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Josipa JERABEK: Regulation of prostitution in Croatia and Slavonia at the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century

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1. Introduction

Prostitution has existed since ancient times, so it is often heard it is the "oldest trade".¹ In reality, it was always present, but also a socially unwanted phenomenon. Therefore, it represents a really complex and controversial topic with different points of view. To understand a particular definition, it is necessary to place it in the time and social context in which is used.² Austrian Criminal Code on Felonies, Misdemeanors and Petty Offenses of 1852 carried the unification of criminal substantive law in Croatia and Slavonia and in that way also regulated prostitution.

1.1. The concept of prostitution

Given the diversity and complexity of the characteristics, it is not possible to form a single universal definition of prostitution. However, essentially it could be said that prostitution is an occupation or activity in which the sexual desires of others are satisfied in exchange for money. There is an obvious connection with alcoholism, crime

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¹ FILIPOVIĆ, Sergej: Reguliranje prostitucije u Osijeku na prijelazu iz 19. u 20. Stoljeće: Pravilnik o uređenju i nadziranju prostitucije iz 1896. i Pravilnik za bludilišta iz 1911. [Regulation of Prostitution in Osijek at the turn of the 19th and 20th century: Instruction on regulation and supervision of prostitution from 1896 and Instruction for brothels from 1911], *Scrinia Slavonica: Godišnjak Podružnice za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje Hrvatskog instituta za povijest [Scrinia Slavonica: Annual of the Department for the History of Slavonia, Srijem and Baranja of the Croatian Institute of History]*, No. 1, 2014, pp. 141–145.

² DITMORE HOPE, Melissa (ed.): *Encyclopedia on Prostitution and Sex Work, Volume 1*, Greenwood Press, 2006, pp. xxv–xxvi.

and other forms of socially deviant behavior. Historically, prostitution was developed in different forms, such as religious, ritual, compensatory, substitution and professional. In addition, there is also a division on male and female, forced and voluntary, occasional and permanent, street and classy, ceremonial and secular, professional – organized or independent.³

1.2. Development during the 19th century

In the 19th century, the world was under the influence of the industrial revolution and increasing urbanization. At the same time, neither parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy nor Croatia and Slavonia were exceptions.⁴ Cities were increasingly becoming the centers of life and were offering better material conditions, so more and more people were leaving the villages and coming to live in the cities. The problem arises because of overcrowding in cities that can no longer absorb such a large number of people looking for work and better life conditions. There was increasing inequality in the whole society and also an increasing number of people who were not sufficiently educated, and who did not have a job or means of livelihood.

Those reasons led them to find different ways of earning for living. At the same time, women often began to engage in prostitution because of economic and social reasons such as addiction, violence or a problematic family situation.⁵ On the other hand, men used their services for reasons such as low moral standards, asociality and

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³ ZORKO, Tomislav: *Prostitucija u Zagrebu u prvoj polovici 20. stoljeća (do početka Drugog svjetskog rata)* [Prostitution in Zagreb in the first half of the 20th Century (until the beginning of World War II)], Biakova, Zagreb, 2013, pp. 8–11.

⁴ PEJIĆ, Luka: Kriminal i represivni sustav u Osijeku na prijelazu iz 19. u 20. stoljeće promatran kroz elemente biopolitike i socijalne povijesti [Crime and the repressive system in Osijek at the turn of the 19th and 20th century viewed through the elements of biopolitics and social history], *Scrinia Slavonica: Godišnjak Podružnice za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje Hrvatskog instituta za povijest [Scrinia Slavonica: Annual of the Department for the History of Slavonia, Srijem and Baranja of the Croatian Institute of History]*, No. 1, 2015, p. 151.

⁵ ZORKO, *op. cit.*, pp. 149–150.

easy availability. Prostitution was gaining momentum and legal regulation for this problem was being sought.⁶

1.3. Legal approaches to prostitution

Abolition warns that prostitution is a social phenomenon, so the primary focus should be on solving social issues and secondary on legal measures. Poor living conditions and the exploitation of prostitutes are presented as main problems. Because of that, the emphasis should not be placed only on prostitutes, but also on their clients and pimps. The main focus should not be only on prostitution, but also on the demand for it. In that way, prostitution itself should not be punished, but the activities that encourage it and create its demand. Abolition represented a new type of regulation that followed after the reglementation. It became more represented at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Among the European countries, the United Kingdom was the first one that accepted it.

Prohibition, or the criminalization of prostitution enlightens that not only prostitutes should be punished, but also their clients and pimps. In this way it is possible to react to the socially undesirable effects of prostitution. Efforts are being made to reduce prostitution and related activities, or at least bring it under greater state and social control. All activities related to prostitution are prohibited. Moreover, prostitution is deprived of the status of a recognized profession. Over time, it turned out that prohibitions and repressive measures lead to an increasing number of illegal prostitutes, and that prohibition contributes to their marginalization and does not solve their existential problems.

Reglementation is an approach in which prostitution is under state and institutional supervision and is regulated according to given rules. Only persons who

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⁶ ŽIVIČNJAK, Iris: Zagrebačke prostitutke početkom 20. stoljeća. Podrijetlo, svakodnevni život i položaj u društvu, [Zagreb prostitutes at the beginning of the 20th century. Origin, everyday life and position in society], *Pro tempore: Časopis studenata povijesti [Pro tempore: Student History Journal*], No. 15, 2020, pp. 15–159.

act according to the prescribed conditions and thus have a practice licence could be engaged in performing prostitution. It is not a desired phenomenon, but is tolerated as a "necessary evil", and the law enforcement authorities play an important role in passing regulations and keeping records. Prostitution should be monitored and not visible, but more covert and difficult to access. The prostitutes who would adhere to regulations passed by authorities, would not be punished. This approach was represented in most European countries, including Croatia and Slavonia.⁷

2. Normative regulation of prostitution in Croatia and Slavonia

The Austrian Criminal Code on Felonies, Misdemeanours and Petty Offenses of 1852 (further in text: Criminal Code of 1852) was introduced by imperial patent in 1852. It contained tripartition of punishable acts taken from French legislation. Prostitution was regulated in the second part, in Chapter 13, which prescribed petty offenses and offenses against public order.⁸ After its entry into force, Croatian substantive criminal law was unified.

The main characteristic is a regulatory attitude towards prostitution. Moreover, regulation mostly depended on the police authorities in some territorial parts, and because of that, there weren't any uniform rules. Given that the spread of venereal diseases is closely related to prostitution, health regulations had an important role for regulation of prostitution. Accordingly, the legislative framework in Croatia and Slavonia consisted of criminal, police and health regulations.⁹

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⁷ ŽE⊔KO, Darija: "Sestre bluda": zakonska regulacija ženske prostitucije na hrvatskom području u razdoblju od 1852. do 1934., s posebnim osvrtom na grad Karlovac i europsko okruženje ["Sisters of fornication": statutory regulation of women prostitution in Croatian territory in the period between 1852 and 1934, with special reference to the city of Karlovac and European context], Student work awarded with the Rector's award, Universitiy of Zagreb, 2015, pp. 16–24.

⁸ Pastović, Dunja – Željko, Darija: Zakonodavni okvir uređenja prostitucije na hrvatsko-slavonskom području 1852.–1929. [Legal Framework for the Regulation of Prostitution in Croatian–Slavonian Territory in the Period 1852–1929], *Pravni vjesnik : časopis za pravne i društvene znanosti Pravnog fakulteta Sveučilišta J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku [Journal of law and social sciences of the Law Faculty of University J.J. Strossmayer in Osijek]*, No. 1, 2016, p. 30.

⁹ ZORKO, *op. cit*, pp. 15–18.

2.1. Criminal regulations

The basis of the criminal regulation was Art. 509, which regulates "prostitution as a trade". Accordingly, prostitutes were women who provided promiscuous services in exchange for money. Prostitution was tolerated, and the law enforcement authorities were given the right, but not the duty, to punish prostitutes. Thus, prostitution was tacitly accepted, so those prostitutes who followed the prescribed rules were not punished.

However, the Criminal Code of 1852 still prescribed cases in which it was mandatory to punish prostitutes. Moreover, it was characteristic that a particular case protected a certain category of society. Considering that, it was necessary to punish a prostitute who was causing a great scandal, and thus public order was protected. Another example of mandatory punishment was the case when a prostitute seduced young men, thus ensuring the protection of minors. Finally, in the third case, she was punished if she continued to work after knowing she had a venereal disease. The last provision protected public health. For the mentioned violations, they should have been punished with strict imprisonment for the duration of one to three months. 10

According to Art. 510, a lawsuit against a married woman could be brought by the husband. In contrast to adultery, the criminal proceedings could also be initiated ex officio. If the prostitute was married, her status was considered an aggravating circumstance during the trial. Thus, among other things, the institution of the family was protected. According to Art. 511, a husband who introduced a woman into prostitution and benefited from it should also be punished. In that case, the investigation had to prove that he lured her into prostitution, that he was a participant or that he benefited in any other way. In that case, the punishment was strict

¹⁰ Pastović – Željko, op. cit., pp. 30–31.

imprisonment from three to six months, with the fact that he could have received a higher sentence.¹¹

2.1.1. Pimping

The law had the intention to prevent violations of public morals, so it was necessary to punish those who help illegal prostitutes as well. Thus, pimping was specially regulated and was punishable as a crime and as a misdemeanor.

According to Art. 512, pimping was a misdemeanor, and a pimp was a person: (1) who gives to a prostitute a regular place of residence or shelter so she can perform her illegal activities, (2) engages in pimping prostitutes and benefits from it, and (3) in some other illegal way mediates between prostitutes, customers and owners of brothels in their illegal arrangements. For those cases, there was prison sentence of three to six months. In addition, the punishment could be more severe if the person continued to engage in it for a long time. In case of recidivism, the person would be expelled from that place and foreigners from the entire Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.¹²

In addition, pimping was also included in the first part of the Criminal Code of 1852 as a crime, specifically in Chapter 14, which referred to rape, defilement and other serious types of fornication. The provision referred to two types of cases. The first group is represented by cases of pimping of sexually innocent persons, while the second one consists of cases for which it does not matter whether the person was sexually innocent or not. In the latter cases, it is important that the pimping was committed by a parent, tutor, guardian/foster or teacher over their children, pupils or those entrusted to them to raise or teach. In this way, persons who were in a weaker or dependent position in a specific relationship were protected. For those cases, prescribed sentence was a hard prison for the duration of one to five years.¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

2.1.2. Secret prostitution

The regulation of prostitution made it possible to be legally engaged in prostitution, but also brought obligations. It required the fulfillment of certain conditions and thus financial expenses. Therefore, secret prostitution was also present and brought even greater social and, consequently, legal problems. Common were cases of white slave trade, juvenile prostitution and the spread of venereal disease. It often took place in taverns and inns, which the legislator considered a high-risk place, and passed a special rule for them.¹⁴

Art. 515 of the Criminal Code of 1852 contained a provision that referred to innkeepers and their servants who facilitated prostitution in their guesthouses. There were different penalties for owners and servants. If the owner was convicted for the first time, he was fined. But, if he continued to facilitate prostitution, a stricter penalty would be applied. According to the Criminal Code of 1852, he could lose the specific business and could no longer obtain a license to open a new inn. If the offense was committed by a member of staff without the innkeeper's knowledge, the member of staff would be punished with imprisonment from eight days to three months. ¹⁵

2.2. Police regulations

The Criminal Code of 1852 gave local police authorities the power to regulate prostitution in the area of their jurisdiction. Police authorities made regulations, kept records and supervised prostitutes. That is why the regulations and practice differed from place to place and caused a situation that the same institute was regulated in different ways. On the territory of Croatia and Slavonia, Osijek passed its first regulation in 1896.¹⁶

¹⁴ ZORKO, *op. cit*, pp 42–45.

¹⁵ ŽELJKO, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–58.

¹⁶ Pejić, *op. cit.*, pp. 152–155.

2.2.1. Instruction for drafting regulations on prostitution of 1911

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, there were many public houses in Croatia and Slavonia: in Zagreb, Osijek, Jastrebarsko, Križevci, Bjelovar, Petrinja, Brod na Savi etc. In that way, there was not any unified regulation on prostitution so on the 19th May 1911, the Department for Internal Affairs of the Croatian National Government issued an Instruction for drafting regulations on prostitution. It contained twenty-two articles divided into six chapters that intended to create a certain framework that will serve to standardize regulation and practice for regulating and punishing prostitution in Croatia and Slavonia. Accordingly, the local law enforcement authorities should have adopted regulations that will be in accordance with the provisions of the Instruction. Despite this, in reality the instructions and regulations were not implemented as they should have been and prostitutes were exploited.¹⁷

New regulations were passed by Zagreb, Osijek, Brod na Savi, Bjelovar and Križevci, but the Zagreb regulation never entered into force. The regulations followed the provisions of the Instruction, but they differed from each other, i.e. the Instruction determined that public houses were open 24 hours a day, but in Osijek they could be open longer than 5:00 in the morning but only with a special surcharge.

The procedure for opening and appearance of public houses was regulated as well. Requests for opening of public houses (brothels) had to be similar to requests for a building permit. The police authorities approved the establishment and relocation of public houses and could revoke the given permission at any time. In order to obtain such a permit, an inspection was carried out and the neighbors were questioned with an aim to find out their opinion. Owners could only be women over the age of 30, and only if they proved that they had not been punished for a crime or that the offense

¹⁷ ZORKO, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

started out of greed. In addition, they had to be trustworthy people who kept order in their business.

Brothels could work both day and night, but they were not allowed to be in the center of the town, but had to be located on the outskirts and far from the church, school, public and health institutions. Street windows had to be closed and curtains drawn. Prostitutes were not allowed to lean against the windows, and when airing the room, they had to be in the back part. It was forbidden to cook food, pour alcohol, and they had to obtain a special permit to play the piano. In that way, they wanted to prevent clients from staying in the brothel for a longer time.¹⁸

To be able to work in a brothel, a woman had to be at least 17 years old and had to be mentally and physically healthy. In contrast, a man who used the services of a brothel had to be at least 18 years old and must not be drunk. Only prostitutes, servants, the owner with husband and child up to 2 years of age could live in the brothel.

Prostitutes were paid for working in the brothel, but the amount was divided between them and the owner of the brothel. At the same time, prostitutes lived in poor conditions and were exploited materially and physically. In reality, the prostitute received only a fifth or a quarter of the earned amount, while the owners received the rest. Accordingly, the owner had to provide them with accommodation, food, clean clothes and laundry. In addition, the owner bore the costs of medical examinations and treatment of prostitutes in case they were infected with a venereal disease. ¹⁹ Additionally, it was forbidden to move prostitutes around brothels in a way that would allow the spread of venereal diseases. Women who did not work in the brothel were forbidden to enter in it at all, and it was forbidden to induce them to engage in prostitution. ²⁰

¹⁸ Pastović – Željko, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁹ ZORKO, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

²⁰ PASTOVIĆ – ŽELJKO, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–40.

To become a prostitute, a woman had to go through a certain procedure. First of all, she should have reported her intention to become a prostitute to the brothel owners or police authorities. After registration, it was mandatory for her to undergo a medical examination, during which the official doctor examined whether she was well developed, sexually innocent, not pregnant, disfigured, and free of any infection or venereal disease. If she fulfilled the necessary prerequisites, she received a certificate of suitability. After that, the owner took her to the police, who should have informed and registered her. They warned her that she has the right to stop engaging in prostitution at any time, and they gave her instructions on how to protect herself from venereal diseases. They registered her and gave her her work book. It contained her personal information, including records of medical examinations. Finally, after she registered as a prostitute and started working, she had to go for regular medical checks that were carried out at least twice a week, and more if necessary. The intention was to prevent the spread of venereal diseases as much as possible.²¹

2.2.2. Specific case – Zagreb

According to the first Zagreb regulation in 1899, prostitution was allowed only in brothels. After the adoption of the Instruction for drafting regulations on prostitution in 1911, Zagreb passed a new regulation in 1912. It was not submitted to the government for approval so it never came into force and the old regulation was applied until 1922. In that period after World War I, there was an evident connection between prostitution, exploitation of women in brothels and the spread of venereal diseases. In that way, it turned out that the solution for prostitution through a brothel was still not satisfactory.²² Therefore, starting in 1922, Zagreb replaced the system of prostitution in brothels with a system of publicly tolerated prostitutes. On 24th September 1922, the Royal Police Directorate in Zagreb passed the Decree on

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²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

²² ZORKO, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–57.

Supervision of Prostitution in the City. Thus, from 1st October 1922, all brothels in Zagreb were abolished and prostitutes continued to provide services but in their own arrangement. They had the status of publicly tolerated prostitutes and the police registered them in a special record. Each had her own file with a photo, and personal information: name and surname, age, religion, place of birth, native affiliation, personal description, previous occupation and the name and surname, occupation and residence of her parent or guardian. At the time of registration, they could not be virgins, pregnant, infected with venereal diseases, married, or women who had not been legally divorced. In addition, they were divided into minors (from 18 to 21 years old and were tried to be prevented from becoming a prostitute) and adults (more than 21 years old).²³

It was shown that the abolition of brothels led to the insufficient organization of prostitution in the Zagreb area and that it did not solve the existential issues of the previous prostitutes. An increasing number of them began to engage themselves in illegal prostitution because they avoided paying for regular medical examinations and then treatment. In general, all prostitutes were paying increased accommodation prices, they were victims of murders, robberies and violence. In addition to all that, changing professions was also difficult due to the fact that they were not desirable in society.

2.3. Health regulation and abolition of prostitution

Reforms of the health care system began at the end of the 19th century, but they did not lead to a significant improvement in health care, so the quality of life was still poor. An important health problem of that time were venereal diseases, which spread quickly and at the same time demanded expensive and long-lasting treatment. Therefore, laws and by-laws were passed to prevent the spread of venereal diseases in different ways. It was stipulated that all public prostitutes should be examined twice a week, while

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²³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

private prostitutes should be examined only if there was a suspicion that she was suffering from venereal disease. If a doctor found out that the prostitute was infected, he should have found the person who infected her and all those with whom she later came into contact and infected them. The infected prostitute should have been placed in a nearby hospital for treatment.²⁴ A significant change was brought by the Health Act of 1906 because it emphasized preventive measures for health, and the costs of treatment in certain cases were borne by the municipalities.²⁵

Given that venereal diseases continued to represent a significant problem and that the previous regulations on prostitution proved to be insufficient, finally in March 1934, the Law on the Prevention of the Spread of Venereal Diseases was passed, and a few months later, an instruction was passed, after which, within three months, all brothels were closed and all certificates for tolerated prostitutes were revoked. Unfortunately, this did not make prostitution disappear nor solved its negative social effects. Moreover, prostitution only became illegal, diseases continued to spread, prostitutes did not have their existential issues resolved. The rest of the citizens were not satisfied either because prostitution still existed but since then it has not been regulated. 27

3. Conclusion

The constant presence of prostitution in society secured the title of the "oldest trade". A profession in which earnings are obtained on the basis of satisfying other people's sexual needs in exchange for money brings many moral doubts and health issues. Therefore, the legal systems that accept abolitionism, prohibition or reglementation differ. Due to the complexity of the issue, in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as well as in Croatia and Slavonia, criminal, police and health regulations played an important

²⁴ Pastović – Željko, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–49.

²⁵ ŽELJKO, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

²⁶ ZORKO, *op. cit.*, pp. 64–65.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–69.

role. The Criminal Code of 1852 accepted the regulation system and tacitly allowed prostitution. Article 509 classified prostitution as a trade, and it was left to the local authorities to adopt regulations for the regulation of prostitution in their own area. A special problem was secret prostitution and pimping, which in the first part of the Criminal Code was incriminated as a crime and in the second part, in a milder form, as a misdemeanor.

In Croatia and Slavonia, there was an increase in the number of brothels and at the same time the non-unification of legal rules and practice. Therefore, in 1911, the Croatian Government passed an Instruction according to which cities should adjust their own prostitution regulations. It prescribed the prerequisites for the provision and use of prostitution services, as well as the issues of opening, managing and operating brothels, as well as the employment procedure. Emphasis was especially placed on the health of the prostitute, who had to be healthy and regularly undergo medical examinations, and the local police took care of this.

Regardless of that, over time the number of people infected with venereal diseases increased, so in 1922, Zagreb abolished the system of brothels and introduced a system of publicly tolerated prostitutes who had to be registered in a special register and follow the prescribed rules. In doing so, their existential issues were not resolved. Moreover, since then, they have borne all the costs themselves, so the number of illegal prostitutes has been growing and they were avoiding paying for medical examinations and treatments. There was less and less control and prostitutes were still marginalized, victims of violence, robberies and murders.

Prostitution was finally abolished by the Law for the Prevention of the Spread of Venereal Diseases of 1934, after which all brothels and publicly tolerated prostitutes were banned in October of the same year. This did not solve the existential issues of the previous prostitutes who found themselves in the position of continuing to work illegally, and society itself could not be satisfied with the continued spread of the disease and the lack of regulation.