluded that the prejudice about women's inferiority within the field of sports has long survived as a kind of social norm that excluded women around the world from practicing sports (Radenović, 2016: 149). Thus, gender inequality as a difference in status, power and prestige between men and women within groups, collectives and societies (Giddens, 2005: 123) directly affected everyday life of women who were excluded from practicing sports throughout history (Radenović, 2016: 149). Despite the fact that globally, both in the contemporary world and in Serbia, a great shift can be stated in greater inclusion of women in numerous sports, the mentioned small number of women in leadership positions in sports organizations in Serbia is still present as a result of long-standing gender inequality about female inferiority within the field of sports.

In order to shed light on the prejudice about women's inferiority in relation to certain sports, and especially football, we are going to present the results of a recent survey of parents' views on the main factors against introducing football as a physical activity for young school-age girls (Ignjatović, Marković, Janković, 2015: 340–347). The survey was conducted in 2015 in two primary schools in the Serbian town of Jagodina, while the respondents (a 100 of them) were parents of younger schoolgirls. According to the results of the research, most parents believe that all children are equally motivated for physical education classes, and most parents understand the importance of physical activity for the proper psychophysical development of children. The majority of parents (71%) believe that for girls there are more adequate activities than football, 79% of parents consider that football is mostly a sport for boys, and as many as 54% of parents think that practising football will have a negative impact on girls, i.e. on their looks and behaviour. Although there are no scientific facts that confirm the negative effects of practising football on appearance and behaviour (of girls), the parents of primary school girls are the main opponents of girls' football, and in this case it is due to a type of prejudice that is present in the population of the parents interviewed. According to the results of a similar past research, 77% of physical education teachers believe that football can be a very useful and healthy physical activity for girls, while only 20% of physical education teachers believe that football is not a physical activity for girls. Therefore, a way should be found to support football and popularise it as a physical activity for girls that should be performed regularly during physical education classes (Ignjatović, Marković, Janković, 2015: 345).

The impact of gender prejudices on performance and success in a particular sport can be considered in the case of chess. Namely, according to numerous researches, it can be concluded that despite some opposing theories, there are no gender specific differences in intellectual performance for chess playing (Veličković and Radovanović, 2018: 363). But women chess players show lower chess-specific self-esteem and choose a more defensive style when playing with males so the final result is that males dominate the top level in chess nowadays. Females seem disadvantaged not because they are lacking cognitive or spatial abilities, but because they approach chess competitions with less confidence and with a more cautious attitude than their male opponents (Veličković and Radovanović, 2018: 363). Let us conclude that mentioned lack of confidence is the result of presence of gender prejudices which act like strong demotivational factor towards women chess players.

Conclusions

We can conclude that despite the aforementioned conferences, seminars and activities of the non-governmental sector, and despite the Strategy for the Development of Sport in the Republic of Serbia in the period 2014–2018 and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy, the number of girls engaged in sports as well as the number of women athletes and women in top management positions in sports organisations have not increased significantly. This fact can be explained by the still present prejudices against women in sports that clearly represent an obstacle for practising women's football. We believe that one of the solutions would be education at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) that would insist on gender equality in the field of sports through real examples that challenge the classical division into men's and women's sports. For example, in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, skaters were men exclusively, and skating was an obligatory subject in military schools. In the twentieth century, women began to skate, and nowadays artistic skating is often perceived by the public as a 'female sport' (Adams, 2011: 134–160). This example points to the need to reconsider the classical division of sports into men's and women's. Also, it can serve as a good sign post to the future perception of gender inequality in sports and as an incentive for its reduction in practice.

Little has changed regarding the history of women's participation in sport in Yugoslavia and Serbia. Despite the progressive policy of the Yugoslav government, the reality of women's sport has been defined by the social conditions of the rural areas primarily. As we stated above, the progressive policy should definitely be continued with, especially through education at all levels. However, education is not enough. For a significant and permanent change to occur, an overall improvement of the material basis is needed so as to overcome the social relations existing in rural areas. Without an improved material basis, a progressive policy has little impact and can change the position of women in sports only slightly. More than half a century has passed, yet women in Yugoslav and Serbian sport remain marginalised, misunderstood and discriminated against.

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