

## Not an Odd-Bird, But an Augury. Yugoslav Youth Press in the Turmoil of 1960s and 1970s

Nikola Bakovic

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

Contact: Nikola.Bakovic@gcsc.uni-giessen.de

### Abstract:

The book analyzes Yugoslav youth press in the 1960s and 1970s through the conceptual lens of alternative media, originating in Western media studies. Three Yugoslav peculiarities informed the development of this media genre: self-management doctrine, introduction of market elements into economy, and decentralization of the federation. By comparing the youth media outlets in the republican centers of Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana, the author points out the crucial role of youth press in 1968 revolts, as well as the contextually induced ideological differences between the three mediascapes. The book also analyzes the blossoming of the punk scene and its social function during the 1970s, and important design-oriented innovations that this type of media introduced to the Yugoslav public. With its innovative methodology and diligently researched sources, this monograph represents a welcome addition to the burgeoning field of media studies dealing with the Cold War era.

### How to cite:

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Zubak, Marko: *The Yugoslav Youth Press (1968-1980). Student Movements, Youth Subcultures and Alternative Communist Media.* Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2018. 371 pages, 50 EUR. ISBN: 978-953-7963-74-3.

**Abstract:**

The book analyzes Yugoslav youth press in the 1960s and 1970s through the conceptual lens of alternative media, originating in Western media studies. Three Yugoslav peculiarities informed the development of this media genre: self-management doctrine, introduction of market elements into economy, and decentralization of the federation. By comparing the youth media outlets in the republican centers of Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana, the author points out the crucial role of youth press in 1968 revolts, as well as the contextually induced ideological differences between the three mediascapes. The book also analyzes the blossoming of the punk scene and its social function during the 1970s, and important design-oriented innovations that this type of media introduced to the Yugoslav public. With its innovative methodology and diligently researched sources, this monograph represents a welcome addition to the burgeoning field of media studies dealing with the Cold War era.

Since the end of the Cold War, significant scholarship has developed around the topics of media functioning and information production on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. Equally prolific has been the research on the 1968 turmoil in Europe, particularly in the wake of the currently ongoing semi-centenary. Yet Marko Zubak, researcher of the Institute of History in Zagreb, brings these two themes together in an idiosyncratic way by examining youth press in that Bloc-defying odd-bird of socialism, Yugoslavia. In this book, besides filling the apparent blind spot of (post-)Yugoslav historiography, Zubak tries to remedy the still lingering ghettoization of socialist case studies in much of scholarly research.

The author abridges this epistemological divide by applying the decidedly Western conceptual lens of *alternative media* to Yugoslav youth press of the 1960s and 1970s. This type of media not only

serves to promote social change, but actively participates in it through its radical content and explicit experimentation in media form, its aesthetic dimension, production methods and relationship between audience and staff. The author presents four aspects of Yugoslav youth press: its target audience, transformative potential, democratic aspirations and links with mainstream media. Following the extensive introduction on socialist (primarily Soviet) theorization of 'press' and 'youth', Zubak compiles the (relatively meager) previous scholarship on Yugoslav youth press during socialism, and offers his own tentative classification of it, by differentiating between: mainstream commercial youth journals, academic 'thick' journals, specialized cultural magazines, social-cultural (bi-)monthlies, and central (bi-)weekly newspapers.

The 1960s proved to be a crucial decade for the development of Yugoslav youth press, most strikingly evidenced in legal changes allowing for greater freedom of expression. Three main factors informed this change: a doctrine of self-management, introduction of market elements through the 1965 economic reform that facilitated the increasingly profit-oriented configuration of media, and the steady decentralization of the federation, which caused significant divergences along republican lines (therefore necessitating Zubak's research scope to entail three different Yugoslav republican centers – Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana). In this period, youth press stopped acting as the Party's 'transmission belt' and started tackling different socially pressing topics, introducing a surprising plurality of voices and political visions. This paved the way for the decisive role that youth press played in fomenting and justifying the student revolt of 1968. However, by comparing journals published in the three cities, Zubak points out significant differences reflecting the political climates in the respective constituent republics. Belgrade press was most influenced by radical leftist leanings, eventually suffering a backlash from the state for trying to be more orthodox than the League of Communists itself. Zagreb's 68ers movement quickly abandoned such leftist wavering and focused on the demands for further nationally-conceived decentralization, thus becoming part of the controversial 'Croatian Spring' and accordingly earning much harsher treatment by the authorities after the movement's demise in 1971. Youth press in Ljubljana, on the other hand, followed its own path, which was primarily concerned with international problems, such as the postcolonial wars, yet was the boldest in questioning the official symbols.

Another empirical field presented in the book was the role of youth press in fostering the Yugoslav punk scene, showcased on examples of Ljubljana's *Radio Študent* and Zagreb's magazines *Pop-Ekspres* and *Polet*. In these outlets, the anti-establishment revolt shifted to the issues of generational conflict, thus successfully evading the authority's reprisals. The emergence of a home-grown punk movement helped youth journalists to reconcile their criticism of elite 'high' culture with their equally disdainful rejection of consumerist mass culture. The Zagreb punk scene, however, proved more prone to

coqueting with mainstream pop and rock genres, thus slowly approaching the mainstream trends, whereas the punk movement in Ljubljana remained more politicized and extreme, eventually laying foundations for civic groups with ecological, feminist/queer and pacifist agendas during the 1980s. The book ends with a brief analysis of the researched media's visual aspects (including the troubled development of the local comics scene), and the impact of youth press visual innovations for the later refashioning of mainstream media across the country.

The analyzed serial publications eventually underwent a threefold epilogue: complete termination of publication, return to standard role of Party's 'transmission belt', or the imitation of the conventional mainstream press forms. Despite the demise of its socio-political projects, the youth press left an important legacy as a laboratory for grooming a future journalistic cadre. Regarding the wider historical framework, Zubak sees the Yugoslav case rather as a portent of things to come in the rest of socialist Europe, than as a unique case (and, compared to the Soviet *samizdat* production, definitely not the most radical one). Hence, this study offers an important contribution to scholarly reconsiderations of the 'myth of Yugoslav exceptionalism', while acknowledging the *sui generis* traits of Yugoslav youth media. Zubak's application of an 'alternative media' model proves efficient in detecting diverse channels through which (more or less) heterodox opinions and cultural agendas could be articulated, whereas the comparison between three Yugoslav metropolises helps in grasping the intricate political, cultural and economic divergences within the complex, multi-national federal system. With such skillfully done methodological symbiosis of analytical concepts of Western media studies and socialist-stemming empirical material, this monograph represents an innovative addition to the burgeoning field of media studies dealing with the Cold War era.

**German Abstract:**

**Nicht die Ausnahme, sondern ein Omen. Jugoslawische Jugendpresse der 1960er und 1970er Jahre**

In der Monographie wird die jugoslawische Jugendpresse der 1960er und 1970er Jahre durch das aus der westlichen Medienforschung stammende Konzept *alternative media* analysiert. Drei jugoslawische Besonderheiten prägten die Entwicklung dieser Mediengattung: die Selbstverwaltungsdoktrin, Einführung der Semi-Marktwirtschaft und Dezentralisierung des Föderalstaates. Durch einen Vergleich der Jugendmedien in den drei größten urbanen Zentren (Belgrad, Zagreb und Ljubljana) weist der Autor auf ihre entscheidende Rolle in der 1968er Bewegung hin, sowie auf die kontext-abhängigen ideologischen Unterschiede zwischen den drei analysierten Republiken. Des Weiteren werden auch die gesellschaftliche Funktion der einheimischen Punk-Szenen in den 1970ern und die designbezogenen Neuerungen der Jugendpresse ausgewertet. Durch ihren innovativen methodologischen Ansatz und sorgfältig recherchiertes Quellenmaterial stellt Marko Zubaks Monographie einen wichtigen Beitrag zum boomenden Feld der Medienforschung des Kalten Krieges dar.

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