

FINALLY, IN OSIJEK (1955–1990): THE OPENING AND OPERATION OF A SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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Abstract

This is a literature and archive research-based study about a school for children with developmental disabilities in Osijek. The authors reflect on the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when the first foundations and schools for children with developmental disabilities began to emerge in the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia. In the post-war period of the Second Yugoslav State, the inclusion of children with disabilities in the school system finally occurred in 1955. Initially established as a practice school of the Teachers' College, in September 1963, it transformed into the Dr. Zlatan Sremec Elementary School. They follow the school's curriculum, extracurricular activities, the integration of children with disabilities into social activities, various events, and encounters with other schools of a similar nature. Through documentation preserved in the archives of today's Ivan Štark Center for Education and Training in Osijek, insight is provided into the developmental journey of educational work with children with special needs. Changes in societal attitudes towards individuals with disabilities in the 1980s are noted as well, shifting from a charitable model to a model of educational inclusion.

Keywords: School for children with disabilities, Osijek, 1955 to 1990, Croatia

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

At the end of the 19th century, 35 institutions for the deaf and mute were operating throughout the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In the Kingdom of Hungary, there were approximately ten such institutions, including the *Institute for the Education of the Deaf-Mute* in the Hungarian town of Vac, which was established in 1802. It was the *only institution at the time that had a formal regulation on training and enjoyed a great reputation even beyond the Monarchy*. A particular significance of this institute lay in its two-year *program*, where teachers and priests were trained to educate deaf-mute children (“Razne vijesti,” 1902, p. 191). In the Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia, the first organized and institutional efforts in the education and care of children with special needs can be traced back to the last decade of the 19th century. For instance, in Zagreb during the 1892/93 school year, alongside the Upper Town Public Elementary School, a *School for Neglected Boys* was established, enrolling 18 boys aged 7 to 14 by November 1892. According to a contemporary newspaper report, *these were mentally and physically neglected individuals, partly orphaned and partly beyond the control and authority of their parents. They were provided with education similar to other children, along with the intention of introducing them to honest trades and earnings through manual labor* (“Razne vijesti,” 1893, p. 167). Regarding the work of this school at both the state and social levels, the same source noted that *everyone took an interest in this new institution and wished for its success*.

Monitoring the work of this school’s department highlighted that favorable results were achieved. The school received support from the relevant authorities, who continuously focused on its development and adjustment to meet the future needs of its students. They recognized that teaching only basket weaving would not suffice, so they decided to expand the training to include light carpentry and lathe work. Thus, this school would eventually serve as a preparatory institution for trades, which was its true purpose (“Razne vijesti,” 1894). There were also private initiatives. For example, Dr. Hinko Lechner, a secondary physician at the Brothers of Mercy in Zagreb, responded to a public call and offered to treat three patients with stuttering disorders free of charge. These patients would be examined at the start of treatment by renowned doctors in Zagreb, and the results would be publicly announced. Registration began on July 15, 1894, and the treatment lasted a total of 14 days. Children under the age of 10 were not eligible for treatment (“Razne vijesti,” 1895).

On a state level, care for deaf-mute and blind children in Zagreb was provided by the St. Vitus Society for the Education of the Deaf-Mute and Blind. With state support, the Society’s work was also funded through contributions from municipalities and towns throughout the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia. For instance, at the beginning of 1895, municipalities in the Našice District—Našice, Feričanci, Šaptinovci, and Koška—each donated 50 forints to the Society. This was reported in a brief notice under the “Various News” section of the weekly

newspaper *Vjesnik županije Virovitičke*, which concluded with the statement: "Many other progressive municipal councils could follow this fine example!" ("Razne vijesti," 1895, p. 55).

Encouraged by this news, in early June of that year, the municipality of Podgorač, as a benefactor of the Society for the Education of the Blind, sent a contribution of 100 forints to the central office in Zagreb ("Razne vijesti," 1895). By the end of that year, municipalities such as Marijanci, Šljivoševci, Moslavina, Cabuna, and others had also made contributions ("1895. - 1896.," 1896).

On September 1, 1895, the Land Institute for the Education of Blind Children was established in Zagreb, marking a significant step in institutional education for visually impaired children. Shortly thereafter, on October 4, 1895, the St. Vitus Society for the Education of the Deaf-Mute and Blind opened an educational and humanitarian institute exclusively for adult blind individuals, enrolling six men who were trained in basket weaving ("Razne vijesti," 1895). In November 1900, the society's efforts received a significant boost when an anonymous benefactor donated 5,000 crowns to the foundation established by Ban Count Dragutin Khuen-Héderváry. This increased the foundation's total to 10,200 crowns, making it the first such fund, founded in 1895, to support the St. Vitus Society for the Blind. In 1896, two more foundations were established: the Mirko and Julija Bogović Foundation (20,000 crowns) and the First Croatian Savings Bank Foundation (2,000 crowns) ("Razne vijesti," 1900).

Under the patronage of County Prefect Count Teodor Pejačević, the Society for the Protection of Neglected Children was founded in Osijek in early July 1900. The society's president was Minka Chavrak-Letovanička, the wife of the deputy prefect, with her deputy being Antun Friml, the director of the Osijek Savings Bank. The vice-president was the wife of lawyer Hugo Spitzer, and her deputy was banker Oskar Weissmayer ("Razne vijesti," 1900). On January 17, 1901, the society organized a charitable fundraising evening at the Osijek Upper Town Casino, raising 2,000 crowns ("Razne vijesti," 1900). The significance of fundraising for the work of such societies was evident in data from 1904: in Slavonia's Srijem County alone, there were 238 blind individuals, 283 deaf-mute, 138 mentally ill, 103 lame, 116 epileptics, and 137 poor incurable patients ("Domaće viesti," 1903).

In early July 1909, a newspaper announcement informed Osijek readers and the broader public about an open competition for spots at the State Institute for the Education of Deaf-Mute Children in Zagreb for the 1909/1910 school year. The competition, set to close on July 31, offered places to boys whose parents or guardians agreed to pay an annual boarding fee of 500 crowns. There were also options for partially subsidized or free placements. Applicants were required to submit: (1) a baptismal or birth certificate, (2) proof of citizenship, (3) a certificate of the family's financial situation, (4) a competency form printed in the *Official Gazette* from 1896, (5) a declaration from parents or guardians committing to pay the boarding fee, maintain the child during school holidays and cover transportation costs if the child was deemed

unfit for the institute. Only boys aged 8 to 12 were eligible for admission, while girls could attend as day students, with parents responsible for their expenses. Additional information was provided by the institute's management, located at Ilica 83, Zagreb ("Natječaj zavoda gluhoonijeme djece," 1909). Shortly thereafter, an article titled *Send Your Deaf-Mute Children to School!*, emphasized that many parents were unaware that schools existed where deaf-mute children could learn to read, write, draw, calculate, and speak. The State Institute for the Deaf-Mute in Zagreb provided free housing, food, clothing, shoes, and school supplies for the poorest children, requiring parents only to provide undergarments. Parents with greater means paid 125, 250, or 500 crowns annually, depending on their wealth ("Dnevne vijesti," 1909). From the early 20th century, Osijek was home to the Society for Assistance to Mentally Underdeveloped Persons and the Defectology Branch, which resumed its activities only in 1964 (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 100, 1963).

Throughout the decades leading up to the 1950s, changing state administrations brought shifts in the care of and attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. The forms of care evolved from the so-called creative model to educational inclusion, reflecting the progressive attitudes toward these individuals and leading to changes in school organization and the education system.

OPENING AND OPERATION OF A SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES IN OSIJEK

In Osijek, the first efforts to work with children with developmental disabilities date back to the 1954/55 school year, when a Training Center of the Teachers' School operated for them within the regular Ivica Šestak Primary School.¹ However, the demand for such work grew. In mid-August 1963, the Education Council of the Osijek Municipality accepted a proposal from the School Board of the aforementioned primary school to establish a Special Primary School in the city on the Drava. This school would include the existing special department within the Ivica Šestak Primary School. Since the Osijek Municipal Assembly had not included the proposal on its agenda by the end of that month, the Department for Education and Training announced that the school would begin operating independently as of September 1, 1963, pending a formal decision on its establishment. Immediately after its founding, the school operated under the Primary School Act as an independent public institution, organized according to the principles of social self-management. All teachers who had been working in the special department of the Ivica Šestak Primary School transitioned to the newly established school. A job posting was issued, but only two teachers applied. Therefore, to meet the needs of the new school, three teachers were transferred from the Ivica Šestak Primary School, fill-

1 The school was located in Tvrđa—the building of today's Administrative and Economic School at Josip Bösendorfer Street 4.

ing all positions. According to the Regulation on the Distribution of Personal Earnings, teachers were evaluated based on their primary activity, professional qualifications, completed professional exams, and years of service. Due to the school's unique nature, each teacher received an additional 70 points, which were included in their regular earnings. The school had 12 classes: one for 1st grade, one for 2nd grade, two each for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, and one each for 7th and 8th grades, encompassing 135 students from Osijek, Beli Manastir, Vinkovci, and Našice. The number of students was not fixed as new students continued to join. During that first school year, 1963/64, another 25 students were enrolled following recommendations from a special commission by the start of the second semester. Since there were 16 students in the 7th grade, exceeding the legal maximum of 10, a decision was made in mid-December 1963 to split the grade into two sections, as it was challenging to work with such a large number of students and provide individual attention. With the establishment of a new section, another teacher was hired on the condition that they would enroll in a Higher School of Special Education in Zagreb or Belgrade to enhance their qualifications. The number of students per class affected the success of the educational process. In mid-February 1964, the Department for Special Education at the Institute of Education in the People's Republic of Croatia, based in Zagreb, drafted a Regulation on the Number of Students in Special Primary School Classes. This regulation addressed inconsistencies in practice by specifying that lower grades could have a maximum of 10 students, with a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 12. For upper grades, the range was 8 to 13 students. In Osijek's Special Primary School, grades 1 to 5 followed the Class Teaching system, while grades 6 to 8 used the Subject Teaching system. All students were required to have evaluations and recommendations from a commission. Observations were maintained for each student, with some undergoing additional testing as needed. At the end of the first school year, 142 of the 160 students (88.75%) completed their grade. Three students advanced with failing grades, six were not graded due to illness and irregular attendance, and nine were held back to repeat the year. Due to increased enrollment, the 1964/65 school year had one 1st-grade class, two 2nd-grade classes, three each for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, two each for 6th and 7th grades, and one 8th-grade class. A preparatory class was established for students who could not keep up with regular instruction. As a result, there was a growing need for special education professionals. Since no special education teachers applied to the posted job openings, teachers with five years of experience and a passed professional exam were hired, provided they committed to studying at the Higher School for Special Educators in Belgrade or completing the Higher Education for Special Education in Zagreb (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Book 42, 1963–1971).

It was understood that this was the only way the school could secure a qualified teaching staff for the future. The school covered the registration fees of these teachers as external students and arranged for free substitutes to fulfill their teaching duties. Starting with the 1967/68 school year, all these teachers were required to submit written reports by early December 1967, specifying which group they had enrolled in when they enrolled, and when they were

expected to complete their studies. These reports were submitted to the school's secretariat. Through active work discussions, issues of special education were addressed, and teaching experiences were exchanged, with significant assistance from special education teachers (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 100, 1963-1978). All teachers in the school had to undergo professional and Marxist training in two cycles. The first cycle included internships, observing classes, assisting beginners, and conducting educational work in accordance with established regulations for taking professional exams and pursuing forms of professional development. Their work was monitored by the school principal and a mentor. In the second cycle, all school employees were required to advance their education by familiarizing themselves with and applying modern pedagogical practices and theories through self-study, Marxist literature, professional journals, newspapers, membership in the City Library in Osijek, preparing notes on their readings (for beginner teachers), participating in discussions, professional school activities, attending regional and national seminars, exchanging experiences on specific topics among special schools, direct collaboration with educational-pedagogical services, and more. These professional developments were organized by the school's educational and pedagogical service, as well as professional bodies such as the Society of Special Educators and socio-political organizations. Advanced forms of professional and ideological development were planned, including participation in symposia and congresses, undertaking specific tasks in the school's interest, and encouraging teachers to publish articles on professional and experiential topics (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder Plan and Program, 1976-1982).

SCHOOL NAME, BUILDING, AND EQUIPMENT

By decision of the Osijek Municipal Assembly on the establishment and categorization of the Special Primary School in Osijek, dated September 16, 1963, the school was named the Special Primary School for Mentally Underdeveloped Children. This prompted a reaction from the school's Teachers' Council, which, at its third meeting on November 18 of that year, requested that the Municipal Assembly amend the school's name, as other special schools in the Republic of Croatia did not bear such a designation. They proposed that the school simply be called Special Primary School, in line with the naming convention of similar institutions. The school's statute was adopted in mid-December 1963, and at the fourth meeting of the Teachers' Council, it was decided that School Day would be celebrated on Youth Day, May 25 (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Book 42, Minutes of the Teachers' Council Meetings 1963-1971, September 27, 1963).

The school was assigned a standalone, single-story building located at the border of Gornji Grad and Tvrdža, separated from the residential row of the then Boulevard of the Yugoslav National Army (today European Avenue) in the peripheral part of the Park of Culture (now King

Tomislav Park). The building was constructed in the 1880s for residential purposes, and from the 1950s until 1961, it served as the student dormitory for the nearby Nikola Tesla Technical School. Since the building had not been maintained for years, it was in very poor condition. The roof leaked, causing plaster to fall from the walls in several rooms. The classrooms did not meet pedagogical standards, as the space per student was less than 2 square meters. Since there was no suitable furniture, new furniture was acquired for six classrooms, the staff room, the office, and partially for the workshop. Furniture continued to be regularly procured in subsequent school years as needed. However, a significant issue was the frequent and severe damage to the inventory by students. Class teachers were required to make detailed lists of students and the desks and chairs they used so that any damage caused could be charged to the parents. Parents were also responsible for paying for any broken windows.

At the beginning of the school year, a dining room was set up for the students, and existing cabinets in the hallways, which were used for storing footwear, were repaired. These repairs were carried out by the students during technical education classes. For the dining room, the students made tablecloths and napkins. Since the school lacked adequate teaching aids, the most essential materials were borrowed from the nearby Ivica Šestak Primary School. By the end of the first school year, the school had procured essential tools for workshop activities, both group and individual, as well as a slide projector with film sets, a tape recorder, a record player with vinyl records, a radio, a transistor, an electric harmonium, teaching aids for mathematics, and posters for natural and social studies.

During the school year, many teaching materials were created by the teachers themselves. In the spring, the students landscaped a flower bed in front of the building and established a school garden in part of the schoolyard. After the end of the school year in the summer of 1964, building repairs began: chimneys were rebuilt, the roof was repaired, gutters were replaced, the facade was renovated, the school fence was repaired, and an unused well in the schoolyard was filled in. Inside the building, doors between classrooms were partitioned, and walls, doors, and windows were painted. New stoves were purchased for the classrooms because the existing tile stoves emitted too much smoke and were unusable (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 100, Annual Reports 1963/64–1978/79, Annual Report 1963/64).

SCHOOL WORK

The school's operations were funded by the Education Fund, and the People's Republic of Croatia provided an annual subsidy to the Municipality of Osijek for the school's needs. According to the new Draft on Education and Training in early December 1968, special elementary schools were financed in the same manner as regular schools. This prompted all special schools in Croatia to petition the Croatian Parliament to maintain the previous funding model since these schools were costly, and municipal communities would not be able to finance

them in the future (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Book 42, Minutes of the Teachers' Council Meetings 1963–1971, December 12, 1968).

A school statute was drafted and discussed during Teachers' Council meetings. It was adopted by the Working Community of the Special Elementary School in Osijek on November 27, 1964, by the Law on Elementary Education. It contained 170 articles, each elaborated in detail. Some articles were later amended, such as Article 12, which allowed school attendance up to age 18 for students who repeatedly failed grades in regular schools but qualified to complete elementary education. Article 13 stipulated that students be enrolled based on a Categorization Decision from the Municipal Committee for the Categorization of Children with Psychophysical and Physical Disabilities. Article 71 mandated the school to assist students in choosing their profession in collaboration with vocational guidance institutions. Article 85 expanded to allow administrative and technical staff to be assigned overtime work (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Book 22, Minutes of the Work Community Meetings 1964–1969).

The school's primary task was to provide students with quality education and upbringing. Therefore, the school leadership and teachers closely collaborated with the Social Work Center (now the Social Welfare Center). Curricular content followed the curriculum for special schools, with all subjects fully represented and supplementary classes organized for weaker students. Classroom teaching was conducted for grades 1–5, while subject teaching was for grades 6–8, with two weekly alternating shifts. Students participated in the Pioneer Organization and the Red Cross Youth and were actively involved in extracurricular activities such as choir, recitation, drama, folklore, art, technical sections, and embroidery groups. School Day was celebrated on May 25, featuring student exhibitions and performances for parents in an external hall (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 100, Annual Reports 1963/64–1978/79, Annual Report 1963/64).

Under the Law on Elementary Education and based on applications and documentation submitted by the Social Work Center, the school was required to admit students with severe developmental challenges who were not integrated into the regular education system. These were children and youth classified as moderately to severely mentally retarded. For them, a special educational program was organized, focusing on basic elements of education. Only the most advanced students capable of following the program for mildly mentally disabled children progressed to the first grade of elementary school. For youth aged 18–22, vocational training programs were provided (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 117, Work Plans and Programs 1976/77–1981/82).

At the end of the 1964/65 school year, 16 eighth-grade students were directed to appropriate vocations or enrolled in special vocational school departments in cooperation with the Vocational Guidance Center and the Social Work Center. During the school year, all students were involved in vocational practice at Osijek Enterprises (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 100, Annual Reports 1963/64–1978/79, Annual Report for 1963/64).

The school also operated a milk kitchen where all students received free cold and hot meals during their breaks. Over time, the number of students from neighboring municipalities, such as Vukovar, Valpovo, Donji Miholjac, Podravska Slatina, Slavonski Brod, and Nova Gradiška, increased. By 1968/69, the school had 230 students in 20 classes, with 23 teachers. Most of these students were housed with families, while a few stayed at the Vladimir Nazor Children's Home. That school year, special elementary schools had to address the following issues: 1) class structure and the number of severe cases requiring different treatment; 2) borderline candidates for regular elementary schools; 3) class size per educational norms; 4) students lacking necessary documents; 5) the age range within classes; 6) accompanying deviations like speech impairments; 7) considerations of the proposed new plan and program for special schools; 8) teaching aids—what could be made by teachers, during classes, or purchased by the school; 9) internal organization and task division, teacher preferences, and further training; and 10) additional work, extracurricular activities, and overall school engagement in child education (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Book 42, Minutes of the Teachers' Council Meetings 1963–1971, Minute of the meeting, October 23, 1968).

To improve school facilities, equipment was procured, including 10 woodworking sets, three carpentry benches, a welding machine, and handcarts. Teachers' professional development included cooperation with other special schools, sharing experiences, and visits to institutions like the "Milan Petrović" Special School in Novi Sad, Serbia, and the Rehabilitation Institute in Krušedol (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder, Annual Report for 1963/64).

At the beginning of the 1970/71 school year, the school received locker cabinets, so from then on, each student had a place in their locker for clothing and outerwear (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder, Minutes of the Teachers' Council Meetings 1963–1971, Minute of the meeting, August 28, 1970).

However, due to a lack of space, extended stay programs for students were not organized in the school until the mid-1970s, even though this was one of the elements of a comprehensive approach in a special school for mentally disabled children, which should have included all students (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 152, Annual Work Plan 1974/75, Special Primary School "Dr. Zlatan Sremec" Osijek, October 4, 1974, p. 2).

The aesthetic arrangement of the school was very important for its operation and consisted of the following components: teaching materials of artistic value were used in instruction, signs on workspaces, bulletin boards, and notice boards were written in simple block letters, while announcements and notices were typed on a typewriter, students' clothing was neatly placed on hangers, and shoes were kept in bags, classrooms were painted in soft shades, and students were taught to protect the walls from damage cleanliness in workspaces was maintained daily through the activities of students and auxiliary staff, classrooms were thoroughly cleaned at the end of the week by removing dirt from walls and furniture, floors were

regularly scrubbed, and parquet was polished with paste. Before students arrived each day, dust was wiped from furniture, and maximum cleanliness was maintained in all work and sanitary areas; trash bins were placed in all rooms. Rooms were regularly ventilated in the morning, evening, and during the long break. Rooms were heated during cold days. Home-room teachers and instructors insisted that students wear smocks and slippers to keep the classrooms and students' clothing cleaner and that they have their hair neatly trimmed and combed. The school was equipped with the necessary first-aid materials. National symbols (flags and coats of arms) were stored in a designated place. High-quality student works, selected by vocational and art education teachers, were displayed in hallways and classrooms throughout the school year. Trophies won in student competitions were displayed in cases, among other items. Both students and teachers participated in the aesthetic arrangement of the school. The most important role in this was played by specialized student groups (Embroidery, Photography Sections, Work Groups, etc.) led by teachers in charge of these groups. Cleaning initiatives were also organized within the school (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 127, Annual Work Plan and Program from 1975/76 to 1982/83, Minute of the meeting, October 10, 1974, p. 21).

Collection campaigns among students were encouraged and conducted, focusing on collecting money, food, clothing, shoes, and old paper to organize educational excursions. This aimed to instill moral behavior and a spirit of helping in certain situations while also guiding students toward appropriate conduct. As part of the Red Cross campaign, stamps were sold. Assistance for financially disadvantaged students at the school level was provided through the provision of free textbooks. Among students, camaraderie and mutual support were fostered, aiming to develop humane and moral habits of behavior and action. In the school's educational activities, numerous measures were taken that were characteristic of teaching in a special elementary school, including the structure of individualized teaching, socialization, concrete motivation, literacy, and life-related learning. Both the adaptation and didactic structuring of lesson content were aligned with the individual abilities of each student, ensuring continuous repetition, practice, reinforcement, and application of acquired knowledge, skills, and habits (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 127, Annual Work Plan and Program from 1975/76 to 1982/83, Minute of the meeting, October 1974, p. 21).

Individual, frontal, and group work methods were applied. Teaching methods included conversation, explanation, demonstration, the use of didactic aids, illustration, and others. Visual teaching aids included television programs, slide films, tape recorders, record players, overhead projectors, graphic projectors, individual worksheets, pictures, applications, posters with text, models, symbols, blank maps, counting tools, lotto games, and more. Through teaching and extracurricular activities, educational influence and a Marxist approach were applied to all events and natural phenomena, with an emphasized and ever-present educational goal of developing work, cultural, and hygiene habits while mitigating deficiencies caused by

students' psychophysical impairments. Students were trained for independent work. Cooperation with parents, guardians, and caregivers from student residences was strengthened, and educational work was intensified through homeroom class sessions (SRZ), the Pioneer and Youth organizations, and ongoing collaboration with the Center for Social Work (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 152, Annual Report from 1963/64 to 1975/76, Report at the End of the First Semester of the 1974/75 School Year, Special Primary School "Dr. Zlatan Sremec" Osijek, February 12, 1975, p. 2).

Outside the school system, the school collaborated in Osijek with the Local Community, the Society Our Children, the Red Cross, the Association of Special Educators, the Center for Social Work, the Pension and Disability Insurance Community, the Employment Office, the Fund for Direct Child Protection, as well as with the renewed Association for Assistance to Mentally Underdeveloped Persons and the Branch of Special Educators. Some teachers were also involved in the work of these organizations. Special cooperation existed with neighboring special schools in Vukovar and Beli Manastir, as well as with the Special School in Novi Sad, a city in SR Serbia.

The school maintained close cooperation with parents, which was facilitated through individual contacts among homeroom teachers, instructors, social workers, and the principal. At least four parent meetings were held where parents received information about students, class issues were discussed, and homeroom teachers gave lectures on education, socialization, career orientation, vocational training, rehabilitation rights, health issues, and similar topics (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 100, Annual Reports from 1963/64 to 1978/79, Special Primary School "Dr. Zlatan Sremec" Osijek; Folder 152, Report for the 1973/74 School Year, p. 15).

ORGANIZATION OF THE TEACHING PROCESS

Teaching in the lower grades was conducted as class-based instruction, while in the higher grades, it was subject-based instruction. In addition to regular classes, the school also offered supplementary instruction, which was provided to students with weaker academic performance. For these students, remedial classes were held at the end of the school year. During the school year, groups for extracurricular activities were also organized. The school year lasted from September 9 of the current year to September 9 of the following year. Regular classes began on September 9 and concluded on June 15, spanning a total of 35 weeks. The first semester lasted until January 15 of the following year, while the second semester ran from February 1 to June 15. The excursion and work practice for eighth-grade students took place from June 16 to June 27. Report cards were distributed to students at the end of June. During the school year, holidays and non-working days were as follows: calendar holidays (Republic Day – November 29 and 30; New Year's – January 1 and 2; May Day holidays – May 1 and 2),

winter break (from January 15 to February 1), school day (May 24 and 25), summer break from June 15 to September 9 for students, except for days designated for final-year student excursions. At mid-year, students were given Student Record Books, and at the end of the school year, they received report cards indicating their academic achievement. For final-year students, a 10-day work practice took place from June 15 to June 30. The teaching staff had summer holidays from July 5 to August 27, generally aligning with the summer school break. If teachers were sent for professional training or called to work in the interest of the school, they were entitled to a 30-day annual leave following the Primary School Act, the Act on Mutual Relations in Associated Labor, and the School Calendar (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder Book 43, Minutes of the Board Meetings 1964 to 1971, September 13, 1967).

In addition to regular instruction, supplementary classes were of great significance for the progress of some students. These were organized throughout the school year in all grades for weaker students, specifically in Croatian or Serbian language and mathematics. Although teaching in the special school was individualized, some students still required inclusion in supplementary classes to master the curriculum fully. For each student enrolled in supplementary instruction, the subject teacher created an individual work plan and regularly monitored their progress and performance. Extracurricular activities were also of great importance, with special preparation and documentation maintained for them. They were organized on strong educational principles, and the work of individual groups focused on preparing students for public performances and various competitions both within and outside the school. Starting in the 1970s, the school had an Editorial Board responsible for publishing the school newspaper, *Prvi koraci* (First Steps). One issue was published each semester. Additionally, student organizations such as the Pioneer Alliance and the Youth Alliance were actively operating within the school. All extracurricular activities and student organizations functioned based on work plans created by the supervising teachers (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 152, Annual Report from 1963/64 to 1975/76, Report at the End of the School Year 1975/76, Special Primary School "Dr. Zlatan Sremec" Osijek, p. 10; Annual Work Plan for 1974/75, October 4, 1974, p. 7-8).

MANAGEMENT AND EXPERT BODIES

The self-management and professional bodies of the school operated successfully with the goal of improving the school's educational work through the Workers' Assembly and the School Plenum, which was chaired by a parent. The professional bodies of the school included the Teachers' Council and the Class Council. According to the Primary School Act, each school was required to have its own self-management bodies, which included the School Council, the Workers' Assembly, the Workers' Council, and the school director. Under the school's statute, the director participated in managing the educational process by teaching

Work Education for four hours per week. In the broader educational framework, the director proposed the annual work plan and program, the director's work plan, the school's aesthetic improvement plan, and the financial plan. The director assigned specific responsibilities to each executor of the plan and program, held monthly work meetings with the secretariat and support staff to analyze progress and assign tasks, reviewed and signed financial documents and administrative acts, and ensured the implementation of the decisions made by all school governing and professional bodies. The principal analyzed teachers' work plans, homeroom teacher plans, Class Council plans, supplementary instruction plans, and extracurricular activity plans. They also monitored the work of student organizations and societies. Between January 1 and 15, the director visited all classes to review student records and teachers' notes. Reports on challenges in the educational process of the special school were submitted to the Institute for the Advancement of Primary Education. The director ensured the implementation and practical application of tested teaching methods and collaborated with other special schools and institutions. Additional responsibilities of the director included managing school regulations, collecting pedagogical documentation, conducting economic and material analyses (periodic and final reports), attending Director Council meetings and seminars, developing monthly orientation plans, analyzing their implementation, and compiling an annual school work evaluation. The school's professional bodies included homeroom teachers, Class Councils, the Teachers' Council, the social worker, and the administrative and technical staff. Class Councils for both general and subject-based teaching held four meetings throughout the school year to analyze and assess students' academic performance and conduct, the implementation of the annual plan and homeroom teacher plans, and the progress of parental collaboration. The Teachers' Council addressed all educational and training issues related to the education of mentally challenged students. At the beginning of the school year, it organized class assignments, subject distribution, and other responsibilities. It focused particularly on curriculum planning, selecting teaching methods and approaches, preparing teachers for lessons, and overseeing the work of homeroom teachers and the council. Additionally, it proposed the procurement of teaching materials and resources and made decisions regarding the accelerated advancement of students. The council also handled issues arising from daily school practice. The social worker collaborated with students, parents, and teachers on social protection matters according to their plan. They maintained necessary documentation, visited students' families, and worked with the Social Work Center, social institutions, the Pension and Disability Insurance Community, and other organizations. The work of the administrative and technical staff included administrative, financial, economic, and other operational tasks (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 152, Annual Report from 1963/64 to 1975/76, Report at the End of the First Semester of the 1974/75 School Year, February 12, 1975, pp. 3, 10-11; Folder 117, Plan and Program from 1976/77 to 1981/82, Plan and Program of the Primary Organization of United Labor for Education and Educational Program "Dr. Zlatan Sremec" Osijek, October 4, 1974, pp. 14-18, 21-23).

Pedagogical, class, and school documentation were meticulously maintained through the school register, class logs, reports, and analyses. Alongside the school's Commemorative Book, an album was compiled with photographic documentation of the school's life and activities (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 152, Special Primary School "Dr. Zlatan Sremec" Osijek, *Report for the 1973/74 School Year*, p. 18).

CHANGES AND THEIR APPLICATION

The first changes in the implementation of teaching occurred in 1969 when a unified curriculum for special primary schools was introduced in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Significant changes also took place in the evaluation of special schools following amendments to the Special Schools Act. Another major change occurred on April 16, 1973, when the Educational Council of the Socialist Republic of Croatia adopted a new General Curriculum for students with mild intellectual disabilities. The developed curriculum and class schedule were approved by the Teachers' Council of the Special School in Osijek. The total weekly workload consisted of 24 hours of direct teaching and 17 hours of accompanying tasks, amounting to 42 hours per week. In the first school year, the curriculum was covered in all grades, as it was adapted to the students' psychological development, allowing them to master the material. In the first four grades, teaching was conducted by a special education teacher specializing in working with children with intellectual disabilities. From the fifth grade onward, subject-specific teaching was introduced, with one special education teacher covering related subjects such as Croatian or Serbian language and social studies. At the same time, another taught mathematics and natural sciences. Specialized teachers conducted classes in vocational training, art, physical education, and music. The planned curriculum was taught according to the students' psychophysical abilities. However, inconsistencies in the curriculum were noted, leading to requests for changes. For example, the existing Croatian-Serbian language curriculum only included variable word types. At the same time, teachers at the Osijek school proposed teaching all nine-word types to ensure that students received a comprehensive linguistic education upon completing special schooling. Another inconsistency was found in the seventh-grade natural sciences curriculum, which covered the expansion of materials due to heat and the use of a thermometer, while in the sixth grade, students were taught about petroleum distillation and iron production, where temperature measurements were mentioned (e.g., gasoline is obtained by heating petroleum to 1500°C). This was problematic because students had not yet learned about thermometers and thermal expansion, making it difficult for them to grasp these concepts (Archive of the Center "Ivan Štark", Folder 117, Plan and Program from 1976/77 to 1981/82, Plan and Program of the Primary Organization of United Labor for Education and Educational Program "Dr. Zlatan Sremec" Osijek, 1973/74 School Year).

In the 1974/75 school year, the school changed its name to the Special School “Dr. Zlatan Sremec” Osijek, in honor of the humanist and social medicine doctor Zlatan Sremec (Gradište near Županja, July 19, 1898 – Zagreb, June 21, 1971), who made significant contributions to genetics and the prevention of intellectual disabilities. During this period, a new Regulation on the Education of Students with Developmental Disabilities came into effect. As a result, in the 1975/76 school year, the school began enrolling children with more severe disabilities, while students with borderline intellectual abilities were integrated into the regular education system (Archive of the Center “Ivan Štark”, Folder 152, Annual Reports from 1963/64 to 1975/76, Report at the End of the First Semester of the 1974/75 School Year). Osijek’s special school was among the first in Croatia, during the 1979/80 school year, to open a vocational training program for students aged 17 to 21 with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities. This initiative, launched in cooperation with the Society for Assistance to the Mentally Retarded, was implemented in a separate building and focused on work activities, socialization, and collaboration with companies. The 1980 Education Act introduced the integration of students with disabilities into regular schools, significantly impacting the school’s operations. As a result, the number of students with mild disabilities decreased, leading to a reorganization of the school. The first educational group for students aged 7 to 12 with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities was established (Archive of the Center “Ivan Štark”, Folder 117, Plans and Programs from 1976/77 to 1981/82, Plan and Work Program of the Basic Organization of Associated Labor of the Educational Program “Dr. Zlatan Sremec” Osijek, 1973/74 School Year).

In 1982/83, the school introduced individualized education for students with autism, involving not only teachers but also a speech therapist, psychologist, and school nurse—the first time a nurse was employed at the school. Their inclusion enabled the implementation of rehabilitation programs. That year, descriptive grading was introduced for first-grade students, and physical activities became part of the curriculum for students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities. Additionally, a student community was formed, encompassing grades 1 through 8 (Archive of the Center “Ivan Štark”, Folder 118, *Plans and Programs from 1982/83 to 1991/92*, Plan and Work Program for the 1982/83 School Year).

In 1984/85, the school’s Workers’ Assembly decided to expand its services. On March 29, 1985, the Self-Managing Interest Community for Social Protection approved the opening of a workshop for work-production activities (a half-day program) for adults over 21 years old. The workshop, launched on May 1, 1985, at the Viktor Bek School for Training and Education, aimed to provide occupational therapy and protected work environments for individuals with severe disabilities (Archive of the Center “Ivan Štark”, Folder *Plan and Work Program for the 1984/85 School Year*). Recognizing that the existing school building was inadequate for its educational and training needs, the first project for a new school building and a vocational training facility was drafted in 1990 (Lemal, Madunić, & Đuranić, 2013, p. 16).

CONCLUSION

The events of 1991, marked by the aggression against Croatia, had a significant impact on Osijek, Slavonia, and the entire nation. This period of upheaval reshaped not only the lives of citizens but also every sector of human activity, including education. The war, while a catastrophe, eventually prompted significant societal and institutional changes, including in the realm of special education.

The school, originally named with the term “special,” did not use the word in a discriminatory sense at the time of its establishment. Instead, it was perceived as progressive, reflecting the intent to provide tailored education for students with specific needs. However, over time, societal perspectives evolved, and in response, the institution adapted by removing the term “special” from its name, aligning itself with the broader shift towards inclusivity and modernization.

In the years following the aggression, the school emerged stronger, symbolizing resilience and progress. On May 18, 2001, the institution was renamed the Ivan Štark Center for Education and Training and relocated to a new facility at Drinska Street 12b, enabling more effective and inclusive educational practices. This transformation represents not only the growth of the school but also the evolving recognition of the dignity, potential, and rights of all students, regardless of the challenges they face.

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Konačno u Osijeku (1955. – 1990.)

Otvorenje i rad škole za djecu s razvojnim poteškoćama

Sažetak

Ova je studija utemeljena na literaturi i arhivskim istraživanjima o školi za djecu s razvojnim poteškoćama u Osijeku. Autori razmatraju kraj 19. i početak 20. stoljeća kada su počeli nastajati prvi temelji i škole za djecu s razvojnim poteškoćama u Kraljevini Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji. U poslijeratnom razdoblju Druge jugoslavenske države inkluzija djece s poteškoćama u obrazovni sustav konačno se dogodila 1955. godine. Prvotno osnovana kao praktična škola Učiteljskoga fakulteta, u rujnu 1963. godine pretvorena je u Osnovnu školu „Dr. Zlatan Sremec”. Prate kurikulum škole, izvannastavne aktivnosti, integraciju djece s poteškoćama u društvene aktivnosti, razne događaje i susrete s drugim školama slične prirode. Na temelju dokumentacije koja je sačuvana u arhivima današnjega Centra za obrazovanje i osposobljavanje „Ivan Štark” u Osijeku pruža se uvid u razvojni put obrazovnoga rada s djecom s posebnim potrebama. Primijećene su i promjene u društvenim stavovima prema osobama s invaliditetom u 1980-ima, prelazeći s karitativnoga modela na model obrazovne inkluzije.

Ključne riječi: školski sustav za djecu s poteškoćama, Osijek, od 1955. do 1990, Hrvatska