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## **THE QUALITY OF GYMNASIUM EDUCATION IN THE BANAL CROATIA IN THE ERA OF NEOABSOLUTISM (1854 – 1860)**

### **Abstract**

The goal of this paper is to present an attempt to increase the quality of education in the Banal Croatia by analysing the reports sent to the Ministry of Religion and Education in Vienna by secondary school supervisor for the Banal Croatia Anton Jarc as well as the existing scholarly literature. The mentioned attempt was based on a reform of the education system which was initiated by the government in Vienna as early as 1848, but its provisions were finalized only in 1854. The paper depicts the efforts to implement this reform in the gymnasiums on the territory of the Banal Croatia in the context of said provisions. Special emphasis is placed on the provision that introduced German as the language of instruction in the higher grades of the gymnasiums, the activity of the teaching staff, and efforts to improve the available teaching aids and library funds. All three elements were envisioned as forming the groundwork for a higher quality gymnasium education, which would serve as preparation for further education at a university.

### **Introduction**

There were six gymnasiums in the Banal Croatia in the 1854-1860 period; four higher gymnasiums with eight grades and two lower gymnasiums with four grades. The higher gymnasiums were located in Zagreb, Osijek, Varaždin, and Rijeka, while the lower ones were in Požega and Karlovac. They operated on the basis of a liberal reform of the education system (Švoger, 2012, pp. 311-315), which was supposed to transform the gymnasiums into general education schools, which would serve as a solid groundwork for a university education. The provisions related to the reform were enacted on 9 December 1854 (Gross, 1985, pp. 304-305; Meister, 1963, p. 85). Since not all students planned to achieve further education, lower gymnasiums were supposed to either prepare the students for further education at a higher gymnasium, or for a practical vocation (Kr. Hrv.-slav.-dalm. zem. vlada, 1896, p. 234; Čop, 1988, p. 93).

According to an order issued on 22 August 1854, the language of instruction at higher grades in gymnasiums was “predominantly” German, which was then gradually introduced into all grades (Gross, 1985, p. 317; Šidak, 1981, p. 196). In practice, this meant that, starting in the academic year 1854/1855, all classes in the Banal Croatia from the fourth grade upwards were held in German, save for Croatian Language and Religious Education (Kr. Hrv.-slav.-dalm. zem. vlada, 1896, p. 234). The introduction of German as the language of instruction was justified on the grounds that a vast amount of scholarly and scientific literature was written in German, and only by using this literature could a modern education be achieved. In addition, German was presented as the only language (apart from Italian) which has already been adapted to modern science, and it was also stressed that all educated individuals in a powerful empire such as the Habsburg Monarchy should be taught to understand each other. Finally, it was claimed that there were neither enough

competent local teachers to implement the new gymnasium program in Croatia nor enough appropriate books written in Croatian, so teachers from the other parts of the Monarchy were invited to work in Croatia. Since they did not speak Croatian, they had to hold classes in German (Gross, 1985, p. 313; Lentze, 1962, p.189; Čop, 1988, pp. 94-95). Therefore, the introduction of German was primarily intended to secure a higher quality education based on scholarly and scientific literature, which was supposed to be available not only to teachers, but also to students. This necessarily led to an increase in the quality of education since the students now had an opportunity to better reflect on what they were being taught.

However, according to the policy of the Ministry of Religion and Education, the introduction of German was not the only condition for securing a better gymnasium education. It also depended on the qualifications and commitment of the teaching staff, who were therefore obliged to attend a three-year study programme with strict exams. Special commissions for the examination of gymnasium teacher candidates were formed, first at the universities in Vienna and Prague, and later also at other universities. This allowed for a relatively high level of professional education of the teaching cadres (Gross, 1985, p. 307; Kr. Hrv.-slav.-dalm. zem. vlada, 1896, p. 235). Apart from this, the extant system where one teacher would teach one class was replaced with a system where one teacher taught a certain group of subjects. New teaching methods were also approved. Finally, efforts were made to introduce the principles of object-lessons and experiments into natural science classes, which gained an important position in the curriculum at that time (Lentze, 1962, pp. 191-192; Potrebica, 1994, pp. 124, 310), with the goal of making the subject matter more accessible to the students. Since it was determined that object-lessons were particularly important for teaching biology and physics in the lower gymnasiums while history classes (to which geography classes were linked) should focus on biographies, it became necessary to increase the number and variety of teaching aids, especially gymnasium libraries and materials related to biology, physics, and chemistry (Kr. Hrv.-slav.-dalm. zem. vlada, 1896, p. 233).

### **Attempts to improve gymnasium education quality in the Banal Croatia**

According to the reports of Anton Jarz (Jarz), the secondary school supervisor in the Banal Croatia, the German language received an extremely important position in the Banal Croatia. This was in accordance with the state policy, which was involved in the education system through the introduction of German as the language of instruction in all gymnasiums throughout the Habsburg Monarchy. Already in his first report, Jarz claimed that the introduction of the German language guaranteed the improvement of the quality of gymnasiums in the Banal Croatia, which was, according to him, visible in the results shown in certain school subjects. However, he also admitted that some Croatian gymnasiums, more precisely those in Rijeka and Varaždin, would require some time to reach the level of the more established ones, such as those in Zagreb and Osijek. He believed this could be achieved only once the provision on the introduction of German as the language of instruction has been fully implemented in those gymnasiums, and once competent teachers and the necessary teaching aids had been introduced. According to his claims, the introduction of German as the “predominant” language of instruction in the higher grades of gymnasiums had finally ended the uncertainty and hesitancy in

artistic expression and the descriptions of scientific theories, which was best seen in the gymnasiums in Zagreb, Osijek, and Karlovac, where the youth was already fairly proficient in German (HR-HDA-71, 19/103v-103r). This was also supposed to mean that the quality of education had improved, since lessons became clearer and more understandable to the students. It is for this reason that Jarc expressed hope that the situation in the other three gymnasiums where the students were still having trouble coming to grips with the new language, i.e. the ones in Varaždin, Rijeka, and Požega, would also improve and reach the desired level (HR-HDA-71, 19/104v).

It can therefore be seen from Jarc's first report that the quality of education was the best at the gymnasium in Zagreb, followed by the one in Osijek, primarily because the students there knew German, while the other gymnasiums were marked as being of lower quality despite the successful implementation of the new curriculum (HR-HDA-71, 19/194r).

The reports show that the quality of education depended not only on the German language, but also on the teaching staff. He generally had no reservations about the quality of the teachers themselves. For the most part, he praised the teaching staff for its knowledge, diligence and collegiality, and credited them with improving the quality of education and the overcoming of various difficulties which had arisen while they were performing their duties. This positively influenced the students, who were inspired by their teachers to work diligently, and which in turn influenced the success and improved quality of the classes in general. He mentioned only one unconscientious teacher. The man in question was Johann Mihaljević, a religious education teacher at the lower grades of the Osijek gymnasium, who was not committed to his work and thus negatively influenced the students (HR-HDA-71, 19/194v, 271v, 322v). Among the teachers he lauded was Dr. Josef Roman Lorenz from the gymnasium in Rijeka, who distinguished himself by using new pedagogical methods. He introduced the usage of a natural history collection in natural history and physics classes, basing his lessons on this (HR-HDA-71, 19/263v). The barriers to having uninterrupted higher quality classes included illnesses among the teachers (HR-HDA-71, 19/104r). In these cases the teachers were substituted by their colleagues, who were however not as proficient in the same subjects, which led to a reduction in the quality of classes. Another often-mentioned problem was the lack of qualified teachers at certain gymnasiums, such as the one in Karlovac, where the students' knowledge of natural sciences was evaluated as very poor, which was partly the result of the lack of teaching staff (HR-HDA-71, 19/109r). However, a further impediment was the fact that certain teachers were overloaded with work, which happened because they had to stand in for their colleagues, or when parallel forms were introduced and became their responsibility.

In almost all of his reports Jarc provided data on the expansion of teaching aid and library collections, sorted by year and gymnasium. This was extremely important since these collections were one of the key elements for the organization of higher-quality education. For example, he noted that the lower quality of education in the Varaždin gymnasium was partly due to a lack of necessary teaching aids or a students' library (HR-HDA-71, 19/108r). He noted a similar problem in the Karlovac gymnasium, where knowledge of natural history subjects was assessed as being very poor, which was ascribed to a lack of advanced teaching aids (HR-HDA-71, 19/109r).

Jarc's reports stressed that the improvement in education quality was also the result of strict discipline, which was strengthened through the introduction of so-called grade certificates. These were usually sent once per semester to the students' parents or guardians, informing them of their moral behaviour and scholarly accomplishments (HR-HDA-71, 19/111v). The aim of these certificates was to inspire the students to be more diligent and devoted in their studies.

The reports show that the main actors of the education policy were aware that the quality of the education also depends on the previous knowledge of the students, which they brought to the gymnasiums from primary schools (HR-HDA-71, 19/105r/106v), and the willingness of the community to invest in education (HR-HDA-71, 19/112v-112r). Namely, gymnasiums were financed by municipalities and Land foundations, so they often had financial difficulties (Gross, 1985, p. 311; Cuvaj, 1910, pp. 222-223) and were dependant on the financial capacity of the students themselves, some of whom were unable to afford even the most basic books, and all of whom were required to pay a tuition fee of 8 forints and 40 kreutzers (Kr. Hrv.-slav.-dalm. zem. vlada, 1896, p. 234).

## Conclusion

It is clear from the reports of secondary school supervisor in the Banal Croatia Anton Jarc that efforts were made to implement all the reforms envisioned by law in order to ensure a higher quality of education in Croatian gymnasiums: the German language was introduced, teachers took strict exams upon the completion of which they became experts for their group of subjects, and teaching aids and library funds were expanded. However, all of this did not guarantee the improvement of the quality of education. Namely, the rapid introduction of German as the language of instruction in the higher grades of Croatian gymnasiums without any significant prior student training had adverse results. Jarc first reported on the good progress of the German language in Croatian gymnasiums, but already in the academic year 1856/1857 he had to admit that classes held in German posed a problem in gymnasiums where it was not in use outside class, i.e. primarily in Rijeka, Varaždin, and Požega, (HR-HDA-71, 19/271v-271r) but it appears the situation was not much better in Zagreb and Osijek. In the end, it seems that professors first had to translate unknown words and terms, sometimes even entire texts into Croatian (or Italian in the case of Rijeka) before classes could be held – if there was even time for that (Gross, 1985, pp. 318-321). Therefore, instead of helping students to improve their cognitive abilities and reflect on the subjects they were being taught, the German language became a very limiting factor and actually cancelled all positive developments introduced by the educational reform. The character of the gymnasiums remained relatively unchanged compared to before the reforms – classes remained predominantly verbal and the students had to learn by rote (Potrebica, 1994, p. 126). However, great progress was made concerning the teaching staff, since it was at this time that the Croatian intellectual elite was created. Namely, this elite was mostly comprised of highly educated and distinguished professors who began their careers precisely in the age of neoabsolutism (Gross, 1985, p. 307).

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