

## YOUTH LABOUR BRIGADES IN YUGOSLAVIA AND REPRESENTATIONS OF VOLUNTEERISM: A STUDY OF PARTICIPATION IN RESTORED FEDERAL LABOUR ACTIONS BY THE PEOPLE'S YOUTH IN THE DISTRICT OF KOPER

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### ABSTRACT

*The author discusses the issue of volunteerism in labour actions in Yugoslavia raised by several scholars, distinguishing between different phases, which mostly corresponded to changes in the socialist regime and society in general. With its research based on literature and archival sources, the question of the voluntary character of the youth labour actions is explored. The district of Koper in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the crucial period in the process of the transformation of youth labour actions, is paid particular attention, drawing on the experiences of the brigadiers and the challenges that the People's Youth had to face.*

**Keywords:** youth labour actions, volunteerism, socialist Yugoslavia, People's Youth, Koper

## BRIGATE DI LAVORO GIOVANILE IN JUGOSLAVIA E RAPPRESENTANZE DEL VOLONTARIATO: UNO STUDIO DELLA PARTECIPAZIONE DELL'ORGANIZZAZIONE GIOVANILE NEL DISTRETTO DI CAPODISTRIA A RINNOVATE AZIONI DI LAVORO FEDERALE

### SINTESI

*L'autore affronta la questione del volontariato nelle azioni giovanili in Jugoslavia sollevata da diversi studiosi, distinguendo tra diverse fasi, che per lo più corrispondevano ai cambiamenti del regime socialista e della società in generale. Basando la ricerca sulla letteratura e sulle fonti d'archivio, viene esplorata la questione del carattere volontario delle azioni di lavoro giovanile. Un caso di studio si concentra sul distretto di Capodistria tra la fine degli anni Cinquanta e l'inizio degli anni Sessanta, il periodo cruciale nel processo di trasformazione delle azioni del lavoro giovanile, attingendo alle esperienze dei brigadieri e alle sfide che la organizzazione giovanile ha dovuto affrontare.*

**Parole chiave:** azioni di lavoro giovanile, volontariato, Jugoslavia socialista, organizzazione giovanile, Capodistria

INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The beginnings of youth labour actions (YLA) in Yugoslavia can be found during the Second World War, where focus was placed on medical aid, farming and, through the last months of the war, intensively on the reconstruction of homes and economic infrastructure, largely undertaken by women. Post-war reconstruction and modernisation were thus a continuation of these labour actions, with a praise of the ideals of brotherhood and unity, anti-Fascism, solidarity, and equality, distinctively emphasising the cult of labour (cf. Baković, 2015; Petrović, 2020). The Communist leadership had, as it was (re-)interpreted, acknowledged the youth an active role in the building of a 'new Yugoslavia' by contributing to the moulding of a new regime of Yugoslav socialism internally and representing the image of Yugoslavia abroad. The issue of the voluntary basis of labour actions – the youth enthusiastically creating, upholding, and improving the social wellbeing of the people in Yugoslavia – is the focus of this article. Based on archival research of youth labour brigades from the local Slovenian Youth Organisation of Koper,<sup>2</sup> the article concentrates primarily on the process of mobilisation, i.e., the recruitment of brigadiers in the late 1950s and early 1960s as the activity most of the concerned 'irregularities' stemmed from.

Yugoslavia was left in a devastating condition after 4 years of occupation and the civil war: more than 1 million people died either in the battle, in concentration camps and as a result of forced labour, or as victims of ethnic and ideological violence. Almost 3.5 million people lost their homes, road and railway infrastructure was greatly damaged, 56% of the agricultural inventory was destroyed, while the total war damage was, according to some estimations, 47 billion dollars. Even though the most important industrial centres, located mostly in Slovenia and Croatia, were mainly intact, production in 1945 did not reach half of what it had been in 1941 (Pirjevec, 1995, 156).

Immediately after the war, the funds for the reconstruction and development of the country – besides the reserves of the National Bank and monetary institutions, and the youth labour actions (Urbanc, 1983), were of decisive importance. Thereby, various forms of organised shock work (*udarništvo*) were first established, starting with shock work in factories and mines on a daily and weekly basis (Burcar, 2019,

185). In the years 1945–1946, approximately 12.8 million dinars were invested into reconstruction, with over 80% of this being funnelled into the economy. Hence most of the infrastructure, farming, industry, and facilities of other branches of the economy were renovated across just 2 years, involving large masses under the motto 'No rest while we're building!' (scr. *Nema odmora dok traje obnova!*). The youth were at the forefront of the 'builders' of the new Yugoslavia, while also representing the majority in all socio-political and even authoritative organisations, e.g., in August 1945 63.2% of members of the Communist party were between 17 and 26 years old (Urbanc, 1983).

'Socialist competition' for efficiency and full span of knowledge impacted the rhythm of progress, the goal of which was to raise the standard of living and create a welfare society. Workers were to find their main purpose in this interest even when they were in the direct role of self-manager (Duda, 2017, 12–13). The first Five-Year Plan in Yugoslavia started with a propagandist action praising industrialisation and the electrification of the country as fundamental conditions for the implementation of socialism. Consequently, between 1945 and 1950, at least 1.2 million people moved from the countryside to the industrial centres, resulting in rapid urbanisation and the stratification of farmers with the formation of a new class of workers-farmers. According to Pirjevec, the cult of physical labour, which was incited by the authorities and aimed to modernise the country as quickly as possible, manifested most noticeably through the early post-war labour actions and the overpopulation in the cities from the late 1950s onwards. The side effects of this involved serious health problems (e.g., in 1948, Yugoslavia had the highest incidence of tuberculosis in Europe), as well as increased delinquent behaviour following the 'record-breaking' second Five-Year Plan (Pirjevec, 1995, 168–169, 243).

This massive project was undertaken to promote progress in accordance with the propagated idea of a better world – where the end justifies the means, i.e., sacrifices of (almost) all – and supposedly standing as an antithesis to the capitalist market economy. The core of that ideology, as Calic argues, consisted of the socialist theory of growth and labour aiming to generate employment and wealth, breaking away from the circle of economic and political dependence on foreign powers and forming a socialist society that was to be better, happier, more just, and more humane. To achieve this, the Yugoslav leadership turned to

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2 I am referring to the organisation of the communist youth *Ljudska mladina Jugoslavije* (scr. *Narodna omladina Jugoslavije*; eng. the People's Youth of Yugoslavia) that was established in 1948 when SKOJ (League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia) and USAOJ (United Federation of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia) – the latter incorporated interwar organisations of different religious, national, political and social backgrounds – merged. The very same organisation bore different names: the League of Youth of Yugoslavia (1963–1974) and the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia (1974–1991).

the Soviet model (Calic, 2019, 170–171). The break with Stalin, followed by subsequent reforms and re-orientations also affected the modernisation project and labour actions, alongside various technological developments, higher standards of living, and changing values and priorities (Pšeničny, 1976, 42). The introduction of socialist self-management led to an increasingly decentralised public administration, a stronger role for market forces, more individual freedom in terms of self-organisation, and greater independence from the state for enterprises and other organisations (Rakar & Kolarič, 2020, 134), including the Youth organisation. Moreover, as Bing points out, self-management was at the same time the origin of political autonomy that encouraged critical thinking unimaginable in other socialist states and a constraint imposed as the primary ideological-political project designed and imposed by the top of the Communist Party (Bing, 2019, 10).

The planned adaptation and approach towards citizens continued in the 1960s, when administrative and constitutional solutions sought to resolve the dilemma between traditional 'macro-socialism' and modern 'micro-socialism'. Developed theoretical insights on socialist self-management intended to lead to the inclusion of 'the largest possible number of 'everyone', which should have contributed to the de-bureaucratisation of relations and de-totalitarisation (Duda, 2020, 735).

Furthermore, in the congress report of the People's Youth of Slovenia (PYS) in 1962, we find that in comparison to labour actions in the post-war years, labour actions after 1955 were different in terms of their organisation and system of management, as well as in their activities and relationships, with these actions signifying self-management and economic independence (Pšeničny, 1976, 42).

To elaborate, we observe a gradual change of the youth brigades from the 'semi-military type' of organisation of life and work based on the ideal of the partisan struggle in favour of a less authoritative way of leadership according to the model of socialist self-management. This transformation followed a 'certain crisis' of the People's Youth arising as a result of the communists not finding their way in the new conditions under which they partially lost control of the problems of the youth. The refusal to organise federal youth labour actions based on decentralisation and the introduction of a new economic system (1953–1957) also contributed to the mentioned crisis of the youth organisation in the 1950s (Senjković, 2016, 187). In other words, we can trace the transformation of labour actions out of duty or necessity to labour actions as prestige or a privilege (cf. Matošević, 2015, 96) and finally to a recreational social experience (cf. Popović 2010; Atanasovski & Petrov, 2015, 23).

Almost synchronously, the perception of volunteerism had changed: in the beginning 'voluntary' work frequently seemed to be a required social activity, while the entire organisation of YLA was already, in the late 1950s, strictly monitored to ensure that the attendance of all participants was of their own free choice, with the avoidance of any false promises given during the recruitment and the guarantee that brigadiers returned home well and satisfied.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH LABOR ACTIONS IN YUGOSLAVIA THROUGH DIFFERENT PHASES

The state-led youth labour actions in Yugoslavia were developed under global and local influences. Externally the labour actions were based on the Soviet Stakhanovite movement, which functioned alongside the system of shock-work, public works and competitions present in all socialist countries, as well as in the interwar corporatist societies. On the local level, their origins can be traced back to the pre-modern tradition of communal labour during harvests and civilians' help to the partisan army by harvesting crops already in 1941/1942 in parts of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Baković, 2015, 29–30; Švajncer, 1980, 43).

Based on the character and circumstances of the youth labour actions, we can distinguish between 6 phases, the classification which is commonly used in literature pertaining to YLAs (Senjković, 2016, 13–14):

1. the war period (1941–1945);
2. post-war federal labour actions (1945/1946–1952);
3. the phase of local labour actions (1953–1957);
4. reviving federal labour actions (1958–1964);
5. the phase of local labour actions (1965–1967), and
6. the final phase (1968–1990) (cf. Mihailović, 1985, 8–9; Poglajen, 1998, 11–25).

During the war, SKOJ started with recruitment – usually called mobilisation – of the youth into the partisan resistance movement, to carry out sabotage actions, courier service duties, etc. In Yugoslavia, the first youth labour brigade was formed in June 1942 in Sanica Valley in Bosanska Krajina to gather in the harvest. During the same period, in the liberated regions of Slovenia, the youth started to collect weapons and clothes for partisans, cultivate the land, gather herbs with medicinal properties, provide medical aid, and to transport food, etc. In January 1943, the League of Slovenian Youth expanded to include all Slovenian youth (Oblak-Čarni, 2000, 13, 21, 24, 28–32). The YLAs intensified in Slovenia in 1944 and 1945 on the liberated and semi-liberated territories, focusing also on the reconstruction of homes and economic infrastructure, largely performed by women (Stibilj, 2015, 100–102). The youth continued to help with the reconstruction of destroyed homes and infrastructure after the war, soon followed by major modernisation projects.





**Image 1: Burnt village of Smrje in Brkini region, 1945 (Koper Regional Museum).**

The second phase distinguishes itself from the first phase – besides by the absence of the war – by the fact that previously, only local actions were organised, while in the early post-war years the participation in federal actions was much incited, while labour had wider social-economic relevance: the ideas behind it were mainly for the youth from different ethnic, social, religious, and other backgrounds to meet and bond in (mostly) secluded places, learn the customs of the local population, and the dissemination of socialist ideals. The competitive aspect was greatly emphasised not only during the actions, but also in the newspapers, literature, films, and propaganda. However, it was transgressed by the constantly evolving ideal of ‘brotherhood and unity’, aiming to create a ‘new Yugoslav’ (Dobrovojević, 2015; Atanasovski & Petrov, 2015, 23; Stibilj, 2015, 102; Potrč, 1949; Slovenski Jadran, 1958, 1; Slovenski Jadran 1959, 4) and to decrease the economic differences between and within the republics. Furthermore, the promotion of socialism included the recruitment of prospective young people into the

Communist Party/League of Communists and youth communist organisations, with the topics often covered in the ‘afternoon classes’ critically discussing the role of the Church in socialist society, not lacking in anti-clerical sentiments and aimed at encouraging an atheist worldview.<sup>3</sup>

For each participant at the YLA, brigade commanders – by unwritten rule Communist Party members – wrote personal evaluations for two main purposes: for the archive of the local youth organisations when they would decide whom to mobilise for the next year’s YLA and, more importantly, to determine whether they would support or block the brigadier’s nomination for membership in the communist organisations. The outline for the evaluations was the same: they gathered data on the individual’s year/place of birth, their nationality, social background, family standing during the war, and (non)participation in the Liberation Struggle, as well as the categories for the assessment of their character, which entailed their attitude towards authority, physical effort at work, participation

3 Cf. PAK, SI PAK-236, 18, Minimalni program ideološko-političnog rada za brigadiste seoskih ORB u 1960. g.

in classes, treatment of state property, behaviour, inclination to (self)criticism, and comments on their private life (Baković, 2015, 39). Particularly noteworthy is the following example of the evaluation of one brigadier, reproached to be both too serious for his age and an overthinker, which assumingly made him seem aloof and introverted. The remarks that followed, commending him to be a disciplined and comradely individual, indeed outweighed his 'deficiencies'.<sup>4</sup>

Over the period between 1942 and 1990, over 2 million young Yugoslavs were involved in projects ranging from major federal actions to more local initiatives (Popović, 2010; Atanasovski & Petrov, 2015, 23). Until the split between Tito and Stalin, youth from other socialist countries attended the labour actions and vice versa, with the additional participation of the Western bloc (see: Thompson et al., 2020). After 1948, this transnational character was preserved, especially in later years with the involvement of the member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Up until 1952, when the first Five-Year Plan was concluded, 1.3 million brigadiers, almost without any mechanisation, built 70 key new facilities, including 11 railways (Brčko–Banovići, Šamac–Sarajevo, Banjaluka–Doboj, Nikšić–Titograd, Foča–Kopač, Preseče–Borovnica, Sežana–Dutovlje, Goleš–Belačevac, Kučevo–Brodice, Gradačac–Modriča, Puračić–Doboj), 6 road sections (the most famous was 'The Brotherhood and Unity Highway', which was finished at a later date) and 5 hydroelectric power stations. In just 7 years (1945–1952), such individuals worked more than 60 million voluntary (and involuntary) hours (Burcar, 2019, 184; Pšeničny, 1976, 5, 16; Stefanović et al., 1976, 32). Despite the focus on 'productivity' and 'efficiency,' it is important to recognise the larger scope of the experience at these working sites: for the youth, it was also a joyful social gathering, as well as the first important ritual of Yugoslav integration (Calic, 2019, 171).

Anti-Fascist ideology, as one of the keystones of youth labour actions, was particularly emphasised throughout the initial years (1945–1947), especially in the region of the former Julian March. In youth labour brigades established in Zones A and B of the Julian March, Italian anti-Fascist youth also participated. A significant part of this was the praise directed towards the cooperation between Italian and Slovenian/Yugoslav youth, which included joint agitation for the inclusion of the territory to Yugoslavia, but then again, it was not completely without its challenges. However, when it was clear that a

large part of the region would be assigned to Italy, the fight against imperialism and capitalism came to the forefront (Stibilj, 2015).

In the Yugoslav-Italian border region, the building of a new city of Nova Gorica facing the 'old' Gorizia/Gorica, which was in the process of demarcation assigned to Italy, was particularly noteworthy. In fact, the building remains distinctive amidst the entire Yugoslav context, despite resembling partly the building of Novi Travnik and Novi Beograd (cf. Ramšak, 2017, 364). This was probably the most significant contribution of YLAs in Slovenia, especially when considering that only minor preparatory works for the port of Koper were performed by the brigadiers. The construction of Nova Gorica started as a federal action in 1947 (with 5194 brigadiers participating) and continued for 2 years as a local action, when gradually skilled (employed) workers and mechanisation took over (Ramšak, 2015, 87). This also occurred elsewhere, with the exception of continued local initiatives (e.g., building local roads, community houses, sports centres, etc.), until the reintroduction of federal actions in 1958 and grand projects with inclusion of the youth again. As articles in the Gazette of the Liberation front *Nova Gorica* demonstrated, the volunteer efforts should have been the sign of endeavours of the new man, creating future prosperity for themselves and, through this, 'liquidating all the remnants of the old mentality and capitalistic worldview.' (Ramšak, 2015, 86–87)<sup>5</sup>

With the progress of technology, the maintenance of youth camps and the organisation of brigadiers' extra-labour activities cost more than the hiring and lodging of qualified workers. Still, Tito, as pointed out by Baković (2015, 30–31), never underestimated the value of such endeavours for the ideological indoctrination of young Yugoslavs, whose loyalty was won by offering them professional, social, and intellectual resources otherwise unavailable in their native environment. In other words, the expected costs of the construction of the Ljubljana–Zagreb highway entrusted to the organizers of the YLAs were approximately 5.5 billion dinars (the supervision and cooperation with the construction companies included), with the costs of using just the youth labour brigades totalling 4.96 billion dinars (4.1 billion for the work alone), while construction companies were willing to complete all of the work for 360 million dinars less, but required two additional years. Only the social security, liability insurance, medical service, cultural, and sports activities were evaluated by the labour action headquarters of the Central Committee of the PYS to cost 300 million dinars.<sup>6</sup>

4 PAK, SI PAK-236, 13, I. koperska MDB 'Srečko Kosovel', Prždevo, 27. 6. 1959; PAK, SI PAK-236, 11J. Zaključki tretje redne seje štaba za delavne akcije pri CK LMS, Ljubljana, 6. 3. 1958.

5 Nova Gorica: glasilo Osvobodilne fronte za goriški okraj, 18. 6. 1948: Položili smo temelje Nove Gorice, 1.

6 PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, Zaključki tretje redne seje štaba za delavne akcije pri CK LMS, Ljubljana, 6. 3. 1958.

This fact – which cannot be applied to all labour actions, and especially not the early post-war reconstruction at the local level<sup>7</sup> – may present a solid ground against the criticism of the Communist Party extorting the youth full of elan.

Not long after the conclusion of the Zagreb–Beograd ‘highway’ (1948–1950), and mainly due to the introduction of industrial mechanisation, the perception of the labour actions as needless and expensive, primarily due to a decline of ‘revolutionary working enthusiasm’, and, presumably, the lack of suitable construction sites for such massive labour actions (Jurinčič, 2017, 18; Prinčič, 1997, 39), followed a phase without federal YLAs (1953–1957). However, the local actions remained; mostly concentrated on local infrastructure and buildings, usually in the economically deprived areas and every so often also as a continuation of the (unfinished) work of federal actions (cf. Martelanc, 1998, 212–247). In addition to this, YLAs partly remained a channel for social promotion, especially among the population that lived in the countryside, and certain parts of Yugoslavia, improving economic and social prosperity.

In the scope of the preparations for the VI. Congress of the People’s Youth of Yugoslavia in 1958, an opinion poll was conducted among the youth, which included the question of whether they were interested in joining the federal youth labour action. 84% replied in the affirmative. Thus, 250,000 brigadiers joined the federal actions in the 1958–1964 period when much better technical equipment was available, the work was better coordinated, more ideological-political training and education (different courses, such as exams for driving motorbikes and tractors, photography course, amateur radio course, etc.) was available, and more competitions were organised. They (nearly) finished the Brotherhood and Unity Highway, connecting Ljubljana with Gevgelija on the Yugoslav–Greek border (Pšeničny, 1976, 39).

After it took three years to certify the Second Five-Year Plan (1955–1957) and a political (and economic) crisis over the question of federalisation loomed on the horizon, the leadership seemed to try to boost (once again) the ‘brotherhood and unity’ through the passion of the youth. Using major labour actions as a ‘social glue’ due to ‘a certain divide between the youth by republics, nationalities, etc., that ha[d] arisen’,<sup>8</sup> and placing ‘unifying’ projects, such as building the highway connecting most of the republics, at the forefront, thus helping to accelerate the economic development of deprived regions, interestingly coincided with the time of strikes, which started in the mining region of Zasavje in Slovenia, the economic stagnation and

subsequent reforms (Prinčič, 1997, 48, 51–52; Čepič, 2016, 171–173; Režek, 2005, 169–190), as well as the start of the Non-Aligned Movement. To expect of YLAs to be a corrective mechanism for the situation, when the principles of self-management became the instruments for differentiation on a national basis on the level of republics as nation-states (Čepič, 2016, 172), would be illusionary, but it may have been a successful temporary – if rather populist – measure.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> phase of the youth labour actions, which also constitutes the prime focus of this paper, several significant changes occurred in terms of the organisation and nature of the labour actions:

- the construction mechanisation comprised three-quarters of the work, resulting in less exhausting labour;
- overall living and working conditions improved at the youth camps, shorter shifts were introduced, and the restrictive ‘military’ character of the actions and the competitive stance of the work gradually weakened, e.g., the awards were assigned to the entire camp as ‘solidarity to the social community’ (Popović, 2010, 289; Senjković, 2016, 191);
- much more attention was given to the well-being of the brigadiers with rigorous health check-ups and mandatory vaccinations (Pogljajen, 1998, 18; Senjković, 2016, 209);
- the propagandist pressure also eased, the content of political work, the social activities and leisure time was adapted to the new conditions, labour actions became less and less reminiscent of tradition and of the past, while emphasis was placed on the education of young people as future citizens who would later act within the framework of social self-management (Supek, 1963, 199);
- the organisation of labour actions changed: representatives of the brigades entered the council of the youth camp in 1960 and, in 1961, a series of measures were introduced, ‘which meant an immediate transition to a democratic leadership system, according to a model of social self-management as a general social system,’ leading to almost 50% of the brigadiers being involved in various commissions and administrative bodies of the settlement (Supek, 1963, 187);
- the selection of the participants became more careful than in the early post-war years (see the concept on ‘prestige’ in the continuation of this article).

<sup>7</sup> To give one example: the work force of youth brigades assumingly saved 1,060,000 of 1,680,000 dinars (total estimated value of the investment) by building railway Otovec–Bubnjarci in Bela krajina in 1946 (Glasilo ‘MDB’ sektorja Otovec–Bubnjarci, 1946, 4).

<sup>8</sup> See Tito’s speech at the 6th Congress of the People’s Youth of Yugoslavia in January 1958 (Davidović, 2021).



A short phase then followed, once again without any federal YLAs (1965–1967), while in the last phase (1968–1990), the ideas of self-management previously introduced in the 4<sup>th</sup> phase, were emphasised even further. Such actions were granted a more pronounced ideological purpose and participants saw them more as an opportunity to travel, socialise and have a good time, while still nevertheless upholding core Yugoslav communist principles. As a result, labour actions from the 1950s onwards became increasingly recreational in nature (Popović, 2010, 280; Atanasovski & Petrov, 2015, 23). For example, ‘brigadiers’ weddings’ became quite a common event in the mid-1970s (Jurinčič, 2017, 106, 137–138), a relaxed stance that would be practically inconceivable in the 1940s and early 1950s, when all intimate relationships were prohibited. It is also worth mentioning other changes that were effectuated: research in early 1970s showed great improvement in the physical condition of the brigadiers after their participation in the YLAs, the number of participants dropping out of the YLA prematurely fell to just 1% in 1981 (in 1971 was still 20%), fewer girls, students, employed young people and the rural youth attended the labour actions, while the number of (mostly male) secondary school students and those unemployed increased in the 1970s and 1980s. After 1974; however, courses that allowed for the acquisition of various professional qualifications ceased to be organised. Despite the lack of a ‘formal solution’ to the ‘problem of self-management’, the brigadier no longer ‘simply accepted anything that was not created on the basis of his self-management action, based on his democratic rights’ (Senjković, 2016, 224–228, 230–232, 238). Researchers confirmed the capacity of the YLAs for the (self)rehabilitation of ‘children of the streets’ into the ‘children of the society’ and thus recognised labour actions as ‘a place of gathering, coming together through work, education and entertainment, a place of discovering individuality, national differences in conditions of cooperation and fraternal solidarity,’ a place which marked the principle of self-management, and enabled brigadiers to undertake work and participate in social activities (Senjković, 2016, 234–236).

In Slovenia, a major part of the local and republic actions – and also various federal actions – provided aid to less economically developed regions, such as Brkini, Kozjansko, Kobansko, Bela krajina, Suha krajina, Goričko, Zasavje, and Soča Valley after the earthquake of 1976, etc. (cf. Filipčič, 2016; Slanšek et al., 2018), which was also strongly emphasised in the last phase in the 1970s and 1980s. In the second half of the 1980s, youth research camps were introduced in parallel as a sort of alternative (Pogljajen, 1998, 23–25; Vaupotič, 1998, 57–65).

#### THE (AB)USE OF THE IDEALISM OF VOLUNTEERISM IN THE LABOUR ACTIONS

Some scholars and critics have raised the question of whether youth labour actions were indeed completely based on volunteerism. To adequately address this issue, previous distinctions between different phases of the labour actions, especially war-related circumstances and the subsequent phases, is necessary to avoid partial and biased assessments (cf. Lilly, 1994; Kos, 2022), in order to strive towards drawing a full(er) picture of a complex, politically motivated but highly popularised and ever-changing phenomenon.

A great collective effort was needed to run the YLAs, both financially and logistically. Given the meagre financial resources available to the new country in the initial post-war years, since most of the economy had been destroyed, a wide network of mutual aid had to be activated to establish and supply the YLAs and to carry out and complete the construction tasks themselves. In this regard, YLAs, therefore, played one of the key connecting roles in Yugoslavia (Burcar, 2019, 185).

Volunteering in youth brigades that adopted the organisation and naming of military formations was considered a great honour – especially if awarded the title of shock brigade and shock worker – considering the high attendance, some may have felt obliged to participate, which is also Mihailović’ argument (Stibilj, 2015, 34). On the other hand, active mobilisation took place, which was often far from an easy task for the organisations involved, precisely because it had to be conducted on a strictly non-coercive basis, while they were pressured to fulfil the required quotas. Almost exclusively in the early post-war years, there were cases of coercive collective recruitment, with political prisoners and captured soldiers also having been taken to construction sites as a part of their sentences, and some men completing their military service obligation by participating in labour actions (Baković, 2015, 35; Prinčič, 1997, 37).

The contemporary criticism suggesting coercion, manipulation, and deception by propaganda and ideology, Petrović argues, lacks the experiential aspect of people attending the actions and is influenced by the perception that such collective voluntary labour in socialism cannot be ‘sincere’ and ‘authentic’. The state-organised collective actions were in contradiction with most of the ‘Western’ perceptions of volunteering as a feature of a ‘democratic’ society, non-governmental actors, and individuality (Petrović, 2020, 161; Ljubojević, 2020). While I agree with most of the arguments put forward by Petrović, I cannot; however, avoid discussing occurrences of coercion and/or manipulation in the first organisational phase, something which was mentioned also in the interviews and memoirs of the participants (cf. Matošević, 2015, 96–100; Kos, 2022, 25).

The radical difference in the organisational process of YLAs, especially concerning how to ensure massive attendance, efficiency, and satisfaction, is probably best illustrated by two – not completely mutually exclusive – concepts introduced by Matošević: duty and prestige. The first can apply to the post-war period and the ‘military type of organisation’ when ‘patriotism was measured by voluntary and overtime work’ (Matošević, 2015, 96), and when coercive mobilisation, and particularly ‘societal pressure’ was relatively frequent.<sup>9</sup> Subsequent labour actions that took place in what can be called the second organisation phase during the late 1950s and 1960s had a completely different organisational impulse and content. Participants’ claims that their work was completely voluntary and relaxing during this later period are legitimate, although even early post-war labour actions were only to a lesser extent fulfilled by coerced participants. This basic shift reflects the high interest to attend YLA: a principle of selection was introduced, and it thus became a privilege to attend the labour actions, rather than a necessity. The ‘prestige’ of post-war actions originates from an entirely different pattern of values: pleasure in exertion, asceticism, and abstinence, where ‘utopia’ was supposed to be a motivational drive in ‘making the impossible’ young builders’ goal (Matošević, 2017, 68; Matošević, 2015, 97; cf. Supek, 1963, 62).

Moreover, throughout these years, regions (and republics), seasons, and social backgrounds, the interest in participation varied significantly. While some districts often struggled to fulfil the assigned quotas of participants while still upholding the basic requirements of who could join the brigades, others had lots of work with the selection of numerous young men and women wishing to join. Supposedly, they even had to deny attendance to Tito’s grandson, because he had one poor school grade.<sup>10</sup>

In August 1958, the Presidency of the Central Committee of the People’s Youth of Yugoslavia sent a letter to all district committees raising and condemning some worrisome observations regarding the process of recruitment, including that a few brigadiers at the worksite of the Zagreb-Ljubljana highway did not come to the action voluntarily (not naming from which part of Yugoslavia those came from). Secondly, brigadiers were given various promises that could not have been fulfilled later: employment after a labour action, com-

pletion of some professional courses, trips to distance cities, etc. Courses were organised, but mostly tended to be amateur courses (e.g., motorbike and tractor courses [theory and practice], amateur radio courses, photography courses, etc.) in which brigadiers certainly obtained valuable and useful skills, especially those who came from economically less developed regions and/or did not have other opportunities to gain such skills. They also did not receive the certificates they had wanted and which had been, in some cases, promised to them.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, it seemed that some of the youth who had already decided to volunteer for the youth brigades experienced some pressure from the municipal committees of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, which was considered harmful and unnecessary. Other issues unrelated to the question of volunteerism that they addressed included the unresponsiveness of the youth from rural areas, who were needed at home to help with agricultural work. One of the consequences of this was a fairly large number of 14- or 15-years-olds in the brigade, which was a ‘disadvantage’ as it reduced the working capacity of the brigade as a whole. In addition to this, the leadership of the People’s Youth supposedly did not make sufficient and timely political preparations for mobilisation into working brigades, often just letting the youth form the opinion of labour actions on their own.<sup>12</sup>

From the documents, it can be deduced that in some Slovenian districts, at least across the years 1957 and 1958, indeed saw the making of unrealistic promises, such as those concerning the above-mentioned courses. Individuals were occasionally told that they would be paid for their work, and that the labour action would only last one month, rather than two, etc. More worrisome is information about labour actions in 1957, during which various incidents of orphans being forced to join the brigade and being threatened with the removal of their scholarship were reported, as well as promises concerning free afternoons. Another pressing issue in 1958 was a presumably loose selection of participants. The report mentions that many of the brigadiers were unemployed and of ‘dubious character’ (e.g., some had joined hoping to avoid going to the prisons that they had been sentenced to) and therefore the number of thefts increased. Several others were also allowed to join the brigades without passing the medical exam

9 Matošević also indicates a testimony of a woman, stating that the whole village – girls and elderly people – were forced to help during the construction of the Lupoglav–Stalije railway in Istria (Matošević, 2015, 98).

10 Cf. PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, The Koper District Committee of the PYS to the Central Committee of the PYS, Headquarters for the youth labour brigades: short analysis of the mobilisation of the youth for federal and local actions in the year 1958, Koper, 18. 11. 1958; Matošević, 2015, 102.

11 PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, Predsedništvo centralnog komiteta Narodne omladine Jugoslavije – svim sreskim komitetima narodne omladine Jugoslavije, 2. 8. 1958; PAK, SI PAK-236, 18, Mladinci in mladinke V. koprške brigade ‘Tone Tomšič’, Lipovica, 31. 5. 1960.

12 PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, Predsedništvo centralnog komiteta Narodne omladine Jugoslavije – svim sreskim komitetima narodne omladine Jugoslavije, 2. 8. 1958.



and receiving the mandatory vaccinations, resulting in hospitalisations and even one death.<sup>13</sup> The response of the PYS was strictly requiring recruiters to carry out any future mobilisations presenting 'real conditions' of life and work in the brigades, stressing the comradeship, the possibility of the youth across the whole of Yugoslavia getting to know each other, and clearly stating that the courses would not provide professional qualifications.<sup>14</sup>

The problems brigadiers encountered on the construction sites and how they dealt with them presented another aspect of the organisation of YLAs. Several reports show that it was the most challenging for the first 'shifts' coming to the worksites in spring as they often had to prepare the lodging and establish relations with the construction companies, including the norms – the quintessential in the whole underlying competitive basis of the actions and, when surpassed, the 'source' of pride for the shock workers – that would be realistic to achieve and fairly recorded. This sometimes resulted in internal conflicts that led to exclusions of brigadiers from the labour action.<sup>15</sup>

There were also differences between the republics in attendance. For example, in 1949 at the federal labour actions, the youth from Slovenia showed the least enthusiasm. As Vejzagić states, all republics sent more participants as required, with Bosnia and Herzegovina breaking the planned quota by 27%, and Slovenia 'just' by 3.7% (Vejzagić, 2013, 52–53; Baković, 2015, 37). Without full records, it cannot be argued that the Slovenians were generally the least motivated to participate in federal YLAs. Especially in the later phases, they may have just undertaken a stricter selection of the candidates, adhering to – but not exceeding – the quotas. Still, finding brigadiers who would fulfil all of the requirements in order to be recruited, especially those pertaining to the 'diversification' (e.g., location and social background), obtaining the medical clearance, and the verification that the candidates had 'good personal character', seemed to be quite challenging, therefore raising the importance of the brigadiers' satisfaction at the local actions. Them sharing their positive experiences was one of the most successful ways to attract new participants.

Increasing differences were observed in the final phase between the labour actions in Slovenia and other republics: actions in other republics were designed as

large economic-orientated 'companies' and spaces for political indoctrination, while the youth in Slovenia accepted YLAs mainly as opportunities to help people in need in economically less developed areas, to socialise with young people from all over Yugoslavia, and to have fun. In the 1980s, however, the interest in YLAs generally dropped, although some local actions continued and maintained the focus on solidarity, socialising, tolerance, and learning new skills, much like what is considered volunteering today. According to the special research that was conducted, labour actions were marginalised by wider societal and global processes, socially devaluing YLAs. As a result, the youth according to Vaupotič no longer saw any sense in 'free' manual work if the same could be achieved with machinery (Vaupotič 1998, 47–49). This opinion; however, is not new, in one report from 1960, we read:

*In my opinion, today's youth actions take on a completely different character than we would like, especially for us Slovenians. The Slovenian youth [...] sees today that it is not possible to build a highway to their detriment, and claims that if they came voluntarily, this must be taken into account. Namely, in the camp, you can immediately see the life of the other brigades, and their way of working is quite close to military discipline. For other nations, it is quite understandable, but for our man [Slovenians, comment added by G. M.] it **must no longer** [emphasis added by the author] be given any consideration. On the other hand, the norms are used rather deficiently and unrealistically.<sup>16</sup>*

#### MICROSTUDY: THE DISTRICT OF KOPER

To further explore the organisational transformation of youth labour actions since the 'founding period,' focus will now be turned to the fourth phase of youth labour actions in the district of Koper.<sup>17</sup> In the period between 1958 and 1964, during the revival of federal actions, the social inclusion of the youth was crucial. The 'processes of social-economic transformation, accelerating development of engineering and science and increasing affirmation of the system of socialist

13 PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, Central Committee of the PYS, Headquarters of the youth labour brigades to the Headquarters for the youth labour brigades to the district committees, Ljubljana, 11. 4. 1958; PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, Central Committee of the PYS, Headquarters of the youth labour brigades to the district committees: medical checkups of brigadiers, Ljubljana, 11. 9. 1958; PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, Zaključki tretje redne seje štaba za delavne akcije pri CK LMS, 6. 3. 1958.

14 PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, The Koper District Committee of the PYS to the Headquarters for the youth labour brigades Koper, Koper, 3. 7. 1958.

15 PAK, SI PAK-236, 18, Zaključno poročilo V. kopske 'Tone Tomšič' [from the construction site in Lipovica], Koper, 1960; Glasilo 'MDB' sektorja Otovec-Bubnjarci, 1946, 5.

16 PAK, SI PAK-236, 18, Diary of Bounasisi Vinko, referee for the construction site, VI. Koper youth labour brigade 'Rudi Brkinc', Ranutovac, 26. 6. 1960; cf. Logar, 2006.

17 The district encompassed the following municipalities: Koper, Postojna, Ilirska Bistrica, Sežana, Izola, Piran, Divača, Pivka, and Hrpelje.

democracy' – quoting the Report of the Central Committee on the work of the PYS from the 4<sup>th</sup> until 7<sup>th</sup> congress (1961) – demanded the youth organisation to adapt to the new social conditions (Jeraj, 2000, 52).

The archival material from the late 1950s and early 1960s pertaining to the PYS of the district of Koper shows that some organisational irregularities at YLAs were also found in this period. As subjective as these types of sources based on the reports of the members of the organisation are, and particularly documents expressing criticism – even when downsized – ensure relevant data for the analysis.

From the local 'mobilisation reports' in Koper, we can deduce that the problems with recruitment were similar to those in other Slovenian districts, mostly related to the difficulties persuading rural youth to join, workers who were on holiday and undertaking premilitary training, and the inflexibility of medical doctors, especially in Izola, who did not want to sign the medical clearance documents without the Central Committee of the People's Youth vouching for the well-being of the brigadiers, especially in cases when brigadiers had not been vaccinated within the required timeframe (several weeks before their departure), something which happened on occasion due to cancellations and quotas. Interestingly, the local youth organisation gave instructions to the enterprises where youth workers were employed to guarantee the brigadiers 50% of their salary when they were away at labour actions, since when returning from the highway, they could not be left without any income. Most agreed, a few did not, and even various public proclamations were made stating that such brigadiers should use their holidays without pay. Then again, some enterprises did pay them a full wage, which, however, caused distress among the brigadiers due to unequal treatment. As equality was considered a core value, the PYS advised against this practice. The major problem that the district committee of the youth organisation in Koper had were the requests to find jobs as they felt obliged to help hard-working young people. No false promises in this regard were mentioned, however. As a result, the impression from these reports would be that the worst they did was to promise various courses that were not run (such as an advanced tractor course).<sup>18</sup>

There are some interesting facts about the local action of helping to build the port in Koper in 1958, with a large number of brigadiers enlisted for local actions: 533 (cf. Petrinja, 1998, 98; Petrinja, 1999; Terčon, 2015, 183–185). An agreement was signed between *Vodna skupnost Koper* (Koper Water Authority) and the PYS, Headquarters for youth brigades, on the basis of which youth workers were temporarily employed and received some payment, entitled to receive the same bonuses, and to work in the same conditions as other workers.<sup>19</sup> It is possible that this agreement was later discarded, as in the main literature on the building of the port of Koper and youth labour brigades in the region (cf. Petrinja, 1993; Petrinja, 1998; Terčon, 2015; Jurinčič, 2017) any reference to this 'anomaly' is missing. Moreover, I could not find the additional agreement regarding the details relating to the payment of the brigadiers, mentioned in the agreement between Koper Water Authority and the PYS. Peculiarly for this action, brigades from Primorska region were not present. Instead, brigadiers from the Koper district were sent to the nearby Brkini region, while the participants were mostly from the district of Ljubljana.

Quite surprisingly, the same company, Koper Water Authority, that was apparently open to pay the brigadiers at their working site, was one of the rare companies in the district that refused to financially support their own employees when attending labour actions (Petrinja, 1998, 98).<sup>20</sup>

In the 1958 actions, across all nine brigades together, including those combined with other districts that the youth from the Koper district participated in, the share of men was 70.6% and the share of women was 29.4%. In fact, the high share of women was in the post-war YLAs, e. g., in the construction of the Brčko-Banoviči railway, quite a Slovenian particularity (Šmid & Štrumbl, 2014, 237). Still, there were limits imposed on the number of women per brigade in Slovenia: the maximum was set at 30 (and, interestingly, at least 25 communists, well below the norm in other Yugoslav republics (40–60)). Expectedly, workers dominated, followed by secondary-school students (in summers), since this type of recruitment was the easiest to organise, while in terms of the issue of rural youth, which has already been discussed, their numbers remained low, even though they were a 'target group', mostly across the spring months to avoid the busiest time at

18 PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, The Koper District Committee of the PYS to the Central Committee of the PYS, Headquarters for youth labour brigades: short analysis of the mobilisation of the youth for federal and local actions in the year 1958, Koper, 18. 11. 1958 (cf. Jurinčič, 2017, 110).

19 PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, The agreement signed between *Vodna skupnost Koper* (Koper Water Authority) and the PYS, Headquarters for youth brigades about the employment of 4 youth labour brigades on construction sites of *Vodna skupnost Koper*, Koper, 24. 2. 1958.

20 PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, Zapisnik sestavljen na razširjeni seji štaba MDB Koper, 27. 2. 1958; PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, The Koper District Committee of the PYS to the Central committee of the PYS, Headquarters for the youth labour brigades: short analysis of the mobilisation of the youth for federal and local actions in the year 1958, Koper, 18. 11. 1958 (cf. Jurinčič, 2017, 110).

**Table 1: Participants and labour actions from the district of Koper in 1958 (social composition).<sup>23</sup>**

The number of all members of the People's Youth	6035
The number of working-class youths	256 (51.9%)
Rural youth	34 (6%)
Secondary-school students (15 years +)	155 (31.4%)
Office staff	19 (3.8%)
Apprentices	25 (5%)
University students	4 (0.8%)
The sum	493

the farms. The number of young people in the district of Koper involved in the PYS is known to us: 6035. Thus, in 1958, approximately 8% of members of the People's Youth joined the YLAs.<sup>21</sup> This number is even more pertinent when considering the situation in the mid-1980s, when around 1% of the youth of Yugoslavia was still participating in the labour actions, a number which was once an astounding 80% in 1947 (Mihailović 1985, 9–10). Moreover, it reinforces the contrast between attendance out of necessity and attendance out of prestige.

Furthermore, another significant observation can be made showing the changes that were already emerging in the late 1950s – and even more so across the following years and decades: the brigadiers occupying the leading positions in the PYS in Koper – at the worksites and 'in the office' – agreed that the right course of action was to move away from the military character of the brigades, and gave recommendations to avoid the penalisation and sanctioning of the brigades 'if possible', which was a general tendency in Slovenia.<sup>23</sup>

As can be seen from the reports, much attention has been given to the well-being of the participants, and a clear difference is noted compared to the attitude present in post-war labour actions, emphasising new priorities – with the competitive aspect also gradually losing its importance in what should (and was) a volunteering activity – while keeping some old ones:

*Our way of working is strongly reflected in the successes on the route. No brigade showed as much concern as our brigade, let it be for the patients, with which we had great difficulty, particularly in helping them to be recognised as sick leave, or in the rain so that the brigadiers did not get wet and caught an unnecessary cold. [...] Despite the good successes on the route, we never fought for percentages, but at every meeting, we emphasise that the quality of the work we do is also important, that the personal life of the brigadiers is important, that it is important how free time is used.<sup>24</sup>*

Even the ideological propaganda evident in the recruitment of brigadiers and providing a 'socialist education' had some positive effects by encouraging the youth to read and to join in discussions, with each brigade even having a small library. In the post-war labour actions, literacy courses were organised, brigadiers learnt Cyrillic script and Italians joining from the Yugoslav-Italian borderland attended courses in Slovenian language (Stibilj, 2015, 213; Baković, 2015, 46). In the first phases of the YLAs, Slovenians from the region also undertook the courses to improve the standardised variety of the Slovenian language, which they could not learn in Italy during Fascism. The efforts of the youth in helping to rebuild and modernise the

21 PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, The Koper District Committee of the PYS to the Headquarters for the youth labour brigades Koper, Koper, 3. 7. 1958.

22 PAK, SI PAK-236, 11, The Koper District Committee of the PYS to the Central Committee of the PYS, Headquarters for the youth labour brigades: short analysis of the mobilisation of the youth for federal and local actions in the year 1958, Koper, 18. 11. 1958.

23 PAK, SI PAK-236, 13, Marija Vogrič, the president of The Koper District Committee of the PYS to the Headquarters of the I. Koper brigade 'Srečko Kosovel', Koper, 5. 6. 1959.

24 PAK, SI PAK-236, 13, The reply of the Headquarters of the I. Koper brigade 'Srečko Kosovel' to the letter from the Koper District Committee of the PYS, Prždevo, 1959.





**Image 2: Youth labour brigade in Šmarje pri Kopru, 23. 11. 1947 (Koper Regional Museum).**

country, including in the wider region in question – i.e., some of the key infrastructure (the port of Koper, roads in the Brkini region, the waterworks in Koper, etc.), industry, the new city of Nova Gorica, etc.<sup>25</sup> – were an important instrument in moulding and representing a new regime of Yugoslav socialism both internally and internationally. Moreover, for several young people of the later generations without the experience of fighting in the war, joining the ‘brigades’ was a real, memorable, *rite de passage*, a test (dis)proving that they were worthy members of (socialist) society.

#### CONCLUSION

It is not the purpose of this article to give any definite conclusion – and by no means speculation – on whether it is justified to characterise labour

actions in Yugoslavia as ‘voluntary’. As has been demonstrated, such collective actions thoroughly changed over time, and while coercion and manipulation surely constituted more than just a rare practice in the early post-war era, this was not the case from the 1950s onwards. Some ‘irregularities’ nevertheless occurred, but these were exceptions. The youth organisation on the local, republic, and federal levels wanted to ensure only voluntary enrolment, since successful mobilisation into the next ‘shifts’, actions yet to come, largely based on satisfied brigadiers whose experiences they would share were of great importance. It was, therefore, crucial to choose a very competent workforce to ensure efficient work – the success of the brigade was strongly publicised and represented a source of great pride – as did the rich ‘leisure time activities’, i.e., sports, cultural activities, political-ideological and other

<sup>25</sup> From the number of solely federal labour actions observation can be made, that the region in the interwar years part of Italy received quite a lot of support on the highest level (cf. Martelanc, 1998).

classes, various courses, etc. In this context, we also explored the reports of the youth organisation in the district of Koper, stressing the need to at least soften the military character of the brigades and to try to avoid the penalisation and sanctioning of the brigadiers, that were completely in line of the changing organisation, representation, and approach to the YLAs. The influence of the People's Youth was also evident – even on a regional level in the district of Koper – in recommending the enterprises to continue paying (part of) the salary to the brigadiers undertaking YLAs, displaying some autonomy of the youth organisation within the system of self-management. Examples like these and the general tendency – in Slovenia the most prominent, especially in the 1970s

and certainly in the 1980s – show the transformation from a Soviet-like 'Stakhanovite movement' to what we today commonly consider as values and goals of volunteerism, eventually with the introduction of youth 'research' camps, which reflected a similar scale. Throughout the history of Yugoslavia, YLAs were also seen as a kind of 'declaration', mirroring the consent of young people to the 'course' of political leadership (Senjković, 2016, 8).

The significance of the reappearance of youth labour actions among (smaller) groups of university students in Slovenia in 1999 (cf. Študentska delovna brigada, 2015; ŠOUM), and the fact that many veteran organisations of former brigadiers are still active, may be the subject of another paper.

## MLADINSKE DELOVNE AKCIJE V JUGOSLAVIJI IN REPREZENTACIJE PROSTOVOLJSTVA: ŠTUDIJA SODELOVANJA KOPRSKEGA OKRAJA LJUDSKE MLADINE NA OBNOVLJENIH ZVEZNIH DELOVNIH AKCIJAH

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### POVZETEK

*V članku je naslovljeno vprašanje prostovoljnega značaja delovnih akcij v Jugoslaviji, katerega so, večino-  
ma obstransko in neredko pomanjkljivo, odprli že drugi avtorji in avtorice. Raziskava pojava kolektivističnih  
delovnih akcij, ki je tekom obdobja Jugoslavije močno spremenil svoj osnovni smisel in organizacijski pristop,  
posledično zahteva obravnavo po ločenih fazah oziroma obdobjih, kar hkrati omogoča umestitev znotraj  
sprememb režima in širše družbene transformacije. Na podlagi raziskave literature in arhivskih virov mladinske  
organizacije v koprskem okraju, so v študiji primera o mladinskih delovnih akcijah, ki so potekale v »pre-  
lomnem« času poznih 50-ih in zgodnjih 60-ih let 20. stoletja, ko so se ideje socialističnega samoupravljanja  
postopoma prenašale tudi v strukture mladinske organizacije, družbene in politične spremembe analizirane  
tudi skozi regionalno prizmo. V kolikor primeri prisile oziroma različnih načinov »spodbujanja« širših množic  
k udeleževanju na delovnih akcijah usmerjenih v nujno obnovo domov, ponovni zagon gospodarstva ter mo-  
dernizacijo države tik po vojni, niso bili zgolj redkost, so se razmere in organizacijski pristop od petdesetih let  
20. stoletja dalje precej spremenili. Nekaj nepravilnosti predvsem v smislu zavajanja ob novačenju brigadirjev  
so se vseeno dogajale, vendar so bile to izjeme in bolj stvar prvih let ponovne vzpostavitve velikih gradbenih  
projektov na ravni zveznih mladinskih delovnih akcij. Vrh države je te skupinske akcije kot enega od temeljev  
ideologije »bratstva in enotnosti« in povečan angažma mladine ter polaganje zaupanja vanjo dojemal kot  
(dodatno) možno sredstvo ohranjanja sloge med republikami in med različnimi narodi, ki pa je, podobno  
kot drugi načrti, sčasoma dobilo vse bolj lokalistični značaj. K spremembam sta izrazito prispevala tudi  
razvoj tehnologije in splošna mehanizacija v gradbeništvu, kar je omogočilo cenejše delo kot na takšen način  
organizirano mladinsko prostovoljno delo in s tem temeljito zamajalo smiselnost masovnih delovnih akcij.  
Tega niti prilagojeni organizacijski pogoji z večjo skrbjo za dobro počutje brigadirjev niso zmogli preprečiti,  
sploh z določenimi spremembami odnosa do družbenih vrednot, ki takšnim velikim projektom zlasti od 1980.  
let dalje niso bili več naklonjeni.*

**Ključne besede:** mladinske delovne akcije, prostovoljstvo, socialistična Jugoslavija, Ljudska mladina, Koper



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