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Archives and the History of Skiing: Slovene Case

As I do my best to keep abreast of the current work in the field of history of skiing, I am often reminded of the fact that international research on this subject lacks reliance on the archives. Reasons for this can be found on both sides: the archives and the researchers.

Maintaining and allowing access to the archives on the one hand, and including these resources in research on the history of skiing on the other, can certainly contribute to the awareness of the importance of the skiing heritage, and to the scientific value of research on the history of skiing. Nevertheless, importance of the link between the archives and skiing history scholars does not seem to have been sufficiently highlighted on an international scale. It is the goal of this contribution to take a step away from the research of particular phenomena, as I believe it is time for the research in the history of skiing to re-examine its purpose, and focus on the sources, placing them to the forefront.

The case of Slovene ski jumper Jože Pogačar

To avoid lacking in specificity and to shed some light on the issue, I present one particular case from the Slovenian skiing history. If we only relied on literature and periodicals, the story of Joža Pogačar, a skier from the early 20th century, would amount to no more than a few highlights. Joža Pogačar was Yugoslavia's first ski jumping national champion. In 1921, he won the first "Yugoslav and Slovenian Championship down the Jumping Hill" on the first artificial, i.e. human-built ski jumping hill in the country.¹ His jump may not have been the longest (9 m), but it was the most confident and earned the highest style marks. Pogačar followed up his success by becoming a regular national ski jumping champion in 1922 in Bohinj (15.5 m) and in Mojstrana in 1927 (25 m).² This information is more or less everything that could be found from monographs, periodicals, and occasional publications, except for a report upon his death and some statistically oriented reports on his results. However, archive sources produced in the process of office work of a key institution, i.e. the Yugoslav Winter Sport Association (1922–1941), reveal a much more complex view into his sports character and the spirit of the history of skiing in his time. The archive materials by this author, which has not yet been processed and which is currently kept at the Faculty of Sports in Ljubljana, opens up many interesting episodes from Pogačar's skiing activities – and in turn new views of the interpretation of the history of skiing.

Joža Pogačar can thus be found among the first skiing instructors who taught, under the auspices of the Winter Sports Association, the Yugoslav military units in skiing courses. Already in 1925, these instructors officially formed the "Chamber of Instructors" within the Association; the Chamber was a part of the Association's management board.³ The Chamber of Ski Instructors, an independent body within the Association, founded in 1930,⁴ had the first 13 declared members in 1931, which also included Pogačar.⁵ The first to be awarded the official title of the federal skiing instructor in Yugoslavia already in 1930 was Janko Janša, especially on account of his past competitive achievements and his teaching experience.⁶ With regard to Pogačar, only the archives can reveal the skiing issues of the time. Thus, we find that Pogačar reported Janša to the Association for giving skiing lessons professionally, i.e. in exchange for payment,

which was then in breach of the Association's rules. Early in March 1932, Pogačar reported that Janša held a permanent appointment as an instructor, with steady income, at the Ilirija skiing lodge in Planica, and that he had also received "payment in a professional amount" for lessons to the Sokol movement. Moreover, the actual lessons were allegedly given by non-qualified skiers while Janša was merely a supervisor.⁷ In his defence, Janša characterized the report as a token of envy because Pogačar was not involved as a paid instructor.⁸ The Winter Sport Association appointed a special investigation unit to examine the matter. The investigators very quickly came to the bottom of the affair and proposed to the Association's board to strike Janko Janša from the list of federal ski instructors; the board did as proposed.⁹ The case thus reveals the amateur foundations of ski instruction, opens up a view of the background of skiing lessons, and



Jože Pogačar, first national (yugoslavian) champion in ski jumping, Bohinj, 1921.
(Sport Journal, 1921)

the analysis of the material related to the investigation also offers foundations for approaches that can integrate the skiing history into the study of the history of mentalities.¹⁰

Through archival sources, we can become even more familiar with Pogačar through another case. He and his colleague from the Ilirija Sports Club, named Hitzel, were rather drunk and disorderly at the Razor hotel on the night before the national championship in Kranjska gora in 1928. Although the skiing manuals preached abstinence from alcohol for the skiers, it appears that they frequently succumbed to the temptation. Their heads masked with head scarves, Pogačar and Hitzel broke into hotel rooms, abused hotel equipment, and made a rumpus. “It was a scandal unlike any that Kranjska Gora had seen.”¹¹ A special disciplinary committee with the Winter Sports Association investigated the case and issued reprimands for both.¹² At the session in which the incident was discussed, they also decided to instruct the skiers on their conduct on trains and to warn them about “frequently occurring drinking sprees.”¹³ The latter case again opens up a rather neglected aspect of the history of skiing – a sport which has been considered for many decades one of the most healthy and ethical of all sports.

Hence, Pogačar was not only a competitor, a national champion, and an instructor, as presented in all printed sources to date. Through the archives, we can learn about him in a more complex way; and, even more preciously, we can learn about the history of skiing in all nuances of its dynamics.

A view from the aspect of the archives

As institutions, archives across the globe are striving to become more open and accessible.¹⁴ Moreover, from the aspect of compliance with the standards of valorization, acceptance, storage, processing, and access to the material, they are surely the most competent and best-trained to offer a solid foundation for research into skiing history. Analyzing the matter on the case of Slovenia, the key reason why the archives keep too little material related to the history of skiing, is a poor link between the organizations and individuals who worked in the field of skiing and created written sources. On the other hand, the reason is of

legal and formal nature as the materials obtained by the archives based on a special law are related to public entities; skiing organizations, based on the tradition of organized sports, originate from the private sphere and are thus a part of the civil society which is not obliged to provide any material. Needless to say, they can do so voluntarily. An additional obstacle is the nature of personal relation to the material. During her or his active lifetime, an individual tends to be emotionally attached and overly protective towards the material; their successors, conversely, are often careless and fail to recognize the value of the material, or they are not obliged in any way to respect the continuous care for the material. It is thus often the case that preservation of materials from skiing organization is merely coincidental, or dependent on the zeal of individuals. The materials are seldom submitted to the archives.

Regional archives in Slovenia – today, there are 6 in the public archives network – keep the materials of only 4 skiing clubs and one sub-association. Moreover, the volume of these materials is scant, it is fragmented, and it only covers a short period of time.¹⁵ The situation in the archives is therefore poor and it hardly allows us to reconstruct even a small bit of history. For the purpose of research it would be even more important to preserve the materials from the federal skiing organizations. In this respect, it should be noted that the materials from the Slovenian Ski Association have not been submitted to the national Archives of the Republic of Slovenia which are in charge of keeping the materials from umbrella organizations covering the entire country. It has been found in practice that sports associations in general tend to do poorly when it comes to keeping records, and they rarely contact the public archives. Remaining within Slovenian borders, beneficial information and the archival material from the former federal Yugoslav sports organizations are kept at the Yugoslav Archives in Belgrade.¹⁶ The archival materials by the Yugoslav Ski Association is preserved and processed rather well there. In addition, information on the history of skiing can also be found in some archives of Yugoslav federal ministries.

Hence, it is very difficult to research the history of skiing in the public network of archives in Slovenia by examining the records from organizations dedicated to this sport. However, it should be noted that traces of skiing activities can be found in other collections; however,

they are rather scattered, unsystematic, and can only be found by researchers closely familiar with the structure and organization of records in respective archives. Skiing activity, not only closely related to competitive sports, but also tourist, health-related, organized by schools etc., also took place within organizations in which skiing was only a part of their activities (e.g. skiing sections or departments at sport clubs and physical education or trade union organizations). It should be particularly noted that a lot of information on skiing can also be found in the expansive collections from administration, jurisprudence, forestry etc. Moreover, collections of particular types of material, such as collections of photographs, postcards, films etc. may also be of particular interest.

To keep this research transparent and clear, I only provide data for the narrow territory of Slovenia and partly former Yugoslavia. However, it would be very interesting – and it would merit a highly committed approach – to raise this issue in other nationalities, and especially to address the matter internationally. There are researchers who have some experience with researching the records from the International Ski Federation FIS, or the material of the International Olympic Committee. However, the question arises as to how accessible are research of records from respective national and international ski associations or federations if these records are not submitted to public archives.

From the aspect of archival activities, it should be emphasized that based on the standards of acceptance, storage, and access, as well as legislation, the archives are a more suitable partner for keeping the records than museums which seem to be prevalent in this field internationally, because the primary purpose of the museums is to interpret, rather than storage, processing, sorting, and care for access to information on which such interpretations may be based. Needless to say, the first concern for all – archives, museums, and academic institutions – has to be to preserve the information of importance for the research into the history of skiing. Only then can we address the issue of who is more appropriate for storing and allowing access to such information.

A view from the aspect of research approaches

From the aspect of research approaches, we can observe that the interest in research of the history of skiing using archival sources is quite meagre and inadequate. Scholars of skiing history – with a few exceptions – around the globe invest too little effort into research of archival records which can actually impart a higher scientific value to the analyses in the field. A view into the archival records opens up a broader view of the context of history. Quite frequently, historical research based solely on periodicals or even accessible literature fall short of adding new insight but rather reiterates and expands on the existing knowledge. Scientific research through monographs may be the first step, a gathering of information; yet in research methods, it should be supported by the broadest possible range of sources.

A review of several decades of research which has found its place especially through a number of collected volumes accompanying international conferences would reveal that there are very few contributions that include archival sources in their research.

In addition to the observed inadequate use of archival sources, we can also often witness interpretation of such sources, devoid of the context of the time and space in which they were created. A historian is namely supposed to not only provide information that was published somewhere at some point. Rather, she or he should ask these sources questions, verify their credibility, consider why and in what context the specific historical information was highlighted, and only then establish her or his interpretation of history.

Failing to include the research methods in the study of skiing history, scholars fail to do more than reiterate the historical stereotypes, and continue to unconsciously (or deliberately in a desire to promote or venerate a specific skiing ideology) reproduce the narrow views of a complex image of the cultural history of skiing.

References

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- 10 Michele Vovelle, *Ideologies and Mentalities*. Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis, 2003.
- 11 YWSA, Letter by Rudolf Sark to the YWSA (personally to the chairman Hubert Souvano); Ljubljana, February 6, 1928.
- 12 YWSA, Letter by the YWSA to Joža Pogačar; Ljubljana, February 11, 1928.
- 13 YWSA, Minutes of the 15th regular session of the YWSA, February 10, 1928.
- 14 For example: Universal Declaration on Archives (2016). See link: <http://www.ica.org/en/universal-declaration-archives> (accessed 12.4.2017).
- 15 Historical Archives of Celje keeps records from: SI_ZAC/1049 Ski Club Braslovče (1973–1987); Regional Archives in Nova Gorica keeps the records of SI_PANG/1062 Ski Club Matajur Tolmin (1976–1983); and Historical Archives of Ljubljana keeps records from two clubs: SI_ZAL_CER/0076 Ski club Loška dolina (1983–1987) and SI_ZAL_IDR/0250 Ski Club Idrija (1978–), and one sub-association: SI_ZAL_IDR/0023 Primorska region skiing sub-association of Idrija (1952–1960).
- 16 Archives of Yugoslavia (Vase Pelagića 33, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia) keeps the documents of entities on the level of formal Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – later Kingdom Yugoslavia (1918-1941) and formal socialist federal republic Yugoslavia (1945–1991).