

## Article

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# Working Class Women's Activism in Socialist Yugoslavia: An Exploration of Archives from Varaždin, Croatia

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**Abstract:** The authors address working class women's activism in socialist Yugoslavia, focusing on archives produced at both factory and municipal levels by local *društva žena* or *aktivi žena* (women's societies/sections) in the industrial town of Varaždin, Croatia. Their critical exploration of archival sources produced between the mid-1950s and the late 1980s has enabled the authors to challenge dominant interpretations of women's activism during state socialism, particularly the idea that no relevant activism existed after the dissolution of the Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ) in 1953. To counter that view the authors highlight the continuities between the AFŽ and subsequent women's organizations, the Union of Women's Societies (SŽD) and the Conference for the Social Activity of Women (KDAŽ), in terms both of discursive narratives and of biographical trajectories. They argue that local archival collections provide new and differentiated insights into past gender and labour conflicts and into working class women's activism.

**Keywords:** women's activism, gender history, socialism, Yugoslavia, microhistory



## Introduction

In her pioneering study of the Antifascist Women's Front (*Antifašistički front žena*), or AFŽ (1942–1953), Croatian feminist historian Lydia Sklevicky wrote: "Listening today to the voices of women from the past, one sees not only the mistaken choices which should not be repeated, but also the unspent reserves of utopian energy."

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Then she added, quoting Walter Benjamin's fifth thesis on the concept of history, "For it is an irretrievable picture of the past, which threatens to disappear with every present, which does not recognize itself as meant in it" (Sklevicky 1996, 69). More recently a number of activist scholars and artists in the post-Yugoslav region have been taking up the challenge of critically reinterpreting the partisan and socialist past and its archives and counter-archives, leading to a veritable "archival turn" in current scholarship (Kirn 2020; Kurtović 2019; Vukliš 2020). On the one hand they have revitalized those "unspent reserves of utopian energy" contained in the archives of socialist Yugoslavia, particularly those produced by sociopolitical organizations and self-managed enterprises (Vukliš 2017, 2020). On the other hand, they have been attempting to preserve existing collections and even to create new archives so that the memory of emancipatory movements will be retained. A case in point is the online AFŽ archive established by the *Crvena* association in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which consists of digitized archival collections as well as a collection of new scholarly writing and works of art (Kurtović 2019).

In this study we contribute to this recent "archival turn" by looking at working class women's activism within state socialist women's organizations in Yugoslavia. Those organizations were the Union of Women's Societies, *Savez ženskih društava*, SŽD (1953–1961), and the Conference for the Social Activity of Women, *Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena*, KDAŽ (1961–1991), which succeeded the AFŽ. The article focuses on factory records and municipal sources which detail the activities of the local *društva žena* or *aktivni žena* (women's societies, or sections) in the Socialist Republic of (SR) Croatia, then part of the Yugoslav Federation. The choice of the industrial town of Varaždin as a case study was prompted by the presence of the *Varteks* textile mill which had a significant female workforce—in fact one of the most numerous in Croatia at the time—as well as for its particularly engaged KDAŽ section, the archival traces of which are unexpectedly better preserved than those of other places.

We critically explore these archival sources to challenge dominant interpretations of women's political experience under state socialism, particularly the view that there was no further activism after the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953, a belief often repeated even in recent activist publications. The *Crvena* online archive, for instance, states on its main page that with "the dissolution of the Antifascist Front of Women, women's emancipatory and united activities in the former Yugoslavia ceased to exist" (Crvena 2021), thereby reinstating Lydia Sklevicky's interpretation which was deeply rooted in the feminist view that autonomy should be a guiding principle of women's organizing (Sklevicky 1989, 1996; for a discussion of Sklevicky's interpretation, see Bonfiglioli 2014). In order to refute such interpretation, we uncovered local activists' grassroots demands and initiatives, particularly in relation to discrimination against women in the public sphere, and touching on matters such as the double burden of productive and reproductive work, gender violence and demands for better childcare. New archive material is crucial to

countering the previous rather simplified and reductive “common knowledge” about women’s activism in socialist times (Ghodsee and Lišková 2016).

This study has used a selection of archival sources ranging from the mid-1950s to the late 1980s to highlight continuity in the work of state socialist women’s organizations in Yugoslavia, at the levels both of discursive narratives and biographical trajectories. Many of the local activists remained engaged in women’s issues from the time of the Second World War until late socialism and they continued to discuss how best to represent other women, whether within state socialist women’s organizations and the League of Communists, or trade unions and the Socialist Alliance of Working People (*Socijalistički Savez Radnog Naroda Jugoslavije*, SSRN) which was the largest and most influential mass organization in Yugoslavia. Such activists kept participating in the ongoing gender and labour conflicts related to women’s status as workers and their access to welfare services such as education, housing, childcare, healthcare, something particularly pressing for single mothers. Contrarily to the belief that only second-wave feminists questioned socialist discourses of women’s emancipation, we point out that in fact local SŽD/KDAŽ activists continuously highlighted the contradictions between the official discourse of gender equality and its actual implementation, in order to advance specific local demands in everyday life, such as childcare provision for working mothers. The activists also appealed to such discourse to counter the sexist behaviour of many of their husbands and male comrades, sometimes suggesting that the autonomy of women’s organizations should be reinstated rather than forcing them to continue working under the patronage of existing socio-political organizations, most notably the SSRN. Such narratives advocating the realisation of women’s emancipation in socialism permeate all the archival sources. Similarly, Malgorzata Fidelis has noted that in the Polish context women negotiated with prevailing social norms and attempted to “influence those policies that they perceived as incongruent with the communist promise of equality and justice” (Fidelis 2010, 109).

A combination of archival sources was required to gather the relevant material for this study. We found a number of reports written by municipal *aktivni* in Varaždin in the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb, where there is continuity in the archival collections of AFŽ, SŽD and KDAŽ at the republican level. Even if formally the SŽD and KDAŽ were working within the framework of the SSRN, they continued to be thought of as separate organizations (Fabekovec 2005). However, there is no such continuity in the smaller regional archives, where the SŽD/KDAŽ were more thoroughly subsumed within the wider SSRN after the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953. Traces of local women’s activism can be found in the collection of the Municipal Conference of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Croatia – Varaždin (*Općinska konferencija socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Hrvatske – Varaždina*, OK-SSRNH-V) in the State Archives of Varaždin. Also, while there is no material about factory *aktivni* in the collection of the *Varaždinski tekstilni kombinat*

*Varteks* (Varaždin textile factory *Varteks*) from the 1945–1990 period, local newspapers—*Varteksov vjesnik* and *Varaždinske vijesti*—are extremely useful in providing a clearer picture of working women's experiences and activism.

When studying Yugoslavia's social history, the use of press material can partially compensate for the unevenness and fragmentation of the archival collections of self-managed enterprises, municipalities and sociopolitical organizations (Vukliš 2017). In the cases we examine here, that press material helps to mitigate the unfortunate effects of the fragmentation of regional and municipal sources on KDAŽ activities after 1961. The *Varteksov vjesnik* (*Varteks* newspaper) was the paper of the working collective of the *Varteks* enterprise, published between 1952 and 1968, while *Varaždinske vijesti* (*Varaždin's news*) is the main local newspaper, published continuously from 1945 until today. We found that both newspapers contained interesting information on the KDAŽ and its local activities, confirming the findings of social historians who have highlighted that factory newspapers and the socialist press more generally can be an insightful source for matters of labour and gender. In fact, the nature of the self-management system meant that Yugoslav newspapers and magazines often hosted different viewpoints and critical remarks, for it is true that “a certain amount of open discussion, criticism [*kritika i samokritika*] and even open verbal conflict was seen as desirable, provided it was in the spirit of Yugoslav socialism” (Archer and Musić 2017, 12). We used a number of interviews with local workers published in the above-mentioned newspapers to highlight the critical and reflexive nature of their narratives, particularly about local labour and gender conflicts.

The first part of the article is dedicated to women's activism in Varaždin from the 1950s to the early 1970s, particularly to SŽD and KDAŽ activities within the *Varteks* textile mill which employed more than 2500 women. The internal factory newspaper highlighted female workers' demands for better welfare facilities as well as their grievances about gendered conflicts within the factory, particularly their complaints about the behaviour of their “male comrades” (and husbands) and the men's attitudes to working women. This section also highlights the discursive and biographical continuities between the AFŽ and subsequent women's organizations, through the translation of a paradigmatic archival source, namely the biography of KDAŽ activist Štefica Madjarić, who received a municipal award from Varaždin in 1971. The same collection of activists' biographies nominated for local awards will be used throughout the article to give some biographical background on the KDAŽ activists Milka Basić, Terezija Lubek and Marija Strbad.

The second part of the article addresses the longstanding mobilisation of Varaždin activists for the construction of childcare facilities, in favour particularly of disadvantaged female workers such as single mothers and women living in the

villages nearby. Local activists lobbied for better childcare from the early days of the socialist period until its end. Various other paradigmatic archival sources will be presented in this section too, including news reports about a “mobile kindergarten”, in the form of three specially equipped converted buses which provided childcare in rural areas between the early 1970s and late 1980s. The sources used in both sections—and particularly the biographical note and newspaper report—demonstrate the complexity and multi-layered character of working class women’s activism at the local level.

## After the AFŽ: Local Women’s Activism in Varaždin from the 1950s to the 1970s

It is widely assumed that meaningful women’s activism in socialist Yugoslavia ceased with the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953. However, previously unexplored archival sources paint a different picture, particularly of women’s engagement at the local level. After 1953 and with the expansion of the self-management system, the newly formed SŽD was intended to be a federation of local women’s societies which would cooperate with municipal authorities and local enterprises while working within the framework of the wider SSRN. Women were encouraged to be active self-managers, first and foremost on local matters and especially within their workplaces or municipality. The transition from the AFŽ to the SŽD was not without problems; indeed it caused a certain degree of confusion and “passivization”, especially in the least developed republics, where women’s societies were less established. Moreover, it took time to organize the SŽD. However, in the SR Croatia alone, in 1957 there were 172 women’s “societies” (*društva*). As reported in the publication *Žena u borbi* (The Woman in the Struggle), the *Žena Varaždina* society (The Woman of Varaždin) addressed working women’s problems and with the cooperation of the local authorities managed to open a canteen. Workers’ canteens “never closed” in the main factories and working women could take food home after finishing their shifts (Početkom 1957. bilo je 172 ženskih društva, *Žena u borbi*, 1957).

The main textile mill in Varaždin, at first named *Tivar*, was founded in 1918 and by the 1950s female workers amounted to 60% of the total workforce at what was by then the *Varteks* textile complex. A 1958 report listed 4512 employees, 2668 of them women of whom 2429 were blue-collar and 239 white-collar workers. 209 women were members of the League of Communists—which had 683 members in total—while 89 women were active among the 243 members of trade union organizations (KDAŽ, Općinska konferencija, Izvještaj o radu ženu u poduzeću

“Varteks“, 27 November 1958). A 1955 report in the *Varteksov vjesnik* referred to the absence of a women's society and insisted on the need to create one within the enterprise, to reflect the similar one that already existed at the municipal level in Varaždin. The report also gives us a sense of the many problems that female workers were grappling with. Significantly titled “Let's bring up our difficulties! Working women's problems”, the article started with a call for action:

There are 2380 women at Varteks. If it weren't for the 40% of employees in our factory who are male, ours would be one of the biggest women's collectives in the country. Now, given that women are the majority of this collective, it is understandable that there is interest in their problems. So; what are those problems, how shall we solve them, and whom shall we ask for help? Well—it's up to the women to tell us! Until today there has been no specific women's organization at *Varteks* able to solve the problems particular to women. Do our female comrades need such an organization, and how should it work and when? And would that help female workers and their wider activism in social life outside production work? Some of our female comrades will discuss that very subject in these pages. We hope it won't be the only time and that in the coming issues of the newspaper we shall hear more about what other female workers think. So, do get in touch, dear reader; put forward your thoughts and suggestions. If you keep them to yourself, you are helping neither yourself nor anybody else. (Iznesimo naše poteškoće! Problemi žena radnica, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 15 April 1955)

In the same article, the women interviewed lamented the end of the AFŽ and the consequent “passivization” that ensued. A women's society within *Varteks* was seen as a necessary step and was demanded by various activists, such as middle manager Marija Zubović who argued that “women as a group have their collective problems which they could solve collectively.” She stated that women would turn more easily to such a society to solve their problems, because they would feel more confident approaching matters of interest to them in that sort of setting rather than in factory-level meetings. Besides stressing the need for a specific women's organization, local workers and activists suggested various measures that could improve their working and living standards, from additional training in self-management, to better facilities for grocery shopping and better collective restaurants and school dining halls. Public baths were also much needed by female workers—those living in the surrounding villages especially but among city-dwelling women too. Blue collar worker Ela Minarić complained that some facility of that sort would have been more useful than the recently-built bowling club:

When such amounts have been spent on the construction of the bowling club, about which women are unhappy (their husbands spend time there drinking, instead of helping at home), money could have been found as well to build some useful facilities. (Iznesimo naše poteškoće! Problemi žena radnica, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 15 April 1955)

Gender conflicts, therefore, were explicitly mentioned and addressed. In another article in the same issue of the newspaper, activist Danica Katalenić posed the question: “Why aren’t we active?” The opening of the article highlighted the gender conflicts inside the factory, stating that since female workers were in the majority it would have been “understandable” that they should lead the enterprise: “Ideally, that is how things should be, but from this point of view the situation is very poor.” According to the author, women’s scarce participation in self-managed institutions was caused largely by the discriminatory attitudes of men and lack of support from them, as

many of our male comrades, especially those who like to brag about women’s lack of skills, did the least they could to encourage the progress and the education of women, particularly their own comrades [their wives] whom they prevent from taking part in social life and work, with different ‘excuses’. (Zašto smo neaktivne?, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 15 April 1955)

The author continued by inviting men to change their backward attitudes first, especially their idea that a woman’s place was in the kitchen:

Wouldn’t it be nicer, more comradely and more humane if the husband whose comrade works in the factory would help after work with domestic chores, at least the heavier ones, so that she is freed from the most tiring and intensive chores? Or, while she mops and sews for the kids, that he reads for her some useful article from the newspaper, or a good book? (Zašto smo neaktivne?, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 15 April 1955)

As this passage shows, the double burden laid on women was openly discussed, and local activists expressed their discontent with the behaviour of their male comrades and husbands, who went off to the pub for a drink as soon as their wives returned from the factory, leaving them to “women’s work” within the home and to physical and mental exhaustion. Katalenić severely criticized such men for spreading the idea that it was impossible for women who were active in sociopolitical organizations to be good wives and mothers. On the contrary, she argued, it was those women who were not contributing to collective institutions who were the ones with “bad morals”. She went on to denounce the men who contributed to such “immoral” behaviour, such as the well-known male “textile worker” who had lured a young female worker to a room in a secluded area of the factory and “immediately locked her inside; she barely manage to escape by screaming and using all her strength” (Zašto smo neaktivne?, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 15 April 1955). After relating such a highly suggestive anecdote clearly describing an attempt at sexual assault—which itself overturns our “common knowledge” that gender-based violence was a taboo topic during state socialism—the writer once again

invited other women in the factory to come together and send in their suggestions and ideas to increase women's activism within the factory.

By 1956 such initiatives seemed to have progressed further, as the *Varteksov vjesnik* reported the launch of a survey (*anketa*) into working women's living conditions. The survey was led by the "Commission to help the working woman" (*Komisija za pomoć radnoj ženi*) organized within the trade union, and its chief protagonist was activist Terezija Lubek (*Pomoć radnoj ženi*, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 15 August 1956). Lubek was among the founders of an *aktiv žena* within the sewing department and had lobbied for such an investigation in order to fully understand working women's difficulties within the factory. She was particularly interested in the difficulty of gaining access to proper housing and childcare of single mothers, whether divorced or widowed, especially those with multiple children. Terezija Lubek had been born in 1916 and as a worker in the *Varteks* factory she was involved in a number of social and political duties, including acting as president of *Varteks'* workers' council and president of *aktiv žena*. She was also an active union member and a life-member of AFŽ, SŽD and KDAŽ Varaždin. She retired as head of the laundry department at *Varteks* and even after her retirement, she continued to work in the local community, despite her poor health (*Općinska konferencija, Prijedlog za nagradu*, 8 April 1970).

The survey into working women's conditions highlighted how gender conflicts were addressed in everyday life, notably through a discussion of women's demands to close the many pubs (*gostionice*) in the vicinity of the factory. The article mentioned that on payday "many a family drama" took place in these pubs as men spent their wages on drinking and gambling and running up debts. Significantly, the *Varteksov Vjesnik* article was accompanied by a photograph of female workers leaving the factory, with the caption: "the work in the factory is over, at home more work is waiting ..." (*Pomoć radnoj ženi*, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 15 August 1956). In arguing for a survey into women's lives at *Varteks*, local activists worked with the trade unions and other sociopolitical organizations, making skilful use of socialist discourse and arguing that after the equal part they took as comrades in the liberation movement women deserved wider support to help them achieve equality in their workplaces (*Pomoć radnoj ženi*, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 15 August 1956). Such appeals to the spirit of the struggle for liberation and for women's equality were rooted in many local activists' backgrounds as partisans and members of the AFŽ during the Second World War, as we shall see later in this section.

Another field in which *Varteks* activists were keenly committed was that of women's healthcare, particularly contraception. *Varteks* set up a gynaecological



clinic offering advice on contraception, as well as on eye-care, dentistry, psychiatry, and physical therapy. The clinic was also equipped with a laboratory (Općinska konferencija, Izvještaj sa održanog sastanka odbora žena Varaždinske industrije svile, 14 October 1959). The contraceptive advice centre was opened in cooperation with the Woman of Varaždin society in May 1959 and offered free contraception to any worker who wanted it. The women could also obtain advice on all aspects of pre- and post-abortion health. Before the centre opened its doors, more than 30 lectures on abortion had been held for women working at *Varteks*, especially stressing the harmfulness to women's health of suddenly-provoked abortion, in light of the continued common use of abortion as a means of birth control (Zaštita zdravlja žena radnica, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 1 August 1959). Certainly, more research in the archives is needed to uncover how ordinary women experienced reproductive politics in Yugoslavia, particularly in relation to the gap between public policies and everyday reproductive practices (Bogdan 2019). Women's healthcare indeed continued to be a privileged area of women's activism into the late socialist period.

The KDAŽ, which succeeded the SŽD in 1961, worked along similar lines at local level, while its federal and republican leaders lobbied for legislative reform at federal level. The KDAŽ, in comparison to its predecessors, was conceived as a *tribina*, a platform of experts and interested parties. Great efforts were made to include prominent experts and scientists on its management boards, who would work with party and trade union delegates at local level. The Croatian section of the organization was significant for its lobbying for legislation guaranteeing maternity leave and funding for childcare. The Croatian Social Plan of 1972 included expansion of family planning services and maternity protection, which were by then legally binding for all enterprises (Dobos 1983). The possibilities for KDAŽ local activism increased from 1971 onwards as the Yugoslav economy underwent a reform of its working organizations based on the reinforcement of the so-called “basic organizations of associated labour” (BOALs). Workers gained increasing autonomy over profit redistribution in their self-managed workplaces, while sociopolitical organizations were strengthened at BOAL level, including local KDAŽ sections. The strengthening of the BOALs' legal obligation to “provide regular, timely, truthful content to workers in an accessible manner” (Archer and Musić 2017, 11) applied equally to women and meant that the activities of *aktivni žena* were frequently reported in workplace periodicals. In 1974 a survey led by the republican KDAŽ in Croatia concluded that there were 490 *aktivni žena* in BOALs and 580 *aktivni žena* in self-managed local communes (*mjesna zajednica*) across Croatia (Roško, Što pokazuje analiza rada aktivna žena,

*Žena*, 1975). Their activities varied widely from encouraging women to take part in local elections to offering preventive medicine, especially contraception and cancer screening. The *aktivni žena* continued to deal with women's access to various welfare resources such as housing, social restaurants, transport, subsidized holidays, and childcare—focusing specifically on single mothers. They also organized 8 March celebrations and commemorations of the antifascist resistance in cooperation with veterans' associations (SUBNOR).

Despite such strong activism in the 1970s, the KDAŽ experienced many of the issues that the AFŽ had already faced three decades earlier, namely the lack of cooperation by men in the SSRN and trade unions, and the feeling that women were “left on their own” to discuss matters particularly important to them (Bonfiglioli 2014). The best results, it was argued, were achieved by local KDAŽ sections when their leaders were authoritative in both the party and the trade union. In addition, it was proving difficult to mobilize younger activists in rural areas, especially in places where the only existing committed activists were elderly women who had previously been active in the AFŽ (Roško, Što pokazuje analiza rada aktivna žena, *Žena*, 1975). Like the AFŽ activists in the 1950s, the KDAŽ activists in the 1970s had to defend the idea that women's labour was a prerequisite for women's emancipation and for overall social progress, against those who considered that maternity costs made female labour unproductive and who believed that women's work outside the home posed a threat to women's traditional family duties (Problemi društvenog položaja žene, *Žena*, Dabčević Kučar, 1970). Broadly speaking, the KDAŽ activists in *Varteks* and in Varaždin grappled with similar difficulties in a municipality where very many women were employed in industry, and where problems therefore arose such as the question of childcare which we address in the following section. The same problems affected not only Varaždin but many of the surrounding villages too, where women mainly worked in exploitative conditions in all types of farming. In view of the persistent discrimination against women both in the workplace and in municipal institutions, the work of the KDAŽ was often called into question, while the AFŽ remained an important reference point. Until the early 1970s, notably, there were discussions about the need for an autonomous women's organization, as many local activists were not satisfied with the KDAŽ being part of the SSRN.

During a high-profile 1971 intermunicipal meeting held in Varaždin, which included the president of KDAŽ Croatia, Marija Šoljan Bakarić, various activists lamented the fact that too few women were elected to local institutions and insisted that better results had been achieved when the AFŽ had been active as an

autonomous organization rather than as a “tribune” of the SSRN. Marija Strbad was particularly vocal in supporting this stance. Born in 1912 in Senj and a humanities and social sciences graduate, Strbad had been a partisan in the national liberation movement and had worked as the director of the Pedagogical Academy in Čakovec and had moved to Varaždin to lead the local National Liberation Movement Museum. A subsequent position saw her as director of the People’s University “Braća Ribar”. She was active in sociopolitical organizations such as the KDAŽ in Varaždin (Općinska konferencija, Prijedlog za nagradu, 8 April 1970).

Other local activists called for an autonomous women’s organization and further proposed to rename the KDAŽ *Savez Žena Hrvatske* (Women’s Alliance of Croatia) (Zapisnik, KDAŽ Varaždin, 23 September 1971). Even KDAŽ president Šoljan Bakarić conceded that women’s participation had fallen to rather low levels and that women were increasingly discriminated against in the workplace, and that for that reason a strong women’s organization was needed to defend women’s rights. Other speakers denounced the lack of promotion of women in workplaces such as *Varteks*, and the demeaning depiction of women in advertisements. Strbad concluded the meeting by stating that there was a clear agreement that things must change, and that the KDAŽ “had to become autonomous and work in a different way”, rather than under the patronage of the SSRN (Zapisnik, KDAŽ Varaždin, 23 September 1971). Such debates between local and republican leaders, preserved in the archives, highlight the existence of grassroots initiatives and the importance of a decentralised, federal system in allowing multiple perspectives on matters of gender.

The archival sources show that the continuity between the AFŽ and its successor organizations was not only discursive and organizational but biographical too, with many former partisans and AFŽ founders continuing their activism in the subsequent decades. Such continuities in activists’ biographical trajectories, from the Second World War to late socialism, have hardly been studied except in specific cases such as that of partisan and activist Rajka Borojević (Herbst 2012). In the case of Varaždin, many KDAŽ members were women in their 50s and 60s with pasts in the partisan movement and the AFŽ. One archival source is particularly enlightening on how local AFŽ members continued working well into the 1970s as KDAŽ members, despite advancing age and, for many of them, ill health. During the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the liberation of the city, it was proposed that Štefica Mađarić should be given Honorary Citizenship of Varaždin, alongside 20 other activists who were nominated to receive honorary diplomas for their services to the community (see also the biographies of KDAŽ activists Milka Basić,

Terezija Lubek and Marija Strbad). The biography of the proposed recipient went as follows:

Štefica Mađarić was born in Ludbreg in 1908. This comrade was a prominent war fighter in the region and holds the 'Spomenica 1941'. During the war she distinguished herself as a political worker and has continued her sociopolitical activity throughout the postwar period right up to today, despite her advanced years and deteriorating health. She was always elected to positions of responsibility, retiring as president of the District Board of SSRN Varaždin. Mađarić always did every job conscientiously; she was tireless in her work, accessible to everyone, honest, and selfless. And that is how she is known and respected throughout our region: simple, diligent, principled—and modest. Her work did not stop after retirement, for she remained active, becoming involved in the sociopolitical work of the SSRN in her local community, and especially in the work of the Conference for the Social Activity of Women. With all her long-term work as well as constant engagement in the Conference for Social Activity of Women in mind, we believe that in this jubilee year, as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Varaždin, comrade Štefica Mađarić truly deserves the title, 'Honorary Citizen of Varaždin'. (Općinska konferencija, Prijedlog za nagradu, 8 April 1970)

This biographical note and the other examples mentioned above highlight the continuous and long-standing activism of many women who had taken part in the partisan struggle and who had been postwar members of the AFŽ. The generation of women who became politicized during the resistance retained their authority in state socialist women's organizations right up to the late socialist period, and they continued to mobilise in women's sections at the local level. In the following pages we shall highlight KDAŽ activists' advocacy for the improvement of childcare facilities in Varaždin. Their engagement challenges the received wisdom that the "woman question" with its ramifications was considered "solved" after the end of the AFŽ.

## The Mobilisation from Early to Late Socialism to Improve Childcare Facilities

The first postwar Yugoslav Constitution of 1946 included a provision (Section 24) which stated that women had a right to special protection as working mothers: "The state especially protects the interests of mothers and children by the establishment of maternity hospitals, children's homes and day nurseries and by the right of mothers to a leave with pay before and after childbirth" (Odluka Ustavotvorne skupštine FNRJ o proglašenju Ustava FNR Jugoslavije, *Službeni list FNRJ*, 2 October 1946). Municipal kindergartens were financed from the social fund which included money for education and upbringing. The importance of the establishment of nurseries and kindergartens was discussed by members of the AFŽ as early

as 1948 when the “Decree on the Establishment of Nurseries and Kindergartens” was passed by the Yugoslav government. According to that Decree

the matter of nurseries and kindergartens, for the accommodation of children, is primarily a matter for the workers themselves but, of course, also a matter for the AFŽ [...]. This mass organization of ours should be of help in developing the widest and most numerous network of children’s institutions for the protection of mothers and children. (Značajna mjera u oslobođenju žena za rad u privredi je osnivanje dječjih jaslica, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 14 October 1948)

Those activities were continued by the heirs of AFŽ who worked in the KDAŽ in Varaždin.

Every working mother needs assistance with childcare and the records of the fund of the KDAŽ at the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb give insights into various provisions for nurseries, kindergartens and child allowance. Trade unions slowly started addressing childcare matters in the 1950s and encountered numerous challenges in their efforts to secure appropriate facilities for working women and their children. For example, archival sources related to the employment of women from 1947 to 1961 reveal the challenges faced by children’s institutions in early socialism. Sometimes, kindergartens were built in remote places, and women had to face a long walk with their children to the kindergarten. There were other problems too, such as when sanitary inspectors banned the operation of the nursery within the “Chrome” factory in Zagreb because “their accommodation was such that even adults could hardly stand the stench spread by that factory, and it has an even more harmful effect on children” (KDAŽ, *Zaposlenost u zemlju 1947–1961*, *Zaključci Plenuma*, 2 June 1962). Similar safety shortcomings caused other nurseries and kindergartens to be closed by the trade union council. The sources from the state archives deal mostly with problems at the republican level or related to the capital, Zagreb. Once again, if we are to differentiate our knowledge of how the same processes developed elsewhere, in this case Varaždin, we must look for the answers in the material preserved in the local archives.

According to the records of the Women’s Society of Varaždin, the first initiatives to open kindergartens and nurseries in the city were made in the late 1950s. From 1955 onwards the *Varteks* factory provided first babysitting services to its employees, and then in September that year an after-school facility for school children. According to the *Varteksov vjesnik*, “working parents, especially working mothers, were greatly relieved by the opening of the after-school facility, because children will do their schoolwork under the supervision of a professional teacher, and spend their free time in interesting games” (Ponovno otvoreno dječje obdanište, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 20 September 1955). Still, one question remained: what to do with those children who were too young for school and were therefore

unable to attend the after-school facilities which were intended solely for older children? That was indeed the precise point occupying the women's society during the late 1950s, which dealt with the need for material support, including childcare, of single mothers especially. According to a 1958 report on the work of women at *Varteks*, the factory employed 218 single mothers, amounting to 4.7% of all employees, certainly not a negligible number. The single mothers were then allowed to adjust their working times and were given financial assistance from trade union funds and the funds of the SŽD/KDAŽ (Općinska konferencija, KDAŽ, Izvještaj o radu ženu u poduzeću "Varteks", 27 November 1958).

Local activists came up with the idea of opening a nursery to take in very young children as weekly boarders, realizing that it would be helpful if parents did not have to carry sleepy children to the nursery at dawn, something obviously most beneficial to single mothers. The children could go home on Saturdays, and parents could visit their children every day and spend their free time together with them (Problemi žena-radnica, *Varteksov vjesnik*, 21 Nov 1959). It was also suggested that it would be a good thing to open day and night kindergartens in the workers' settlements outside the city centre. The proposal to keep the nursery and kindergartens open all day and night seemed especially appealing given that there were "many working women employed in the *Varteks* factory with illegitimate children, who are left to take care of themselves." However, at that time, the People's Committee of the Varaždin District did not support such an initiative, despite the commitment of the women's society. The reason was simple—such a kindergarten would be too expensive (Općinska konferencija, Zapisnik, 2 April 1959).

A permanent source of funds for the normal activities of kindergartens was established in Yugoslavia by the adoption in 1960 of the Basic Law on the Financing of Education. A subsequent Law on the Financing of Certain Forms of Social Activity of Children (1967) established municipal funds for direct child protection, funds which were used to construct, adapt, equip and maintain pre-school institutions (Lipovac 1985, 68). In Varaždin, a Municipal Fund for Immediate Child Protection was established in 1968 with dedicated resources collected from contributions of 0.2% from gross personal incomes. As the contributions increased subsequently, so did those of the Municipal Fund (Još šest novih vrtića, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 16 January 1975). However, the funds available were not always sufficient. In the year of the fund's establishment, the local KDAŽ addressed child protection more seriously, because members thought there had been a lot of talk about the problems but not much had been done to solve them. As they pointed out, in 1968 alone there were more than 2000 children of pre-school age in the town, but the overall capacity of existing childcare facilities was sufficient for only 205 of them. There were plans to build additional facilities, but actual work had

been constantly postponed and precisely because of that the local KDAŽ activists came to the following conclusion:

We firmly maintain the position that all these issues related to the immediate protection of children cannot be further postponed. We believe that some problems could have been solved earlier, that funds could have been found, but either there was a lack of understanding or a lack of concrete joint action. We must not forget that we, as a socialist community, have a duty to ensure an equal start in life for all children. [...] The Conference for the Social Activity of Women of the Municipality of Varaždin calls for the strong support of Comrade Tito's proposals and demands that the identified problems be resolved without delay, for society to care more about women's freedom, so that they can give more at work and in social life in general. (KDAŽ, Zapisnik, Dječja zaštita, 16 October 1968)

Once again, the local activists used socialist arguments to advance their demands, while linking better childcare provisions not only to children's rights but also to the full realisation of women's freedom and emancipation.

The lack of adequate childcare infrastructure was discussed again during the following year, 1969. Milka Basić, the president of the KDAŽ Varaždin, was especially engaged in the matter. Born in 1922 near Koprivnica, she had taken part in the National Liberation Movement from 1942 onwards and had been a party member since 1945. She settled in Varaždin in 1948, working there at various sociopolitical duties, notably as an educator in the Pioneers' House (*Pionirski dom*) where she founded a puppet theatre and a pioneers' theatre for children. She organized pioneers' publications and led the "Our Children" society (*Društvo Naša djeca*) in the local villages. In 1957 she became director of the Household Improvement Centre (*Centar za unapređenje doma*) where she worked until 1967 when she retired due to ill health. However, even after her retirement she stayed active in sociopolitical organizations. Since 1942, when she had taken up the role of first president of the AFŽ in the village of Velika Mučna some 50 km south of Varaždin, she had worked continuously in the local AFŽ, SŽD and then KDAŽ (Općinska konferencija, Prijedlog za nagradu, 8 April 1970).

Basić spoke about childcare with the work collective of the "Ratimir Herceg" kindergarten and with the municipal conference of the SSRN. During those meetings she emphasized the difficulties faced by single mothers employed at *Varteks*. She pointed out that most of them were semi-skilled workers whose average monthly incomes were far too low for them to be able to afford to pay large sums of money to other people to look after their children while they were at work (Djetinjstvo bez dječjih ustanova, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 30 Apr 1969). In fact, in 1970 the matter of kindergartens became one of the most pressing problems in Varaždin. Some parents pointed out that children who were successfully placed in kindergartens were privileged, because the only way to enrol them was through personal

recommendations. That year, women from almost all major labour organizations demanded that the construction of kindergartens should be prioritized and placed at the forefront of non-economic investments. Franjo Petković, director of the Varaždin Silk, Clothing and Umbrella Industry (*Varaždinska industrija svile, konfekcije i kišobrana*, VIS) emphasized that the position of female workers was difficult because they had no one to leave their children with when they left for work. According to *Varaždinske vijesti*, at that time “it became a daily practice for working mothers to be forced to beg their managers to let them go home for an hour or two, just to check on their children, who were left to themselves while their parents were at work” (*Velike brige za najmanje, Varaždinske vijesti*, 18 March 1970). The situation in *Varteks* was similar given that its working collective employed more than 200 single mothers, half of whom had two or more children.

In order to relieve single mothers—and families in which both husband and wife were employed in the factory—at the initiative of the work collective of the “Ratimir Herceg” kindergarten, Varaždin’s KDAŽ and the Municipal Centre for Social Work, the upgrading of the kindergarten finally began in 1970, and the construction of two more kindergartens was planned (*Velike brige za najmanje, Varaždinske vijesti*, 18 March 1970). Such improvements were financed by the Fund for Immediate Child Protection, and the Varaždin KDAŽ, together with the Council of Kindergartens and members of the work collective, as well as the local press which was also invested in the expansion of the space for pre-school children. The upgrade of the “Ratimir Herceg” kindergarten was extremely important because 125 places were reserved for families with larger numbers of children, single parents, families with difficult housing conditions, and parents on low incomes. There were two paediatricians at the kindergarten to take expert care of the children’s health, and with such organization and monitoring the kindergarten indeed met the needs of parents, including working mothers, who no longer had to leave work to queue up at the medical centre (*Općinska konferencija, Dječji vrtić Ratimir Herceg*, 13 November 1971).

Despite the opening of the new “Ratimir Herceg” kindergarten premises, however, there were still not enough places for all the parents who wished to enrol their children, and the construction of new kindergartens or expansion of existing ones was still urgently necessary. Furthermore, as the following source reveals, differences between the town of Varaždin and the surrounding villages persisted:

In our villages, the upbringing of children is left to great-grandmothers, or the children are on the streets or at home without parental supervision, because the parents are working. I find that working women would be overjoyed to have children stay in school after the regular teaching hours (extended stay) or to be able to place them in preschool. (*Općinska konferencija, Zapisnik*, 19 October 1970)



In the same document, activist Lela Lončar commented on the problems of women from rural areas. She argued that the villages should increase the Child Protection Fund to invest in kindergartens, because *Varteks* also employed many women from the rural areas who would have benefited from them. Precisely because of all the above, the Varaždin KDAŽ, led by Milka Basić, concluded that the programme for the needs of child protection in the municipality of Varaždin should be developed, notably by investing in pre-school institutions which would include school kitchens as a way of improving children's nutrition, for in rural areas especially many children were malnourished (Općinska konferencija, Zapisnik, 19 October 1970).

From the report of another discussion related to child protection, it is evident that the KDAŽ activists also advocated one-time assistance for all newborns, through cash payments or packages containing the most necessary standard equipment. They were also very keen on child allowance, which they believed everyone was entitled to, not only employees of state enterprises. KDAŽ president Milka Basić, notably, spoke about the unfair distribution of child allowances, which privileged the children of employed parents over those of farmers. It was also proposed that single-parent families receive a 50% higher allowance (Općinska konferencija, Neposredna dječja zaštita, 28 April 1971). At the session of the presidency of the KDAŽ Varaždin in May 1972, there was yet another discussion of fund-raising for the construction and equipment of kindergartens in the Varaždin county. On that occasion it was agreed to appeal to various organizations for support, given that kindergartens as an institution and the Fund for Immediate Child Protection lacked sufficient resources. Among others, the *Varteks* and VIS factories contributed to the fund collection and the women employed at VIS donated 24,000 dinars for kindergartens, money originally intended for their 8 March gifts (Doprinosom pomoći dječjim vrtićima, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 28 October 1972).

The grassroots pressure from parents, working mothers and the Varaždin KDAŽ was ultimately successful, with a new, fully equipped kindergarten opening in 1973 (Otvorenje 1. rujna, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 26 July 1973). Then, in 1975 the newly established Association for the Social Care of Children in the Municipality of Varaždin (*Zajednica društvene brige o djeci općine Varaždin*) adopted a five-year plan to open six more new kindergartens, both in the town and in the surrounding villages. According to the plan all children of single mothers were to be provided with accommodation in kindergartens, and children of poorer families would be given more chance of obtaining places. It is important to emphasize that the municipal section of the KDAŽ worked on the programme together with the municipal Trade Union Council as a stakeholder in the social care for children (Još šest novih vrtića, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 16 January 1975). The five-year plan was

launched in 1975 and progressed as expected, so that work was begun on two new kindergartens in March 1978—and they were completed (Dva nova dječja vrtića, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 2 March 1978). Another facility was added in 1979. In the end, three new kindergartens were built out of six that were originally planned. The lack of kindergartens in the rural areas of Varaždin was addressed in another way too, through the ingenious idea of a “mobile kindergarten” in the form of a bus which visited the surrounding villages from 1976 onwards (Figure 1). The interior of the bus was fitted out with all the necessary aids and items, as well as two teachers (U dječjim vrtićima. Ni mjesta više, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 7 October 1976). At the end of April 1987, the 10th anniversary of the founding of this mobile kindergarten was celebrated:

Every day, the three buses of the “Ratimir Herceg” kindergarten with their teachers go to the local communities within the municipality. These are mobile kindergartens, that is special-purpose buses, which have been going to sites outside Varaždin for 10 years in order to gather pre-school children. (10-godišnjica pokretnog vrtića Ratimir Herceg, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 30 April 1987)

U dječjim vrtićima

## Ni mjesta više

Već unatrag nekoliko godina, jedan od najizraženijih problema s kojima se susreće SZS za društvenu brigu o djeci predškolskog uzrasta i roditeljska zajednica Dječjeg vrtića „Ratimir Herceg“ u Varaždinu, su primani kapaciteti za boravak djece u ovim dječjim ustanovama. Petogodišnjim programom razvoja društvene brige o djeci predškolskog uzrasta, uz odobrenje koje je izdano od Aleja 8. maja, te uz proširenje, odnosno dogradnju dječjeg vrtića na Banfici, predviđena je na području grada, samo gradnja još jednog vrtića, za koji do sada još nije određena lokacija. Da je u tom smislu situacija dosta složena, i da treba razmisliti o novim kapacitetima reši su nam Stanica Meševi, tank SZS i Đurđica Horvat, v. d. direktora Dječjeg vrtića. U razgovoru oni su nam ukazali na još neke dosta izražene probleme s kojima se susreću u radu, kao i o naporima da se u postojećim uvjetima, stvore nove mogućnosti oblika odgoja i obrazovanja djece predškolske dobi.

**ZBORNICI POSTALE – RADNE PROSTORIE**

U dječjim vrtićima na području grada, trenutno boravi više od 300 malšana. U SZS za društvenu brigu o djeci predškolskog uzrasta i

daje stizu prijave roditelja, koji se nadaju da će im djetić biti primljeno u vrtić. Trenutno nema mjesta, jer su svi mogući kapaciteti u vrtićima popunjeni. Da bi se nekako pomoglo roditeljima, i uzeo još jedan broj djece, s 15 mjesta, naknadno je uključeno u vrtić još oko 70 malšana, a za tu svrhu, i zbornice odgovajale, prevozne, u radne prostorije. To je sve, što se za sada moglo učiniti. Ostalo je još 50 prijava za djecu jaslične dobi – mišđu od tri godine, i približno stotini broj djece za ostale predškolske grupe.

Među govornjima situacija otkriva se u studenome, kada će se prvotni oblog, novo-sagrađeni dio vrtića na Banfici, koji će moći primiti oko 80 djevojčica i dječaka. A isto tako, s posebnim se interesom otkriva gradnja novog objekta – dječjeg vrtića koji je planiran u Gortanovoj ulici. Njegovu gradnju predviđa se početkom sljedeće godine.

**NOVI OBlici RADA**

Samoopravna interesna zajednica društvene brige o djeci predškolskog uzrasta u suradnji s radnom zajednicom Dječjeg vrtića trenutno, obavlja niz priprema za provođenje novih oblika rada s djecom, koja još nisu počela dječje vrtića. Tako će od 1. studenoga početi

provodeći tako zvanog „mini-programa“ za djecu od šest do sedam godina starosti. Ovak bi program ukupno trajao 150 sati, jednodnevno u grupama, koje će djecu okupljale poslijepodne, s ciljem da se djeci, budućim predškolkama, omoguću upoznavanje gradiva prvog razreda osnovne škole. Ovisno o broju djece, formirati će se grupe s određenim brojem nastavnih sati u dječjim vrtićima na Banfici, u Kozarčevoj, Aleja osmog maja i Trakoškarskog ulici.

**ZA „MINI-PROGRAM“ PRLJAVE U MJESEJNIM ZAJEDNICAMA**

Valno je reći, da je ovaj „mini-program“ ili stjecanje osnovnog predznanja za polazak u prvi razred, za djecu, odnosno roditelje besplatan i da troškove snosi Samoopravna interesna zajednica. Roditelji, međutim, moraju što prije, za svoje djetić dostaviti prijavu mjesnoj zajednici na području koje oni startuju, ili aktivnima u svojoj mjesnoj zajednici, kako bi se znalo koliko će djece biti uključeno za organiziranje ovakvog oblika predškolskog odgoja.

**U SELA – POKREJNI Dječji VRTIĆ**

S prvim studenom, isto tako, starta, po prvi puta na



Ovaj „veseli autobus“ pokretni je dječji vrtić, koji će startati s 1. studenom ove godine na području nekoliko seoskih mjesnih zajednica

našim području – specijalni autobus, tako zvan „pokretni dječji vrtić.“ On će obilaziti sela, Zamlatku, Novakovec, Lužan, Beletinac, Ludinac, Črešnjevo, Tužno, Vinica, Breg i Jarko. Za sada, odlazit će u ona mjesta, sela i zaseoke, u kojima postoje i najizraženije potrebe za predškolskim odgojem i obrazovanjem djece. U autobusu je prostor funkcionalno riješen i opremljen svim potrebnim pomagalima i predmetima, kao i jedna od uobčajenijih radnih prostorija za boravak i odgoj djece u vrtićima. Ovak će pokretni vrtić, koji poseti, kadro i to, da se u Dječjem vrtiću priprema nova orga-

nizacija rada s djecom, pa će tako u skoro vrijeme, brigu o djeci uključivo voditi odgovajale u radnom vremenu od 5.30 do 16. sati. Uz odgovajale, bit će i njegovateljice, koji će, od sada, više brige posvetiti djeci u mjesnim grupama, odnosno djeci u dobi od 2,5 do četiri godine.

U samoupravnom konstituiranju, radna zajednica Dječjeg vrtića, koja bori već sada više od 50 zaposlenih, u dogledno će vrijeme učiniti veliki korak naprijed. Kad se za to stvore uvjeti, ona će preiasti u organizaciju udružnog rada, sa nekoliko svojih samostalnih OOUJ-a.

Nevinka Suhić

Figure 1: The “merry bus”, as the caption beneath the photograph has it.

Source: “U dječjim vrtićima. Ni mjesta više”, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 7 October 1976.

Courtesy: National and University Library in Zagreb.

Most of the time, the buses stood in a village so that the children could spend time playing while under supervision. In addition, these unusual kindergartens offered activities such as physical exercise, recitations, walks and learning about nature. Indeed, apart from being mobile the bus kindergartens were not too different from the others. By 1987 they had gathered 226 children from various villages.

However, despite the innovative practice of gathering village children into buses, the solution ultimately proved unsatisfactory for rural parents and local activists alike. Although a “kindergarten on wheels” sounds like a fun idea, especially for the children, a proper kindergarten building was clearly necessary, a point well made in 1988 by KDAŽ activists and the *aktiv žena* in the local community of Majerje:

The local community, and above all the local women, are committed to use the available public space for the activities that are indispensable for modern life, with the help of the municipal bodies, organizations and institutions. In the first place, the social care of pre-school children certainly deserves attention. In Majerje, for ten years now there has been only a mini-programme of 150 hours, which takes place in a mobile kindergarten-bus. At first this activity was welcomed, but now the women’s section of the local community of Majerje proposes that the programme be ‘moved’ to the appropriate space of the community centre, which should be equipped in preparation by the ‘Ratimir Herceg’ kindergarten. [...] The space in the community centre provides far greater opportunities for that than a dilapidated bus, and the investment would be minimal. (Rješenja na vidiku, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 14 April 1988)

That quotation shows that while the mobile kindergartens were welcomed as a solution in 1976, 10 years later the local activists were clamouring for proper daycare facilities in the rural areas too. Access to affordable childcare continued to be difficult in the city of Varaždin, especially in the 1980s when sustained economic recession meant that kindergartens became too expensive for most parents. It is worth pointing out here that not all parents received the same subsidy, which ranged from 25 to 90%, depending on family income (Prioritet širem društvenom interesu, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 8 April 1982). According to a 1984 KDAŽ report two kindergartens were actually closed, while the others operated at reduced capacity, due to parents’ inability to cover the costs. Therefore, the president of the KDAŽ recommended to pre-school institutions not to increase their fees (KDAŽ, Izvještaj, 7 February 1986). However, it seems that Varaždin’s kindergartens and nurseries ignored the KDAŽ recommendation, because even as the subsidy was reduced the fees rose. For example, in 1986 the cost of nursery places increased by as much as 193%, and for kindergartens by 151% (Ispravljanje krive Drine, *Varaždinske vijesti*, 13 February 1986). As for the mobile kindergartens, we found the last trace of them in a 1991 article from *Varaždinske vijesti*, when one of the buses was listed for sale. But by then anyway, women’s struggle for welfare services was taking place in postsocialist, independent Croatia.

## Conclusion

This study's exploration of local archival sources from the mid-1950s until the late 1980s has shown that women's activism in the industrial town of Varaždin and its surroundings defied the "received wisdom" about women's lives and activism in socialist Yugoslavia, in particular the idea that there was no autonomous or grassroots mobilization to address such matters as gender discrimination, gender violence and women's double burden of productive and reproductive work. In fact, archival sources testify to a variety of campaigns aimed at improving the position of women—particularly single mothers—in the *Varteks* textile mill, and at expanding childcare facilities both within the factory and in the entire municipality. Local women's organizations actively advocated women's rights, and addressed the pressing question of women's emancipation on an everyday basis.

Like the AFŽ activists of the 1950s, the KDAŽ activists of the 1970s defended the idea that women's work outside the home and support for working women in the form of adequate welfare facilities was not only a precondition for women's emancipation, but was just as much a tenet of general social progress. Specifically in the case of Varaždin, it was in fact former AFŽ members who continued to lead the local activist scene into the 1970s, which also counters the dominant historical interpretation that women's activism ceased after the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953. The sources used in this study show that the SŽD/KDAŽ inherited the values of the AFŽ and after 1953 continued its work, despite the "passivization" observed after its dissolution and incorporation into the broader SSRN.

The issues dealt with by the successor organisations remained topical in the 1980s too, when lasting economic recession placed additional pressure on welfare resources. Activists responded to the demands of their times and their localities, something which becomes clear only when archival research is conducted at the municipal and workplace levels. The activities of the KDAŽ have been largely forgotten since socialism's demise—research in those local archives is therefore all the more relevant to recreating an understanding of the liveliness of past debates on women's rights, and the everyday engagement of activists such as Milka Basić, Marija Strbad, Štefica Mađarić, Terezija Lubek among many others. Their legacy remains both a reference point and an important asset to women's activism today.

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