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ARTICLE

Without a Future: The Man-Making Project in Socialist Yugoslavia in the 1940–1980s

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ABSTRACT
The Yugoslav man-making project stands out as a distinctive phenomenon in the history of 20th-century Europe. The country sought to find its "own path" that would be different both from the Soviet model of communism and the Western model of capitalism. The attempt to envision an appealing future ultimately failed, plunging the country into a crisis of identity in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Yugoslavia's final years exemplified a "doubling" of the post-conflict condition as the country was still grappling with the legacy of the Second World War, now compounded by the rupture with the Soviet bloc. At the center of this study is the phenomenon of the Yugoslav man-making project—a unique vision of the man of the future that emerged at the intersection of communist ideology, multicultural heritage, and aspirations for European integration. This issue is examined through a four-component model that underpinned the construction of the desired human type, encompassing bodily, moral, aesthetic, and cognitive dimensions. Social institutions, including the Pioneer Organization and the education system, sought to cultivate traits aligned with the accepted vision of the future. The success of these efforts was expected to shape the future of Yugoslavia as a complex social entity.

KEYWORDS
man-making project, post-conflict culture, post-conflict situation, image of the future, disintegration of Yugoslavia

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Introduction

Every project begins with a vision of the future it hopes to bring about. In man-making projects, this vision takes the form of an ideal human prototype, defined across cognitive, moral, aesthetic, and physical dimensions. Such a model helps to organize extensive concrete information about the work of various social institutions involved in shaping this project. These efforts concerned not only the upbringing of children and young people in schools and the Pioneer Organization, but also certain aspects of adult re-education. The latter proved more difficult, since adults were outside the reach of children's organizations and schools. In such cases, efforts focused on shaping a new worldview, way of thinking, and bodily discipline through ideological, cultural, and sporting initiatives. All citizens were also made subjects for the transmission of the new communist morality and aesthetics. "In addition to the sociocultural norms of the industrial age, the communists propagated specific socialist values: the Marxist ideology, humanism, open-mindedness, solidarity, equality between the sexes, and the 'correct' way to live with regard to family life and morality" (Calic, 2019, p. 174).

An important concept in this study is the notion of the *post-war* (or *post-conflict*) period. Unlike the adverb *after*, which has a straightforward temporal meaning, the prefix *post-* carries a more ambivalent sense, as seen in terms such as *post-industrial society* or *postmodernism*. It signals both an end—a symbolic death of a phenomenon—and the beginning of a new order (Kruglova, 2024, p. 145). In the military sphere, there is an idea that a battle is won when one side begins to see itself as defeated, in other words, when it no longer envisions future victory or any acceptable outcome (for example, continuing resistance "to the last drop of blood" for a given cause). The Cold War was lost by the USSR and its allies the moment when the vision of a communist future, and the human project bound to it, ceased to function.

While victory often has many fathers, defeat is experienced alone and in a unique way. At the end of the 20th century, the Soviet man-making project, institutionalized in the Pioneer Organization, underwent several transformations.

This study focuses on various aspects of the man-making project in Yugoslavia, a country that found itself twice in post-conflict situations—after World War II and at the end of the Cold War, although Yugoslavia's involvement in the latter was not as deep as that of the USSR or the USA. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, rising interethnic tensions sparked a new conflict that eventually escalated into civil war. The vision of the future that the socialist sci-fi authors described, that propaganda posters promised would come "soon," and that children dreamed about, vanished. As a result, massive social institutions like the Pioneer Organization, whose purpose was to design and create humans for that future, became obsolete. Yugoslavia provides an example for studying all stages of the development of a human project, from its conception to its deployment and result. This country tried to act independently and not to look to any "big brother" to follow as an example at all stages of the project's life cycle. This desire for the uniqueness of its own human project collided with the reality that there were not enough resources and political will to achieve the desired future.

From Yugoslavia to Post-Yugoslavia

The new political elite of the Yugoslav state, immediately after coming to power, began to create a political system, forming a new economic and cultural policy. In the reality of post-war economic poverty and an unclear future, culture acquired a significance that it almost never had in Yugoslavia. The need for a radical change in all existing foundations of culture, primarily in education, science, art, and morality, was based on Lenin's idea that the rise and change of culture should follow the political transformation of the country, thereby completing the final reorganization of society. Such a systematically conducted cultural policy became the most important factor in the transformation of society and represented a diverse set of planned actions necessary for managing a huge cultural space, becoming an extremely important segment of the entire state policy. In the 1940s, the period of its early development, socialist Yugoslavia brought together a highly diverse mix of ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. For example, during the formation, Yugoslavia had different legal and cultural traditions in the field of education. Some of them were "heirs" of nationally independent states, such as the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Montenegro, while some were created in territories that were once part of great empires, such as the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary. Building such a state was a complex undertaking. The goal was to create a socialist country that would chart its own course without aligning with military-political blocs. Achieving this vision required a particular kind of person, one whose development would begin early in childhood. Organizing education and fostering a collective identity were therefore among the top priorities for Yugoslav authorities. The implementation of the set goals, both short-term and long-term, required the development of tools and methods that would lead to a change in the current situation. Since the bureaucratic-educational model of cultural policy was in effect, all the tools for its implementation were in the hands of the state. By the nature of their action, these tools were economic, political-legal, organizational, and value-ideological, and by the direction of action they were stimulating or repressive, which directly depended on the needs of the ruling political elite. One of the most important tools for the transformation of society was the human design within the framework of children's and youth organizations, such as the Pioneer Organization. Depending on the priority of the goal, all the tools of cultural policy were put in the function of encouraging or suppressing cultural activity. State cultural policy developed a number of incentive tools such as free education, scholarships, loans, development incentive plans, accessibility of all cultural programs to the widest possible range of consumers. However, these instruments were in the field of only one ideology, one system of values, so that any activity that contradicted one or another communist idea was carefully suppressed.

This analysis proceeds from the premise that "the problem of identity is the problem of breaking with one's past and repeatedly redefining it" (Kruglova & Pigin, 2024, p. 140; Trans. by Aleksandr Lunkov—A. L.). In the postwar years, Yugoslavia sought in many respects to adopt and apply the Soviet experience in state-building and social organization. According to Romanenko (2011), the Communist Party of

Yugoslavia did not merely follow the Soviet model of social building, but applied it in even harsher forms (p. 417).

In 1948–1949, a sharp conflict erupted between the USSR and Yugoslavia, blocking cooperation between the two countries for many years. In response, Yugoslavia quickly formulated the "Tito's ideas," which emphasized peaceful coexistence with capitalist states and independence in foreign policy. It should be noted, however, that the term "Tito's ideas" is a collective construct, reflecting not only Tito's personal views but also the policies and ideological positions developed collectively by the Yugoslav leadership and party apparatus. Edvard Kardelj is often regarded as the leading theorist of the Yugoslav communists, but Milovan Djilas and Boris Kidrič also played major roles in shaping Yugoslavia's ideology during its early postwar development. Later, Aleksandar Ranković, the Minister of State Security and subsequently Vice President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), became Kardelj's principal ideological rival. Where relevant, I am going to specify the particular authorship of individual ideas. "Tito's ideas" will refer to the composite "superposition" of views advanced by leading Yugoslav ideologues, which entered public consciousness in the form of a set of ideological constructs and theses.

In the context of our research, this rupture was twofold: it involved not only a break with the past but also a rupture in the future, manifested in serious contradictions with the USSR regarding the meaning and direction of the socialist project. What is meant here is the communist future in which the USSR could have served as both guide and principal ally. From that point on, however, Yugoslavia embarked on the path of building its "own" communism through self-managing socialism.

> The starting point of the man-making process is a shared past, which must be selected and its boundaries defined. In the case of Yugoslavia, this shared past was the Second World War, while more distant history was minimized in significance. (Kruglova & Pigin, 2024, p. 141; Trans. by A. L.)

It is worth adding that influence from the imagined future was also limited, as the vision of Yugoslavia's desired future remained highly abstract. In the deeply politicized Yugoslav society, cultural policy and human design was a type of regulation of class interests in culture. Decision-making on all issues of general cultural development was manifested through three stages: defining goals in culture; theoretical justification of the set goals; creation of conditions, tools, and methods for achieving these goals.

At the temporal boundary between socialist Yugoslavia and the independent states that emerged from it, such as Serbia, Croatia, and others, the concept of the Yugoslav socialist man-making project underwent a profound transformation. The direction of these changes had been shaped several decades earlier, well before the events discussed in this paper. Key preconditions included the continued existence of scout and other alternative pioneer children's organizations, a shift toward entertainment-oriented activities for children, and the break with the USSR, which led to the loss of the ideological framework that had previously guided the man-making project. Before the conflict with the USSR, the Yugoslav leadership had sought to

develop a system of school education. These efforts were grounded in Article 38 of the 1946 Yugoslav Constitution, which stated:

> In order to raise the general cultural standard of the people, the state ensures the accessibility of schools and other educational and cultural institutions to all classes of the people. The state pays special attention to the young and protects their education. Schools are state-owned. The founding of private schools may be permitted only by law, and their work is controlled by the state. Elementary education is compulsory and free. The School is separate from the Church. (The Constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, 1946)

This duality was embodied by the fact that Milovan Djilas, a prominent Yugoslav Communist Party official, Tito's comrade, and later Yugoslavia's most famous dissident, had a great influence on the Yugoslav man-making project. In Croatian academic literature, the beginning of the project is known as the Djilas reforms. At the 1949 3rd Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Djilas emphasized the need to educate a new socialist person in schools, a person who is free, courageous, with broad and diverse perspectives, and resistant to bureaucracy and rigid thinking (Duda, 2015, p. 66). This rhetoric was fully in line with the approach to designing the man-making project pursued in the USSR. Among other things, the Communist Party recognized that education and upbringing policy should be placed on a broader social basis, which, in addition to party members and representatives of rather weak mass organizations such as the Pioneers, would include specialists and experts, as well as parents. Thus, the party expressed its willingness to delegate some responsibility. In this case, the concept of a "new" or "happy" childhood can be discussed. Paradoxically, Djilas's report also contained an idea for a new cultural policy based on the rejection of the previous postulates of Yugoslav culture: Soviet influence and a negative attitude towards Western art. This shows that the political and cultural elite had a very ambitious vision of the cultural revival of the country. The basic strategy of the newly formed communist government was recognized in a truly humane vision of raising the cultural level of the entire country. This strategy was based on increasing the availability of all forms of culture for all inhabitants, both in the creation of cultural goods and in the consumption of each culture, the destruction of differences between the elite and other cultures, and the reduction of cultural inequality between the western and eastern parts of the country. The cultural revival achieved its true goal: the creation of new values, or, more precisely, the creation of a "new person."

However, less than a decade later, Djilas proposed the concept of the "new class," that is, the party bureaucracy class that exploited society in a new way. This idea had a major influence on the development of Yugoslav political thought. This "new class" was described as "a special stratum of bureaucrats, those who are not administrative officials, make up the core of the governing bureaucracy, or, in my terminology, of the new class" (Djilas, 1957, p. 43).

The continuity between the ideas of the "early" and "late" Djilas is quite clear. His key point was that the party bureaucracy embodied the negative tendencies of the

Yugoslav state, which had no place in the bright socialist future. This new bureaucratic elite, represented by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, began in cultural policy with a process of radical and abrupt change in the spiritual culture and the system of values and people's attitudes towards them. Radical changes, which were reflected in the violent change of consciousness of the entire population, had all the characteristics of a revolution. Even a special terminology was created, which today can be perceived with great fear. In constant concern for the consciousness of their subjects, the frightening terms "engineers of souls" and "raising the masses" were created. The state cultural policy of the new government did not understand tradition as a living part of history and as a sign of social and spiritual continuity. Tradition was consciously replaced by traditionalism. Thus, tradition became a synonym for the outdated and conservative, which hindered the creation of a new history. The new proletarian culture was not only necessary for changes in culture, but also affected all ideological and social relations. Every cultural action had to be class-based, uniquely Yugoslav and mass. This widespread desire for "Yugoslav uniqueness" often reached the point of absurdity.

According to contemporary Croatian researchers, the impetus behind the organizational reform stemmed from views that the children's organization had succumbed to a "rigid and stereotypical content of work" and the "introduction of excessive militant spirit and discipline," and therefore "it remains small in number and insufficiently popular among children" (Duda, 2015, pp. 30–31). A key organizational change was the removal of the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia (SSOJ) from its role as patron of the pioneer movement. Instead of Yugoslav "Komsomol members," the education of children and adolescents was to be implemented by "educated adults, teachers, and specialists … who would work with children on a voluntary basis" (Duda, 2015, p. 31). The SSOJ was the youth movement and a member organization of the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia (SSRNJ), thus being considered the "reserve of the Party." According to official documents, its main task was to strengthen the ideological and political unity of all young people and to support self-managing socialism. An important part of its activities involved organizing political, ideological, cultural, and sporting events, aimed at educating youth in the spirit of all-round personal development. The SSOJ operated through local organizations such as commissions, sections, clubs, and societies.

The separation of the Pioneer Organization from the next age-level youth association made a unified youth policy impossible. This division appears to have stemmed from a series of intra-party struggles among representatives of different national groups. As a result, the SSOJ leadership pursued an ambivalent youth policy, for example, by promoting rock and roll as the music of Yugoslav youth, a topic that will be examined in more detail below. The Initiative Council of the Union of Pioneers of Yugoslavia, which was created to coordinate all activities, described its mission as follows:

> The Union of Pioneers, as an educational and recreational extracurricular organization, should meet children's needs for games, entertainment, and physical education, and through organized cultural and socially useful work, develop in children initiative, creativity, a sense of collectivism, love for their

> country, national freedom-loving spirit, and all those traits and tendencies that contribute to the proper and comprehensive development of a person. (Duda, 2015, p. 31)

In addition to the Croatian researcher's perspective presented above, I would like to compare the pioneer oaths of the USSR and Yugoslavia. In the Soviet case, every version of the oath from 1922 onward included strongly ideological terms such as "working class," "communism," and "the Party." In Yugoslavia, by contrast, the only explicitly ideological reference was to "self-managing socialism."

The first known version of the Yugoslav pioneer oath appeared in 1946, and its wording was revised several times in the following decades. The most important change was the replacement of the word "oath" with "promise." For comparison, here are the English translations of the 1946 oath, the 1963 and 1974 promises:

> 1946: I pledge before the pioneer flag and before my fellow pioneers that I will learn and live as a faithful son of my homeland, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. I pledge to preserve the brotherhood and unity of our peoples, the freedom and independence of our homeland, acquired with the blood of our best sons. For the homeland, with Tito—forward! (Duda, 2015, p. 127; Trans. by A. L.)
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> 1963: Today, when I become a pioneer, I make a promise: That I will study and work diligently, respect my parents and elders, and be a faithful, honest comrade who keeps his word. That I will follow the path of the best pioneers, appreciate the glorious work of the partisans and the progressive people of the world, who want freedom and peace. That I will love my homeland, all its fraternal peoples, and build a new life full of joy and happiness. (Duda, 2015, p. 129; Trans. by A. L.)
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> 1975: Today, when I become a pioneer, I make a promise: That I will study and work diligently, respect my parents and teachers, and be a faithful, honest comrade who keeps his word. That I will follow the path of the best pioneers, appreciate the glorious work of the partisans and the progressive people of the world, who want freedom and peace. That I will love my homeland, self-governing socialist Yugoslavia, its fraternal peoples and nationalities, and build a new life full of happiness and joy. (Duda, 2015, pp. 130–131; Trans. by A. L.)

Importantly, the 1946 version was of Serbian origin, the 1963 version was Croatian, and the 1974 version was created by a federal working group. Without going into the details of textual analysis, it is worth noting that each successive version represented a greater departure from militant rhetoric, replacing ideological constructs with increasing references to ordinary moral categories. Notably, the 1974 version began to mention nationalities.

In 1983, the last known version of the pioneer promise made an attempt to strengthen the pan-Yugoslav rhetoric:

> Today, as I become a pioneer, I give my word of honor as a pioneer: that I will study and work diligently and be a good comrade; that I will love our self-governing

> homeland, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; that I will develop brotherhood and unity and the ideas for which Tito fought; that I will appreciate all the people of the world who want freedom and peace! (Duda, 2015, p. 133; Trans. by A. L.)

In this version, references to nationalities disappeared, ideological content such as the "ideas of Tito" reappeared, and the motif of struggle returned (Duda, 2015, pp. 126–134).

This approach was largely motivated by a desire to restore the childhood stolen by war. It became one of the post-conflict cultural responses to the horrors of war, occupation, and the partisan movement. For example, in the USSR, pioneer-heroes became central figures in a cult of hero worship: their names were memorized, streets in major cities were named after them, and their deeds were immortalized in art.

By contrast, Yugoslavia took a different path. Yugoslavia's most famous young partisans, such as Albina Mali-Hocevar, Dragan Kovacevic, and Lepa Radic, were important persons too; however, post-conflict Yugoslav culture generally separated the experience of childhood from the realities of war. Rather than emphasizing heroic child figures, the Yugoslav pioneer organization aimed to shape an abstract "good person" whose worldview lacked rigid ideological constants.

As shown below, this educational approach achieved some success and continues to influence how people in contemporary Serbia see themselves, although the temporal boundary between Yugoslavia and today's Balkan states is still perceived as a tragedy. Research indicates that the years 1990–1991, rather than any other later date, remain to be seen as the main turning point in recent Serbian history (Spasić, 2012, p. 581). In my view, however, interpretations of contemporary attitudes and the memories of former Yugoslav residents should be approached with some caution. The phenomenon of "Yugonostalgia" does not necessarily imply that a unified Yugoslav identity or the ideal of the "new man" was ever fully realized. As Lindstrom (2005) puts it,

> Yugonostalgia can be broadly defined as nostalgia for the fantasies associated with a country, the SFRY, which existed from 1945 to 1991. Fantasy is a crucial qualifier here. No necessary relationship exists between the temporally and spatially fragmented memories of a Yugoslav past and the present desires, expressed by and through Yugonostalgic representations of this past. (Lindstrom, 2005, p. 228)

Another example of a "Yugoslav artifact" in the collective consciousness of people in post-Yugoslav states is *omladinske radne akcije* [youth work campaigns], representing youth labor actions or brigades. The first examples of such initiatives apparently appeared in 1946–1947, during the construction of two economically important railways. It was at this time that the famous slogan appeared: "*Mi gradimo prugu, pruga gradi nas*" [We build the railway, the railway builds us]. In later periods, from the early 1960s onward in particular, youth labor actions became a tool for education. Their practical purpose was often lost, and questions increasingly arose

about what was more valuable: the transport, food, and accommodation of tens of thousands of young people in labor camps, or the work they performed (Pozharliev, 2022). Despite the gradual devaluation of their educational significance, this narrative remains alive in the collective memory of post-Yugoslav populations, to the point that it is sometimes invoked as a kind of archetype when describing contemporary political realities in Croatia.

In the following sections of this paper, I am going to outline features of the Yugoslav man-making project through the proposed philosophical-anthropological four-component model: cognitive, moral, aesthetic, and bodily.

"Faster, Higher, Stronger—Together(?)"

The project for creation of the "new person" relied, in the bodily component, on engaging individuals in sport and physical culture. After the war, sport ceased to be a privileged pastime and became a tool of the state. Almost immediately, "sport in Yugoslavia became a means of affirming the new state both to the global community and to the USSR" (Satybaldina, 2024, p. 66; Trans. by A. L.). Unlike professional sport, which retained its elite character, mass physical culture was intended to be built on principles of accessibility, amateurism, and mass participation. This approach came to define the development of sport in the new Yugoslavia. However, serious challenges soon emerged. Mass sport and physical education demanded significant financial investment—resources that were scarce in a country devastated by war. There was a severe shortage of qualified coaches and physical education teachers in schools, and the infrastructure, such as stadiums, swimming pools, and sports facilities, was underdeveloped. As a result, public participation in mass sport remained low throughout the postwar period.

From a philosophical and anthropological perspective, this policy was contradictory. One view holds that the primary goal of sport, as a form of agonistic practice (competition), is victory. Even when it is not a direct contest between two individuals or teams, there is always indirect competition: setting a new record, meeting a benchmark, or achieving a prestigious standard. It is nearly unthinkable in sport to reward an athlete merely for struggling with themselves, their weaknesses, or their limitations Even at the school level, performance is measured quantitatively: jumping three meters earns a grade of "excellent," while two and a half meters is "good." Only a truly gifted teacher will recognize a student's personal progress, even if they fall short of the standard.

This focus on competition and the constant drive to surpass previous records inevitably leads to the professionalization of sport. The pinnacle of this idea is reflected in the Olympic motto: *"Citius, altius, fortius"* [Faster, Higher, Stronger], which in 2021 was amended to *"Citius, altius, fortius—communiter"* [Faster, Higher, Stronger—Together]. Meanwhile, in Yugoslavia, "by the late 1940s, there had been a trend toward creating independent, self-managed sports organizations where athletes could acquire professional status and receive salaries based on their achievements" (Satybaldina, 2024, p. 67; Trans. by A. L.). Clearly, not all citizens, or even all young

people, can engage in sport at a professional level. Therefore, other institutions and methods were needed to influence and shape individuals at the level of the body.

The second approach involves incorporating physical culture and sport into a person's everyday life. Morning exercises, jogging, short workouts during breaks at work, or amateur participation in a personally enjoyable sport are key examples of this model. This kind of engagement is much less demanding on state resources, but also far less effective in shaping the kind of person the state intends to cultivate. These are forms of individual activity carried out for the benefit of the individual, resembling a bourgeois rather than a socialist approach. A similar understanding of physical development is central to the Scout model of youth upbringing. The motto "Be prepared!" emphasizes personal readiness—being prepared as an individual. The meaning of this preparedness can vary depending on the situation, from "be ready to be a young scout" to "be ready for civil defense in the event of nuclear war." Traditionally, scouting places great importance on a child's physical development, expecting them to be ready for exertion, hard work, and other challenges. In this view, physical culture and sports are not merely leisure activities but essential elements in shaping the ideal person—strong, resilient, and ready to face any challenge.

Finally, the third approach—the one that was actually adopted by the Yugoslav authorities—viewed sport as an instrument of ideology. This approach involves creating a well-defined system, whose internal contradictions can be regulated externally. Instead of direct participation in sport, the average person becomes involved in it through symbolic or collective means, i.e., they become part of collective activities related to sports. For example, they participate in local competitions under the slogan "Participation is more important than winning" or join fan movements with slogans such as "We support our team." Through this kind of involvement, individuals become subject to ideological influence via sports discourse. This approach produces a very small elite of top-tier professional athletes who represent the country in international competitions, as well as a few regional stars in team sports. In Yugoslavia, football was chosen as the central sport. Sport, especially football, seemed like the ideal way to help the peoples of Yugoslavia get to know each other once again. This ideological framing of sport was further reinforced by the post-conflict culture of Yugoslavia, which sought to connect the "partisan past" to the present. Some sports clubs were even granted the honorary title of "Partisan," which significantly elevated their status in society.

As early as 1945, the Communist Party leveraged the widespread popularity and influence of football players for electoral purposes (Mills, 2018, p. 79). The Yugoslav Football Federation was organized to mirror the federal structure of the country (Mills, 2018, p. 82), meaning that from the state's formation, football reflected the nation's characteristics and experienced its crises and defining events. This alignment had far-reaching consequences for the country. The physicality of an athlete differs fundamentally from that of a person who is merely a sports fan. Moreover, "in the 1970s and 80s, belonging to a particular team and its fan base was a form of collective existence and a sense of belonging to a specific community—national or local-geographical" (Satybaldina, 2024, p. 68; Trans. by A. L.).

In the 1980s, fights and large-scale clashes between fans of different football teams became common, as did attacks on players during matches or when they arrived in “hostile territory” (Mills, 2018, pp. 172–174). The national aspect of football hooliganism quickly took on characteristics of a nationalist movement. When a person is “integrated” into a strictly defined, nationally based sports-territorial community, any rhetoric grounded in nationalist discourse begins to influence them. As a result, the physical aspect of the man-making project was often only superficially imitated, or the physicality of fans developed for different purposes, such as confrontations with rival supporters. This phenomenon can be seen as the emergence of a counter man-making project. Instead of promoting constructive goals, this form of physical identity served primarily destructive ends.

Furthermore, the football fan culture that took root in Yugoslavia became a ticking time bomb beneath the state system. Regional fan groups, often organized along national lines, quickly evolved into the foundation of nationalist movements and later became a destabilizing force during the early stages of the country’s disintegration and civil war.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the physical dimension of Yugoslavia’s man-making project was largely superficial. Many people were involved in sport only as spectators or fans, without truly embodying the physical ideals the project aimed to cultivate.

Post-Conflict Morality

The moral component of the man-making project can be studied through analysis of the discursive content of the foundational texts of the Yugoslav Pioneer Organization, which was the largest mass youth education movement. The multinational character of the Yugoslav state and the need to account for national interests in domestic policy created a demand for a new person who could embody a united, multiethnic Yugoslavia.

Until 1972, the Pioneer oath had included a notable phrase: “I pledge to defend the brotherhood and unity of our peoples and the freedom of our homeland”. In addition, the oath contains a “personal” block that includes principles such as respect for elders, love of friendship, and honesty—essentially guidelines for moral orientation in everyday life. The oath concludes with a promise to follow “Tito’s ideas” and to respect all peaceful people. It can be argued that this kind of moral “abstractness” is one of the reasons for the failure of the Yugoslav Pioneer project. The process of designing a new person is always oriented toward a future that has yet to be created and brought closer. However, multiple visions of that future can exist simultaneously, which leads to competition for resources, similar to the rivalry between different institutions involved in shaping and educating people.

It is at the moral component of the project that individuals come to understand why their vision of the future is considered “right” and why other visions are seen as “wrong.” Morality integrates the individual into the social structure by providing behavioral guidelines. In this way, morality directs a person toward embracing a specific vision of the future.

It appears that the post-conflict culture of Yugoslavia "split in two" almost immediately after the war. On the one hand, the official ideology employed a whole set of theses and mythologemes associated with the war and the partisan movement. In the moral component, this was reflected in the general message that "partisan" meant "good," "special," which directly correlated with the idea of Yugoslavia's "distinct socialist path." Meanwhile, Yugoslav culture and art clearly sought to move away from the horrors of war and to make life cheerful and carefree, at least for children—something that manifested itself in the spirit of reforms within the Pioneer Organization. Since morality is closely linked to ideology as a tool for distinguishing "us" from "them," this split in cultural direction led to breakdowns in how the moral system functioned. This is especially significant given recent findings that, in post-Yugoslav societies, people continue to define social group identities primarily by moral judgments rather than by traditional sociological categories. For example, Serbs raised in Yugoslavia tend to choose friends and acquaintances based on personal, psychological, and subjective criteria, expressing these distinctions in moral terms. As a result, both "us" and "them," whether referring to close circles or more distant groups, are primarily described using moral language such as "honest," "just," "sincere," "greedy," and "hypocritical" (Spasić, 2012, p. 579). This suggests that the moral upbringing of Yugoslav youth was in some ways successful; however, this fact only underscores the failure of the broader man-making project. The educational methods available to Yugoslavia's Pioneer Organization had the potential to shape the "person of the future," but almost immediately after the war, meaningful ideological content was replaced by abstract slogans.

The trends described above began to appear as early as the 1950s, when, at the institutional level, the Pioneer Union was freed from the influence of the Yugoslav youth league and was effectively left to its own devices. During this period, the Union failed to recruit enough motivated and ideologically consistent individuals (not necessarily in a strictly communist sense, but at least those familiar with "Tito's ideas") to work with children and adolescents. Local Pioneer organizations often ended up "under the control of certain individuals or groups of a petty-bourgeois type—former politicians and members of various former civil parties—who were carriers of ideological emptiness, apoliticism, and petty-bourgeois mentality" (Duda, 2015, p. 35). This situation created a certain dissonance: while, according to official documents, the Pioneer Organization aimed to contribute to the state's "man-making" project, in practice this image was often distorted at the local level. Consequently, the actual work with children could be shaped by the views and ideas of a particular educator or local leader, who might have their own national, religious, or ideological preferences.

The alternative to communist morality was the morality of the bourgeois kind. Its defining feature was a fundamental rejection of any vision of a desired future. As Djilas wrote,

> The Communists are more to blame than anyone else for the calamities that befell them, for they blindly pursued an imagined society, believing they could change human nature, while both the ideas and their bearers were relentlessly destroyed and annihilated by the madness of the grand violence they themselves

> unleashed. Under communism, as throughout history, human beings proved themselves unfit for any ideal models, rejecting those that sought to restrain their nature and determine their fate. (Djilas, 1969)

Under the guise of “realism,” which appealed intuitively to the ordinary person (rejecting the “imagined society” and “ideal models”), all forms of forward-looking vision were being dismantled.

Nevertheless, moral judgments remain a key starting point for assessing the overall social condition in Serbia today. And since “what once was” is often spontaneously referenced as the only concrete normative model—“how things ought to be”—this past takes on a disproportionate significance, far exceeding mere personal memories or sentimental stories of lost youth (Spasić, 2012, p. 582).

Aesthetics of the Future

In the aesthetic component, there was a need for artistic images that would engage an individual’s values and emotions, shaping their perception of reality. One example that can be seen as a benchmark of the communist aesthetic of the future is the suite *Time, Forward!* by Soviet composer Georgy Sviridov, written in 1965. This work expresses the aesthetics of mastering the future, where even time itself is commanded by humans to move forward. This necessity to create a vision of the future explains why youth organizations considered aesthetic education, relying on vivid artistic images, an important part of their work with children.

In Yugoslavia, the goal of aesthetic education for schoolchildren was set before the pedagogical community in the first postwar decade. However, the conceptual basis for this objective was underpinned by the idea of harmonious personal development without clearly defining the purpose of such development. The focus was placed on such aspects as fostering children’s creative abilities, developing their communicative relationship with art and cultural heritage, encouraging their sensory perception of the world, and promoting creativity and self-expression (Duraković, 2017, pp. 51–52). A detailed analysis of the Yugoslav authorities’ approach to aesthetic education once again reveals the contradictions inherent in this policy.

On the one hand, aesthetic education was approached from the standpoint of dialectical and historical materialism, which posited that art is socially conditioned and serves as an important tool for transforming society. For example, music education and its key determinants were seen as logically stemming from the Marxist belief that music is not a phenomenon detached from the general human interest in life but always expresses the values and perspectives of the environment in which it is created. Musical art produces high-quality works when it aligns itself with the progressive class in its struggle against backwardness. In pedagogical practice, music was emphasized as performing a specific function in every society and being consciously or unconsciously directed toward achieving certain goals. Music was not viewed as an isolated source of aesthetic experience but rather as an active instrument for reflecting and reproducing reality. As new serious musical works, which previously

were accessible only to the privileged class, became available, young people were expected to learn about the compositions of the "great composers." These works carried a humanist message and supported the idea of music as a powerful tool in the effort to transform society (Duraković, 2017, p. 54).

On the other hand, the quantitative growth of the "middle class" or "counter-class," described by Yugoslav sociologists in the 1970s–1980s, led to the emergence of a kind of "bourgeois aesthetic." Different organizations involved in efforts to shape youth often promoted diametrically opposed approaches to aesthetic education. A striking example is the attitude toward rock'n'roll. For many contemporaries, this music symbolized the "corrupting influence of the West" and in the USSR of the 1960s–1970s, such music was virtually banned.

Meanwhile, according to the chairman of the Central Committee of SSOJ, this youth organization had recognized rock'n'roll as the music of young Yugoslavs since 1966 (Raković, 2012, p. 159). In the 1970s, the main publications of youth organizations across the Yugoslav republics paid significant attention to rock'n'roll and its place in Yugoslav society. Paradoxically, SSOJ faced resistance from the Muzička omladina Jugoslavije [Music Youth of Yugoslavia], or MOJ, a member organization of SSOJ, which refused to acknowledge rock'n'roll as an important part of its work.

While the professional music journal *Pro Musica* labeled rock'n'roll as "acoustic pollution," "musical laziness," "ideological indoctrination," and music harmful to the physical and mental health of youth, the newspaper *Polet* (the publication of the League of Socialist Youth of Croatia, part of SSOJ) proclaimed that rock'n'roll was the "joy of life" (Raković, 2012, p. 182). Only in 1981 did MOJ officially include rock'n'roll in its program (Raković, 2012, p. 161).

This striking conflict between the "part" and the "whole" highlights the inconsistencies in attempts to cultivate aesthetic tastes among Yugoslav youth.

New Thinking

The cognitive component of man-making is the most difficult to implement. While all other components can be formed through the transmission of ideas or direct delivery of normative discourse, the cognitive component cannot be formed in this way. Creating a person who thinks in a specific way is a complex task. This becomes particularly evident when it comes to a socialist-oriented project of the future, which opposes the general tendency toward "social entropy," that is, the reduction of the image of the future to a "like everyone else" situation. Such a project requires constant efforts to maintain itself. In the USSR, this work was certainly conducted, as the vision of a communist future was clearly defined in the postwar period—not only in science fiction but also in important program documents of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The intensity of efforts in the cognitive component varied across other countries of the socialist bloc. For example, in the German Democratic Republic it was quite convenient to contrast the Marxist understanding of social structure with the bourgeois perspective of the Federal Republic of Germany. The cognitive component of man-making "primarily involved forming knowledge about society in the spirit of Marxism-

Leninism, according to which the advanced state that had overcome the oppression of man was the GDR, while the backward one was the FRG" (Cherepanova, 2024, p. 130; Trans. by A. L.).

Yugoslavia, however, found itself in a difficult situation as it sought to oppose its socialist project, based on the "ideas of Tito," to the Soviet project. Components of the Yugoslav man-making project in the cognitive component included a new understanding of the economy, the role of central authority in society, the specifics of interethnic interaction, and the role of the individual in building the desired future.

In the economy, there was a shift away from central planning, which, as Yugoslav theorists believed, inevitably led to growing bureaucracy. More specifically, the "new class," the Communist Party bureaucracy, was seen as the main flaw of the Soviet social system. It was assumed that Yugoslav workers would now manage their own enterprises. It should be noted at this point that the decision to build self-managing socialism in Yugoslavia was not a simple one. According to the memoirs of the main participants in the discussion (Kardelj, Kidrič, and Djilas), Tito himself initially did not support the idea on the grounds that the Yugoslav proletariat had "not yet matured" for it. However, he was persuaded that it would help "liberate them from the traps of Stalinism and even serve as a model of development for others" (Anikeev et al., 2025, p. 28; Trans. by A. L.). Yugoslavia's foreign-policy position and ideological considerations played a decisive role in choosing the main strategic line for economic development. This period of self-management was intended to serve as a transition toward creating a new person who would live in a classless communist society, where individual consciousness, rather than public morality, would control behavior. Therefore, high-skilled personnel were needed at all levels for effective self-management in industry and other sectors of the economy. Workers' councils were required to make complex managerial and strategic decisions, which again highlighted the lack of qualifications. Žebec Šilj and Cvikić (2022) discussed:

> Artificially created simulative interests of workers as direct producers of goods to improve productivity of work and production will gradually decrease over the time under the pressure of economic problems produced by the system of decentralized socialist economy, and due to overestimated professional capabilities and potential of the working force to deal with issues that are above all political (self-management implementation), and then economic in nature. (Žebec Šilj & Cvikić, 2022, p. 212)

As a result, the bright but brief economic miracle of Yugoslavia in the 1950s and early 1960s was followed by a long period of decline that lasted until the country's dissolution. Thus, the economic aspect of the Yugoslav vision of the future, based on the idea of self-management, ultimately proved unviable.

Tito's ideas about the organization of society and the role of the state in managing social development were based on the principle of regionalism. According to this principle, the means to achieve ultimate communist goals in each country should be dictated by the specific conditions of that country, rather than by a model imposed by

another country. This way Tito broke with the unified communist model that the USSR sought to establish. This approach, however, predictably led to the creation of distinct state and social models for each nation within Yugoslavia. In other words, by separating such a multinational state from the unified Soviet model of social organization, Tito in many ways triggered the further fragmentation of the country.

This situation was further complicated domestically because nationalist manifestations at the level of the Yugoslav constituent units never fully disappeared. For example, in the early 1970s, as Yungblud and Rosina (2025) described, U.S. intelligence noted that the political system created by Tito is incapable of coping with nationalism without his personal intervention; nationalism will undoubtedly intensify again and could reach enormous proportions. By the end of the 1970s, it was already predicted that the regime would be at risk of becoming "defenseless" when Tito, who had an impeccable reputation as an ethnically neutral leader, stepped down (Yungblud & Rosina, 2025, p. 191).

Moreover, Romanenko (2011) argues that

> formally proclaimed communist internationalism failed to overcome ethnic nationalism; on the contrary, it became its most aggressive expression, relying on the power of the state. This resulted from the convergence of social and national revolutions—national unification and the restoration of the Yugoslav state were perceived as inseparably linked not only to the long-awaited national liberation but also to the creation of a new society of 'social justice.' Therefore, the causes of the conflict were, among other things, shaped by the objective internal development of the Yugoslav state itself. (Romanenko, 2011, p. 420; Trans. by A. L.)

The career of Aleksandar Ranković, a Serb who headed state security and later became the Vice President of the SFRY, exemplifies the "Serbian" variant of Yugoslav socialism, which largely aligned with the line of communist construction adopted in the USSR. Ranković advocated for centralized governance, approached economic and social liberalization with caution, and relied on a group of party officials, mostly Serbs, promoting a "pro-Serbian" policy regarding Kosovo's autonomy (Perica, 2002, pp. 43–44).

In contrast, Edvard Kardelj, who was a Slovene, drew support from Slovene party circles. When the decisive 7th Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia took place in 1958, it was held in Ljubljana. At this congress, the party adopted a new program that finalized Kardelj's theory of self-managing socialism (Pirjevec, 2018, p. 167).

These two examples show, at the very least, that Yugoslav communists did not follow a single ideological line. The question of whether national party elites intended to build a locally specific variant of socialism remains open and deserves a separate study. It is clear, however, that regional resistance to federal initiatives was both real and significant.

This process was also fueled by the "doubling" and fragmentation tendencies described earlier in the post-conflict culture of Yugoslavia. For example, Serbia and Croatia had different experiences of the partisan movement and occupation, as the various forms of collaboration they faced stemmed from ethnic and religious divisions.

Regarding the role of the individual in society, a situation arises where people are demanded to achieve more than they are actually able to accomplish. For the most part, the population of Yugoslavia was unable to embrace a supra-national and supra-confessional culture, which, in fact, never truly existed. Moreover, even during the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, “transnational practices” were viewed by local elites as opportunism that weakened national sentiments. Thus, the states inheriting former Habsburg territories placed great emphasis on national mobilization of their citizens. Nationalism was strong at both the state and local levels (D’Alessio, 2017, pp. 220–221). Consequently, the constituent parts of Yugoslavia had a long-standing tradition at the local level of resisting supra-national and transnational models of social organization. The contradictions and complexities of national policy manifested themselves, on the one hand, in the condemnation of nationalism, and on the other, in policies supporting national minorities.

In the interwar period, Yugoslavia under King Alexander I Karađorđević was reformed along the lines of “integral Yugoslavism.” A unitary state structure was introduced, with administrative divisions based on territory rather than ethnicity. However, nationalist currents never truly disappeared. Germany’s invasion of Yugoslavia and the outbreak of the partisan war revealed that nationalism and religious chauvinism remained strong in the country. Later, the rise of the communists under Tito and the creation of a unified federal state, granting broad powers to the national republics, effectively undermined efforts to build a cohesive Yugoslav identity.

When considering Yugoslavia’s man-making project, it is worth noting that the country built an extensive school infrastructure for national minorities or “nations,” as this was officially termed in Yugoslav discourse (D’Alessio, 2017, p. 223), with instruction in Italian, Hungarian, and other “non-Yugoslav” languages. This situation naturally excluded part of young people from the unified man-making project. Although, according to new ideas about “people’s education,” such “national” schools were expected to produce responsible youth imbued with aspirations for freedom, progress, and brotherhood, the outcome of this educational organization was, at best, a person tolerant of other ethnic groups.

One example of the central authorities’ attempts to impose some order in this area was the promotion of a common language, most widely known as “Serbo-Croatian.” The process of aligning literary norms with everyday speech among the Balkan peoples began long before the events described here. For the federal Yugoslav authorities, the widespread introduction of a single language could have provided an effective tool for building a unified Yugoslav identity. However, by the late 1960s, this policy faced strong resistance in Croatia from intellectuals and local authorities. The famous “Croatian Spring” of the early 1970s largely traces its origins to 1967, with the publication of *The Declaration on the Status and Name of the Croatian Standard Language*. Subsequent developments showed that Croatia became and remained, until the very collapse of the SFRY, one of the main drivers of centrifugal tendencies in Yugoslavia. In this region, separatist sentiments combined with a critical stance toward traditional Marxism, a movement for democracy, pro-Western liberalism, and nationalism (Romanenko, 2011, p. 752).

The development of Yugoslav school education highlights top-down efforts to create the socialist person. The most extensive reform, implemented in 1971, focused on the so-called "professionalization" of schooling. Across the country, gymnasium-type schools, which provided a general humanistic education, were abolished. They were replaced by a system that emphasized vocational skills and on-the-job training. These "specialized" programs aimed to align the curriculum with the needs of the labor market, ensuring students acquired practical skills that could be immediately applied in production. The reform was designed so that no student would finish secondary school without a profession. The concept of "learning for work and through work," along with workplace practice and internships at factories and enterprises, was meant to give students hands-on experience and prepare a skilled workforce, easing the transition from school to the labor market (Bacevic, 2015, pp. 219–220). However, the reform's failure to achieve its goals quickly became clear. Local implementation lagged, enterprises were unprepared to host large numbers of students, and students themselves often did not understand the purpose of the training. Despite these challenges, the reform continued until Yugoslavia's dissolution, after which it was halted in the newly independent republics through legislation.

The attempt to "professionalize" education was part of a broader effort to shape the "new socialist person," carried out without regard for labor market conditions or the capacities of participants. Schools were easier to control from above, whereas youth organizations could not achieve the same level of influence. In essence, this reform was the last major effort to cultivate the new person envisioned for Yugoslav self-managed socialism.

The Yugoslav man-making project formally ended in the late 1980s to early 1990s, alongside the collapse of the Yugoslav state. A key event that, in our view, marked a complete distortion of the vision of the future was the publication of the *Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts* in 1986. As Pavkovich (2013) writes,

> The authors of the Memorandum transformed the idea of monarchical Yugoslavia as a prison for *non-Serb peoples* into the idea of the SFRY as a prison for the *Serbian people*. According to these academics, during the second Yugoslavia period, the Serbian people were punished because the Comintern accused them of being "oppressors" of non-Serb peoples in the Versailles system. This view was also held by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which, between the two world wars and under instructions from Moscow, allied itself with the political movements of non-Serb peoples and adopted their approach to solving the national question in Yugoslavia. (Pavkovich, 2013, p. 80; Trans. by A. L.)

In other words, the country that was supposed to build an independent socialist future, the country, whose citizens were meant to embody the dream of the human of the future, suddenly "became" nothing more than a typical prison for one of its constituent peoples. This was not only a rejection of the possibility of continuing the Yugoslav man-making project, but also a retrospective denial of all the efforts that had already been invested in it.

Another notable example is the “Youth Day Poster Scandal,” which took place in 1987. Since 1945, Yugoslavia had regularly held a symbolic relay race for Youth Day, timed to coincide with Tito’s birthday on May 25, although some sources indicate that he was actually born on May 7. The relay began in Tito’s hometown of Kumrovec and ended in Belgrade. A poster competition was traditionally organized as part of the celebration. In 1987, the winning poster was later discovered to be based on a Nazi propaganda design. This fact became known only after the contest results were announced and the poster was published in the press.

The artists behind this provocation were members of *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, a Slovenian art collective founded in 1984. The collective brought together individuals from various creative fields, including the well-known Slovenian music group *Laibach*, and was recognized for its artistic provocations and engagement with the aesthetics of totalitarian states, such as Nazi Germany. The authorities interpreted the poster as equating Tito with Hitler (Gow & Carmichael, 2010, pp. 96–99).

Conclusion

In the planning of each state cultural policy or, in this case, the design of man, the social, material, political, and ideological contradictions of a given society, the important goals of social development and political struggle, the general situation of freedom and human creativity, the daily life of millions of people are reflected. In the planning of each state cultural policy or, in this case, the design of man, the social, material, political, and ideological contradictions of the given society, the important goals of social development and political struggle, the general situation of freedom and human creativity, the daily life of millions of people are reflected. The Yugoslav government created its own cultural policy, through which it ensured the continuity of its political orientation, supporting culture materially and guiding it ideologically. Culture and the design of man became a vital factor in the transformation of the entire society. This conscious and planned intervention of the state in the cultural sphere became an extremely important part of the comprehensive political management. Although the goals that the Yugoslav cultural policy was aimed at achieving were indeed oriented towards the creation of a new person for a bright future, the way in which this was sought to be achieved under communism did not allow for their implementation. In attempts to determine the direction of cultural policy and human design, one must begin with the question of what kind of society needs to be created, in what way, and with what material resources. Was it possible to develop an effective cultural policy in Yugoslavia if the system of common values changed radically several times during the period under consideration? All these years, culture was under the direct patronage of state policy. Cultural policy in Yugoslav society did not achieve its goal because it did not create a new culture, education, or a new human being. What was planned in terms of human design was never fulfilled. Under optimal conditions, the results of creating a new human being are visible only after several decades. However, one gets the impression that the Yugoslav political elite did not want to think so. It was not interested in the future, except declaratively. The failure of these efforts is evident in

the war between the former Yugoslav republics and the extreme violence it produced. Numerous war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansings, and other atrocities highlight the artificiality and unsustainability of a unified Yugoslav communist identity.

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