

Education in Vrsac

Vrsac lies on the slopes and the foothill of the mountains of Vrsac, at the edge of the Pannonian plain, near the Romanian border. With its colourful setting, great vineyards, the abundance of woods and its cultural treasury it has since long before been recognized as an **attractive town**

It is written in the history of the town that the settlement first appeared in the darkness of ancient history. The first preserved traces of the town date from the period of the Stone Age. Numerous archaeological findings confirm the permanency of the settlement through the tempestuous history of conflicts and wars, peace and restlessness. Under the reign of various masters, all settlements used to be extinguished at one place to start life at another, changing their ethnic and cultural structure (Chimers, Celts, Dacians, Romans, Sarmatians...).

The first written document mentioning Vrsac dates from the 14th century – a report of a monk to the Hungarian king Bela IV. The inhabitants were farmers, winegrowers and craftsmen. According to the very name of the place, as well as the range of other toponyms, it is considered that Vrsac then was inhabited mostly by Serbian people.

The fortification of the town of Vrsac was built at the time, as an immediate consequence of the threats of the Turkish conquest. The remnant of the fortification, its tower, still stands on the top of the hill. People who live in Vrsac have a habit to say that they live in the town beneath the Tower.

Late in the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century, Vrsac came under the rule of the Turks. It gained its freedom in 1716 when it was governed by the Austrian court. Liberated from the obligations towards local nobility, the town strengthened under the influence of Vienna. At that time it adjoined the new established Tamish Banat with its centre in Timisoara and in 1720 the town became the seat of Vrsac district – the county of 72 settlements. It is when the planned colonisation of the Germans began with two municipalities established in Vrsac: Serbian and German Vrsac, with their own headmen. It lasted until their union in 1794.

During the next century Vrsac founded a civil school (real gymnasium), an agricultural and a teacher training school, a higher school specialised for young women, a theological school and others. In the 19th century Vrsac had its own public library, reading room and printing house. Since the I World War dozens of publications were published in three languages. A museum was founded in 1897 owing to the great dedication of Feliks Mileker, a well-known historian and archaeologist.

The museum with its fascinating collection of over 200.000 items is nowadays classified under one of the most significant institutions of culture in Vojvodina. The exhibits of the museum are of great importance for the insights into the life and movements of the people of this region – from the period of prehistory until today.

The town library was founded in 1886. It has a significant fund of old and rare titles, unique copies, manuscripts (around 5000 titles) and around 20 000 complete editions of magazines and other periodical publications, as well as the library holdings in German, Hungarian, Romanian, English, Russian and French language.

Vrsac has given many important figures to our culture: the painters Nikola Neskovic (icon-painter), Nedeljko Popovic-Serban and Paja Jovanovic; the European opera singer Sultana Cijuk; the creator of Serbian drama, Jovan Sterija-Popovic, who is in the same time the most famous and the most important son of the city, after whom the town of Vrsac is called the town of Sterija; the poet Vasko Popa; the architect Dragisa Brasovan; the politician Svetozar Miletic; the writer and socialist Laza Nancic...

According to a demographic research, Vrsac is nowadays one of the most desirable towns for living in Serbia. The omens to attribute it would be: the town of students, painters, winegrowers, poets, writers, basketball players... And when we look back in the past, little has changed: the spirit of Sterija's time is recognizable today. In spite of the fact that there were and have been migrations, the conservative spirit of the town has interwoven them into its fabric, preserving its middle class distinctiveness.

The oldest Serbian schools in the south Banat were mentioned at the turn of the 17th century in the monastery of Mesic (near Vrsac) and the beginning of the 18th century (Vladimirovac and Stara Palanka, on the banks of the river Danube in 1703).

A German primary school, situated behind today's Catholic Church had been working in Vrsac since 1727.

The Serbian primary school in Vrsac is first mentioned in the minutes of the meetings of the Assembly of Karlovac in 1769. There have been claims that the school had been established two decades earlier, having in mind that since 1751 Vrsac had been the centre of the eparchy, while the first teachers in the Serbian, as well as in the Catholic schools used to be priests.

“The General School Decree on the Rearrangement of German Schools” was the grounds of the Court Deputation to issue the guidelines in 1784 on the rearrangement of Serbian and Romanian schools in Tamish Banat, allowing all the municipalities with Orthodox churches to open primary schools. Serbian bishops were supposed to send a group of young people to Vienna to study to become teachers.

In the 80ies of the 18th century there were 218 Serbian schools in Banat and as many teachers educated in Timisoara who were attending the courses of the school inspector Teodor Janovic-Mirijevski.

According to the minutes of the meetings of the Council of Eparchy in 1796, it can be acknowledged that there used to be another public religious school nearby the Assumption Church in Vrsac. At the time Josif Jovanovic – Sakabenta became the head of the Banat eparchy and owing to his great dedication the Grammar school (so called Gramatikalna school) was founded in Vrsac. The grammar school was in the rank of a lower (incomplete) gymnasium; it was formed according to the Hungarian gymnasium and together with the gymnasium in Karlovac, it was acknowledged to be the highest educational institution of Serbs in the South Hungary at that time.

The foundation of the Serbian-Romanian clerical school in 1822 was important for the education of the priests of Serbian and Romanian churches. It was in the rank of a high school and it was bilingual.

There were Greek and Jewish primary schools in Vrsac in the late 18th century, which were joined to the Rectorat of German Teacher Training School with two independent teachers.

In 1851 the Imperial-Royal Ministry of Education made a decision to found a real gymnasium (lower gymnasium with two grades) to prepare pupils for other professional schools, especially those who wanted to continue their schooling in the Teacher Training School in Vrsac.

The opening of the first teacher training school was an important event for the educational sphere in Vrsac (the decision was made on November 29th 1852, and the school started working in 1854). The name of the school was Deutsche katholische Lehrerbildungsanstalt (the German Catholic institution for teacher training) or – how this school used to be called at the time – Preparandija. The Imperial decree issued on December 27th 1860 abolished the Serbian Dukedom and the Tamish Banat and they were joined to the Realm of Hungary, when the complete political-administrative machinery of the Serbian Dukedom was dissolved and came within the competence of Hungary, imposing the need for the united Hungary to create a sole nation with the Hungarian language as a common language of communication. Consequently, the German Teacher Training School was dislocated from Vrsac – German setting – to Segedin, where in the predominantly Hungarian environment in everyday contacts the future teachers were supposed to learn the Hungarian language. The school was joined to the Teacher Training school already existing in Segedin. This was the end of the German Catholic Teacher Training School – in 1870.

There was a musical school in Vrsac at the time, founded in 1862, as well as a kindergarten for German children founded in 1870, called Frebel's kindergarten. The real gymnasium was transformed into a public civil school. In 1884 the town magistrate built new premises for German female communal school. The public civil school was located in the same building – facing the Catholic Cathedral.

Vrsac had over 20 000 inhabitants in the 19th century belonging to various nations (Serbian, German, Hungarian, Romanian, Slovakian, Jewish, Roma...). In the end of the 19th century the Germans, Hungarians Jews, Romanians and others attended the following schools: the real gymnasium for boys, the six-grade-school for girls, the four-grade-high-school for girls, primary schools and three kindergartens (preschools), a music school for violin and flute and two private institutes for education of young women, an agricultural school and a trade school.

Teacher training school was brought back to Vrsac not sooner than 1920. It was formed out of the teacher training course for students who fought in the I World War and it was first opened in Veliki Beckerek

(today's Zrenjanin) and in the same year it was moved to Vrsac. It met the needs of the whole Banat and the Danube area.

The schooling lasted for three years, and in 1929, it was extended to five-year-long education. In 1933 the Convention on the schools for minorities in Banat was signed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia and Romania. The school was for training teachers in Romanian language, as well. In 1949 a department for pre-school teacher training was opened in the same school.

Pedagogic academy under the name "Ziva Jovanovic" was founded in 1973, according to the decision of the Assembly of the Provincial Community of Education. It was a unique high school. The education lasted for 6 years and it had two levels: the first lasting 4 years and the second lasting 2 years. Future teachers used to be educated in the school. In 1993 Pedagogic academy was transformed into two-year Pre-school Teacher Training College. The same college got accreditation for three-year education of preschool teachers in 2007.

Students

The approximate number of students studying at the Preschool Teacher Training College each year is between 300 and 400. They are predominantly girls, although there are more and more boys interested in the profession of a preschool teacher. The students come from the town itself or nearby places, but they are traditionally accompanied by the candidates from the more remote places of the country. Apart from the domestic, a certain number of foreign students, mostly from Romania, enroll the college each year.

In the spirit of contemporary pedagogic tendencies the students are expected to show initiative, to participate and be active throughout their studies. They are encouraged to self-development and free development, reflected in personal self-fulfilment, emotional development, critical thinking and forming positive self-image. Accordingly, apart from their regular everyday duties, students can get involved in various activities taking place at the College. So, they often become members of research teams, participate in the publishing activities or enrol the programs of professional development organized by the Preschool Teacher College.

In accordance with their future profession, students are encouraged to take part in artistic and creative work in choir and orchestra, as well as drama and art clubs. The products of such extracurricular engagement of students are appearances in the events organized on special occasions. Apart from group and individual exhibitions, the College has organized drama and puppet plays. Students make the requisites and puppets for the plays themselves and perform them for the children attending the kindergartens where students have their regular practice. Furthermore, the students are included in numerous forms of cooperation existing between the College and the kindergartens in the town and each year, before Christmas, they present the youngsters with the toys, puppets, various objects, illustrations and teaching means they make by themselves mostly of natural materials.

Encouraging the development of the advanced students, the Preschool Teacher Training College has established rewards for best works of students in the field of psychology, pedagogy and art.

Having in mind the importance oratorical skills have for the profession of a pre-school teacher, the College has each year organized a competition in public speech. The students readily participate in the event, expressing their opinions and attitudes on the issues relevant to them. The winners compete further with their colleagues who have won in other colleges.

The Students' Parliament is also active at the Preschool Teacher Training College, whose representatives participate in the work of the Staff Council the Board of the college, expressing their opinions, needs, initiatives and suggestions.

Ambience

In the immediate vicinity of the town park, surrounded by verdancy, the Preschool Teacher Training College is placed in a new, modern building, which has all the conditions necessary for adequate education of students. Apart from 6 classrooms where theoretical and practical lessons take place and the appropriately equipped specialised classroom for informatics teaching, the College has two amphitheatres with 100 and 200 seats, where the lectures of visiting professors and other curricular and extracurricular activities are organized. There is a gym in the premises, as well as a sports field for physical education

lessons. The consultations with the students take place in the offices of the departments. During breaks students can refresh themselves in the students' club.

For individual independent work students have a library at their disposal with almost 27000 books and 120 professional magazines, as well as 6100 books in Romanian language. There is an air-conditioned reading room in the scope of the library, where students can use computers, which have unlimited access to the Internet. The Legates of Milan Prazic and Mihailo Palov are integral parts of the library.

The Legate of Milan Prazic – Twenty years after Milan Prazic, the master of literature had died, his personal library with over 1000 titles from the field of literature, mostly for children, was presented to college students to use during their studies. The books were given to the institutions where they are most needed: to the library used by both students of the Preschool Teacher Training College and the department of the Teacher Training Faculty. The books were placed in separate shelves and marked as the Legate of Milan Prazic.

Remembrance Room – the Legate of Mihailo Palov in the College, where the dedicated pedagogue used to be a student, then the professor and the principle, is today placed in the office of the Pedagogy and Psychology Department. Mihailo Palov earned a highly significant position in the domain of education during the last century, owing to his long pedagogic, professional and scientific work and fruitful social engagement. The Remembrance Room consists of almost 3000 books from his private library, as well as his diplomas and acknowledgements, which were presented to the College in 2006.

Day by day the bright halls of the college, enriched by greenery and paintings echo with the murmur of students; the voices of lectures and practical lessons can be heard through the doors of classrooms, while in the silence of the library the students read, search on the Internet for the modern literature and write their seminar and professional bachelor degree papers.

Scientific – Professional Activity

Scientific – professional activities of the Preschool Teacher Training College are carried out in the following forms:

- Organization of round tables
- Publishing
- Participation in various projects
- Lectures of the acknowledged experts in the field of science and art.

The Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac organizes the Round Table dedicated to the domain of giftedness and creativity of children every year. The acknowledged experts participate in the Round Table with their paper presentations – pedagogues, psychologists, artists, teachers, preschool teachers, researches from the institutes for pedagogy and psychology, universities, faculties and colleges from the country and abroad.

The teachers of the college participate in scientific conferences in the country and abroad. The Departments of the College organize discussions on relevant issues from the field of preschool education.

What is considered to be a very important form of scientific-professional activity of the College is its participation in domestic and international project. The following are to be emphasised:

- International research project under the name “THE PROJECT FOR AN EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF GIFTED PUPILS” with participation of 15 European countries.
- The research project “Gifted Children and Relevant Adults” carried out in co organization of the following institutions: Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac, Teacher Training Faculty in Belgrade, Philosophical Faculties in Banja Luka and Novi Sad and Tibiscus University in Timisoara.
- Neighbouring project Serbia-Romania “Gifted Children and Relevant Adults in the Region of South Banat and Timish”, supported by the European Agency for Reconstruction. The participants of the professional development seminars organized within the project were preschool and primary school teachers from the region of South Banat and Timish, and the lecturers were professors from Cluj, Timisoara, Vrsac and Belgrade.
- Accredited seminars of professional development of educational workers accredited by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia. One of the most popular seminars is *Education of*

Present and Future Preschool and Primary School Teachers for Identification and Work with Gifted Children which was realised 12 times in Vrsac, Pancevo, Nis, Omoljica, Veliko Srediste... More than 350 preschool and primary school teachers received certificates for attending the seminar.

Publishing Activity

Within the publishing activities of the Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac more than 150 titles have been published within the following libraries:

1. Monographic studies
2. Books of collected articles
3. Textbooks

An overview of all the editions is offered in a special catalogue issued by the Preschool Teacher Training College.

International Cooperation

The Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac successfully carries out bilateral cooperation with the following institutions:

- Universities “Tibiscus” and “De Vest” from Timisoara and Universities “Vasile Goldiş” and “Aurel Vlaicu” from Arad (Romania);
- Philosophical Faculty in Ljubljana and Pedagogical Faculty in Maribor (Slovenia);
- Philosophical Faculty from Banja Luka (Srpska Republic);
- Cambridge University (England);
- Institute for Pedagogic Research from Belgrade;
- Teacher Training Faculties from Belgrade and Uzice;
- Philosophical Faculty from Novi Sad...

The cooperation with the stated universities and institutions has been carried out within shared organization of scientific gatherings in the country and abroad, mutual participation in international scientific and professional projects. Mutual publishing has been programmed and realized, together with exchange of literature, periodical publications and direct students exchange. A special form of cooperation is the exchange of experience in the field of teaching staff education.