

**CLUB FOR WORKERS AS AN EDUCATIONAL VENUE FOR URBAN RESIDENTS OF YENISSEI PROVINCE IN THE EARLY 1920s**

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*The article aims to place the workers' clubs within a larger context of socio-political and cultural developments that were taking place in Russia in the early 1920s. The article draws on evidence found in the Siberian periodical "Krasnoyarsk Worker", as well as official sources from the same period.*

**Key words:** *Siberia, Yenissei Province, the early 1920s, club for workers, cultural developments, educational initiatives, urban residents.*

**РАБОЧИЕ КЛУБЫ В КОНТЕКТЕ ПОВЫШЕНИЯ КАЧЕСТВА ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ ГОРОЖАН ЕНИСЕЙСКОЙ ГУБЕРНИИ В НАЧАЛЕ 1920-х гг.**

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*Статья посвящена анализу вопроса роли и места рабочих клубов в контексте досуговой деятельности горожан Енисейской губернии в начале 1920-х гг. Выявление общественно-политических настроений горожан, особенностей культурного развития и опыта появления рабочих клубов, связанные с инициативами властей по повышению качества образования в указанный период, осуществляется на материалах местного периодического издания «Красноярский рабочий».*

**Ключевые слова:** *Сибирь, Енисейская губерния, начало 1920-х гг., рабочий клуб, культурное развитие, образовательная политика, городские жители.*

“A workers' club is a major tool of socializing the daily life. Properly equipped and governed, a club changes even the family life of workers. It takes the place of their former “hearth and home”, expands their circle of friends and acquaintances, introduces the workers to team spirit” [1]. This definition, given by a handbook “Festivals of Community Living”, exhibits symptoms of socio-political and cultural developments that were taking place in Russia in the early 1920s. At this time, Russia was beginning to come back to life and to heavily engage in the reconstruction effort.

Ludmila Bulavka identifies 1920s as a remarkable period of societal transformation in which a whole range of creative activities – cultural and socioeconomic – flourished. Bulavka explains, “The message of the cultural revolution of the period was in profound transformation of spiritual production” [2]. In the words of Stefan Plaggenborg, “trying hard to entirely transform a person they (the Bolsheviks) continued to use all solutions and venues available”. Plaggenborg therefore believes that state-provided printing, broadcasting, filmmaking and museums became important drivers of bringing people together [3]. Gabriele Gorzka investigates social clubs for workers – as a shared public area for regular public meetings and another tool of socializing the daily life. According to Gorzka, workers' clubs gave another foothold for the Bolsheviks' influence within the Soviet society [4]. Cultural developments, through cultural institutions, Valentina Ryzhenko argues, intensified the process of urbanization in terms of cultural modernization in Soviet Siberia [5]. Educational initiatives of Soviet government among indigenous peoples who lived during the period in Siberia in the Yenisei region have also attracted the attention of the historians [6; 7; 8].

Thus, the place of social clubs for workers as a public leisure activity for urban residents and a tool for cultural modernization in the territory of Siberia, given the fact of significant differences between Russia and Siberia in terms of cultural developments during the early 1920s [9], has thus far been largely overlooked.

Within the article, the term leisure is understood as the time “which is left over after work and other obligations have been completed” [10].

Among a number of cultural institutions aimed to provide new Soviet leisure culture, which became available for the urban residents of Yenissei province, “House of Public Education” and “Palace of Working Youth” began to play a serious role in the transformation of local urban society in the early 1920s. On the first count, the newly available public leisure activity aimed, in the first place, to bring people together as the new government advocated “team spirit” among Soviet citizens and, in the second, to improve the literacy

levels. As A.Wood identified the NEP period, “Progressive educational systems were introduced, the laws on marriage, cohabitation, divorce and women’s’ rights were totally revamped, and a vigorous drive to improve literacy levels – including the creation of new alphabets and writing systems, at first in the Roman and later in the Cyrillic script, for some of the Siberian native peoples who till then had no written language – was set in motion” [11, p.193]. Equally important is the second characteristic, Soviet shared public areas became a “viable” alternative for people’s traditional habitat. Besides, overcrowded and poor standard homes left no place for individual leisure.

In the early 1920s, the mass media was the main source of information for the urban residents on achievements of Russian cultural revolution, in general, and local educational initiatives, in particular. Through the mass media Soviet authorities addressed their agitation and propaganda needs [12]. Thus, textual evidence found in local periodicals constitute a unique source of information on socio-political and cultural developments that were taking place in Russia from the regional perspective of Siberia [13].

In 1922, the House of Public Education (Dom Narodnogo Prosveschenia) was transferred to the balance of the Yenisei Provincial Union of Education Workers [14]. The same year a library and several societies – pedagogical, preschool, natural science, Marxist, trade union, chess, local history, music, etc., - were organized. The variety of activities and the competence of the staff represent an impressive record of organizing outdoor [15, p. 4] and indoor performances for the local residents. However, education of the urban residents was a priority for the staff and local authorities. Among a number of educational initiatives aimed to improve people’s literacy levels, lectures were regularly given. For example, the locals had lectures on “The Green World and the Red World” (Plants as an intermediary between inanimate nature and animals)”, “Geological Origin of Krasnoyarsk”, “The Origin of Life on the Earth”, given by the members of the Krasnoyarsk Department of the Russian Geographical Society. Entrance for those willing to improve their literacy levels was free [16, p. 4]. Despite scientific topics of the lectures given for not very literate people, the analysis of textual evidence from the local periodicals shows the people enjoyed shared experience: “One thing is bad that such interesting lectures are given only once a month. Would they be read more often, there would have bring more benefits,” - a contemporary complained [17, p. 3]. Already in December 1924, foreign language courses – “English, French and German” – were organized and apparently enjoyed popularity, since the newspaper was forced to inform the townspeople that “in the first place, union members are welcome to join the courses and in the second – all urban residents” [18, p. 8]. Films were shown in the cinema “Science and Life”, functioning at the premises of the House of Public Education, they targeted not only grown-ups. Local children enjoyed for example, “80 Days around the World” in five parts [19, p. 4].

Likewise, the Palace of Working Youth (Dvotetz Rabochey Molodezhy), another kind of educational and leisure venue for young people, included a library, amateur dramatic society with 60 members and music society with 10 female members [20, p. 8]. Antireligious society with its traditional lectures as “What is Religion?” or “The Origin of Traditional Siberian Religion” was the token of societal paradigm shift [21]. In addition, the members of the Krasnoyarsk Department of the Russian Geographical Society held regular meetings at the Palace of Working Youth. On December 21, 1924, D.E.Lappo gave the lecture on “Protection of Natives in the Northern Territories”; N.K.Auerbach – “Organization of the Excursion to the Archaeological Excavations of Mount Afontova near Krasnoyarsk in 1923-24”. The members of the Krasnoyarsk Department of the Russian Geographical Society did not charge entry fees [22, p. 5]. The local periodical typically pointed out that the lectures were given at the “appropriate time” – usually in the evenings on weekdays and during the whole day at weekends. The topics for the lectures “Geological origin of Krasnoyarsk” or “Organization of the Excursion to the Archaeological Excavations of Mount Afontova near Krasnoyarsk in 1923-24” introduced to the urban residents of Yenisei province or their shared activities within foreign language courses or amateur dramatic societies could hardly advocate for “strong ideological backgrounds” or “special working culture” identified by some scholars [3; 4].

In the early 1920s, clubs for workers, as an educational venue and democratizing form of public leisure activity became the token of returning to normality or a new normal for those willing to enjoy new educational experiences. Given harsh socioeconomic circumstances and living environment, clubs for workers became places of regular public meetings and the tool of socializing the daily life of ordinary people, brought them together, expanded their “the circle of friends or acquaintances”, and intensified the process of urbanization in terms of cultural modernization in Soviet Siberia. State-provided cultural services, considered newsworthy by the mass media, encouraged the people to enjoy a new form of equality and became important drivers for creating inclusive urban community. As a result, the young Soviet state’s attempts at creating a new socio-political order in Russia essentially reshaped both the personal and the public lives of Russian urban residents in the early 1920s.

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