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**Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future**

**TRAINING OF PROFESSIONAL CADRES AND THE PROBLEMS  
OF SORBIANS' ETHNOCULTURAL IDENTITY**

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*Abstract*

The article is devoted to the problems and perspectives of the traditional culture of the Lusatian Serbs at the present stage. On the material of official documents and interviews with the bearers of tradition, are being considered the problems of training professional cadres for educational and public organizations of Serbian people and organization of the education system at various levels. The following issues are considered: 1. Culture of Lusatian Serbs: historical background; 2. Actual problems and the role of educational organizations in the preservation of Serbians' culture; 3. Institute of Sorbian Studies at the University of Leipzig: training of professional cadres for educational and public organizations of Serbians; 4. Language Center "WITAJ" as a factor in the preservation of the Sorbian language and culture; 5. Bilateral cooperation of the Institute of Sorbian Studies and the Language Center "WITAJ"; 6. Problems of preserving the language and ethnic identity of Serbians. In the conditions of migration of ethnic representatives to the major cities of Germany, the insufficiency of protecting the public and cultural interests of the Lusatian Serbs at the regional and federal levels, and the problems with the numerically prevailing German population in the country, is of fundamental importance the complexity of the approach to the preservation of the culture of the small people. Possession of the Sorbian language, knowledge of the history and traditions of its people, which is acquired in educational institutions of various levels, becomes the factor that preserves the vitality and uniqueness of Sorbian culture.

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**Keywords:** Ethnocultural identity, Institute of Sorbian Studies, Lusatians Serbs, Language Centre "WITAJ professional training, traditional culture.



## **1. Introduction**

Analysis of socio-cultural characteristics, as well as the problem of the correlation between the concepts of “tradition” and “innovation”, is especially difficult when it comes to the so-called “small cultures”. Today, in virtually every country in the world, one can find ethnic communities that have common citizenship for all citizens of this country, represent a separate group in the conditions of the whole state, are an integral part of its structure, but at the same time are differ from the majority with its ethno-cultural characteristics (Grinëv, 2016, 2017). According to Elwert (2002, p. 254), such features can be “religion, language, origin and ethnic self-organization”.

## **2. Problem Statement**

In this article we will discuss the problems of the cultural and ethnic identity of the Sorbian minority in terms of organizing the education system at various levels.

## **3. Research Questions**

Within the framework of the article it is proposed to consider the following research questions: 1. Culture of Lusatian Serbs: historical background; 2. Actual problems and the role of educational organizations in the preservation of Serbians’ culture; 3. Institute of Sorbian Studies at the University of Leipzig: training of professional cadres for educational and public organizations of Serbians; 4. Language Center “WITAJ” as a factor in the preservation of the Sorbian language and culture; 5. Bilateral cooperation of the Institute of Sorbian Studies and the Language Center “WITAJ”; 6. Problems of preserving the language and ethnic identity of Serbians.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

To analyze the issues of training professional cadres among the smallest Slavic people – the Lusatian Serbs.

## **5. Research Methods**

The methods of research were comparative historical (the interaction between Sorbian and German cultures and their historical development) and structural functional (the features of the linguistic and cultural component in the program of Sorbian educational organizations), as well as the source analysis of official documents and video interviews with the bearers of the tradition.

## **6. Findings**

1. Culture of Lusatian Serbs: historical background. The Lusatian Serbs, or as they call themselves, Sorbs, are the descendants of the Slavic tribes who, from the time of the great migration of peoples (occurred more than 1,400 years ago), settled in the area of the Oder and Elba rivers, in the territory from the Baltic Sea to the mountains of Central Germany. Because of the swampy natural landscape, this historic area is called Luzhitsa (Lusatia). Today it is the region of Lausitz in the eastern part of modern Germany, which is located on the territory of two federal states – Saxony and Brandenburg.

After the loss of political independence in the XXth century there was a purposeful Germanization and assimilation of the population, as a result of which the area of residence of the Serbian tribes was much smaller. This led to the growing dominance of the German language and culture in various life spheres, and often to the German people's contemptuous attitude to the unique heritage of the Lusatian Serbs, to the gradual loss of language and culture.

Meanwhile, Serbian culture is a unique phenomenon from the point of view of the way in which a small number of people managed to preserve their cultural identity in conditions of a foreign culture environment. At the same time the history of Serbian people constantly checked them for strength, sending tests for the resistance to assimilation processes from the German environment. Thus, the term "Vendian", which the Germans called Serbian for many hundreds of years, was in German with the official name of Lusatian Serbs with a disdainful tinge, since the Vendian was considered to be "an uneducated and uncouth rural man, burdened with negative character traits" (Schuster-Šewc, 1983, p. 138). In the history of the Serbs, we will find episodes of conquest by Germanic tribes in the VIIIth–IXth centuries, and the German colonization of Serbian lands in the XIIth–XIIIth centuries, and persecutions against the native language in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries.

As a result, at the beginning of the XXth century, the idea of creating a Lusatian state, which had not been realized, was ripe for the Lusatian Serbs. In 1933, after the establishment of the National Socialist government in Germany, began arrests and forced evictions of representatives of the Lusatian intelligentsia, the Lusatian language and printed publications were banned, and the Serbs themselves were declared German speaking Vendian (The peoples of foreign Europe, 1964, p. 283). In 1945–1946 years Lusatian Serbs for the second time in their history attempted to secede from Germany, which again failed, and after World War II, the Germanization of the Serbians was accelerated after the resettlement of Germans from Czechoslovakia and Poland to Lusatia (Lapteva, 1996, p. 116). However, in the decades national self-consciousness grew in the family, church, and school-education spheres, the desire to preserve customs and traditions became noticeable, as a result of which the cultural growth of the Lusatian people occurred (Im Zeichen des Lindenblatts, 2006).

2. Actual problems and the role of educational organizations in the preservation of Serbians' culture. The culture of the Lusatian Serbs of the past and present refers to a culture of the so-called traditional type, characterized by the following features: domination of agriculture and manual technologies in material production; the numerical superiority of the rural population over the urban population; low social mobility; the prevalence of prescribed statuses over those achieved; extended patriarchal family; non-separation of the individual from the social environment; low rate of social change; orientation to the past, not to the future; homogeneous values and norms (Kostina, 2009).

Present day the problems of preserving the unique culture of the Lusatian Serbs and their reproduction are very acute. The main cause of anxiety for the future of Serbs is the fact that the language and cultural heritage are preserved by the efforts of the small people, whose number of representatives decreases every year. So, at the moment there are about 60,000 Lusatian Serbs on the territory of the federal state of Saxony and about 20,000 in the territory of the federal state of Brandenburg (Im Zeichen des Lindenblatts, 2006). It should be noted that it is impossible to establish the exact number of carriers of the Serbian culture, since there is no clear criterion that a person could be uniquely identified as a Sorb.

For example, according to Act № 14 of Article 35 of the Treaty on the Unification of Germany, issued in 1990, “the recognition of one’s belonging to the Sorbian people and culture is free” (Im Zeichen des Lindenblatts, 2006, p. 6). However, the document emphasizes that the Lusatian Serbs are “free to protect and preserve the Sorbian language in public life” (Im Zeichen des Lindenblatts, 2006, p. 8). The lack of clearly defined criteria in determining their ethnic identity is demonstrated by another official document, the Saxony Ordinance Law, adopted in 1999. It says: “A Sorb can be considered one who considers himself such. This accessory is free, that is, it cannot be either challenged or tested. This belonging cannot be accompanied by any negative consequences” (Im Zeichen des Lindenblatts, 2006, p. 8).

The above mentioned circumstance of freedom in determining the own ethnic identity of the Lusatian Serbs strengthens the objective complexity of preserving the cultural specificity of the small people in the territory belonging to representatives of a different culture. Do not forget that the German population in comparison with Lusatian Serbs quantitatively dominates and, importantly, has a language of national importance. Being officially recognized by the government of the FRG and the European Union as autochthonous people on the territory of Germany, unfortunately, Serbians, in comparison with the numerically prevailing Germans, do not feel as confident on their land as they would like.

In order to preserve and transfer cultural heritage, Lusatian Serbs created a number of public, educational and creative organizations. So, today the Lusatian Serbs have their own national theater, publishing house, cultural center and a daily newspaper. A special place is occupied by the national organization Domovina, a politically independent and self-governing association of Serbians, one of the main tasks of which is the preservation and development of the language and culture of the Serbian people, their self-awareness and traditions. One cannot fail to mention also the work of the Fund of the Serbian people, founded by the federal government and the governments of the states of Saxony and Brandenburg in 1991. The Fund provides financial support to the main Serbian institutions, projects and individual activities for the preservation and development of the Sorbian language and culture. Special importance in the continuity of the cultural development of Serbian people is acquired by educational organizations of various levels.

3. Institute of Sorbian Studies at the University of Leipzig: training of professional cadres for educational and public organizations of Serbians. The Institute of Sorbian Studies of the University of Leipzig occupies the main place in the training of professional cadres for the educational and public organizations of the Lusatian Serbs. The Institute is a structural subdivision of the Philological Faculty of Leipzig University and was founded in 1951. The Institute’s mission is to study the Upper Sorbian and Lower Sorbian languages, as well as culture, literature, historical, ethnological and social issues of the Serbian heritage. Today, the Institute of Sorbian Studies is the only higher educational institution in the world that prepares graduates with higher education. Graduates of the Institute of Sorbian Studies receive scientific degrees of Bachelor and Master of Arts, Bachelor and Master of Pedagogy. Teaching at the Institute is conducted in the Upper and Lower Sorbian languages.

The official website of the Institute emphasizes the fact that qualified and well-educated graduates are particularly in demand in schools, educational centers and other institutions of Lower Lusatia with the center in Brandenburg (Cottbus) and Upper Lusatia with the center in Saxony (Bautzen). So, most Serbian parents want to use the state guaranteed right to engage their children in Sorbian language in

bilingual schools. The Institute offers its students a practical-oriented education that presupposes the language competence, development and strengthening of linguistic and ethnic self-awareness regarding the native culture (University of Leipzig, n.d.).

The Institute of Sorbian Studies sees the main task in the training of teachers for primary, secondary schools and gymnasiums. Many students enter the university with the already available preparation in the Sorbian language, which they passed at the school level or the educational project “WITAJ” (it will be discussed below). However, learning is not just about learning a language; great attention is also paid to literary and cultural studies. A number of special disciplines are conducted by the invited employees of the Sorbian Institute from Bautzen, which ensures the unity of teaching and research activities.

#### 4. Language Center “WITAJ” as a factor in the preservation of the Sorbian language and culture.

The Language Center “WITAJ” was founded in 2001 in Bautzen. The main task of the Center is the revival of the Sorbian language, which begins already from preschool age. Language in preschool institutions (kindergartens) is taught by the language immersion method. The Language Center “WITAJ” also prepares for language courses of educators, develops school textbooks and additional materials in the Sorbian language, designed for conducting lessons in the school. The palette of language projects extends from the development of computer games to the organization of events with the participation of young people and families.

Visiting the Language Center “WITAJ” and Sorbian-language pre-school institutions undoubtedly affects the personal and professional lives of their graduates. Thus, interviews with young Sorbian people testify that they have a high degree of responsibility for the preservation of the Lusatian language – so called “personal responsibility for the language” (Fishman, 1989, p. 397), even if they do not associate their profession with Sorbian language and culture. Here, for example, as characterizes Eric Osterwald, a former pupil of the “WITAJ” Language Center from Cottbus, the influence of the Sorbian environment on himself: “This is very important for me. The Sorbian language is the language of a small nation, and I believe that it has opened many opportunities for me. It’s about acquaintance with the broadcasts of Radio Berlin – Brandenburg and about the training in the Lower-Sorbian Gymnasium” (20 Jahre sorbisches Sprachprojekt WITAJ, 2018).

And the 22-year-old Isabel Berki studies at the magistracy in English and History at the Humboldt-University of Berlin: “When I come home to Cottbus, I work at Radio Berlin – Brandenburg as moderator and creator of Sorbian-language radio programs. I am happy to remember my school years, because I really appreciate the feeling of linguistic and cultural affiliation with my people” (Junge Leute mit wendischen Wurzeln, 2018).

#### 5. Bilateral cooperation of the Institute of Sorbian Studies and the Language Center “WITAJ”.

There is no doubt a two-way link between the Language Center “WITAJ” and the Institute of Sorbian Studies at the University of Leipzig. On the one hand, the students of the Language Center are replenishing the ranks of future students of the Institute of Sorbian Studies. Already with language training, such entrants are more motivated to choose a future profession, and, moreover, are more aware of their ethnic identity, as the desire of a group of individuals for self-identification depends on the degree of real or perceived ethno linguistic viability (Giles & Johnson, 1981). On the other hand, the Institute of

Sorbian Studies is a kind of “forge of cadres” for the Language Center – many employees of the “WITAJ” are graduates of the Institute. For example, the head of the branch Language Center “WITAJ” in Cottbus is Doctor of Philology Viktor Zakar. He defended his thesis on issues of the upper Sorbian language at the Institute of Sorbian Studies under the guidance of Professor, Doctor of Philology Eduard Werner. Such fundamental scientific and language preparation allows Zakar to develop the center’s activities in three directions: the first of them is devoted to the development of pedagogy and didactics in the form of creating textbooks, teaching aids and dictionaries of the Sorbian language; the second is related to the project activity and is aimed at popularization of the Sorbian language in the youth environment, as well as the organization of family evenings and an out-of-campus language camp; the third direction of the center’s activity is directed to scientific work, the results of which are used in training of the cadres of Sorbian kindergartens (Elsner, 2016).

6. Problems of preserving the language and ethnic identity of Serbians. Despite the developed educational system, the survival of Sorbian language and culture in Germany is fraught with a number of problems. In the opinion of the linguist Bogomolova (2011), the language of the Lusatian Serbs today is threatened from two sides. First, while the Sorbian language is officially recognized as the language of the autochthonous minority and has the right to state support, it often does not go beyond the individual cultural initiatives of the Serbs, and in the domestic environment it sounds mostly in family communication. Secondly, there are no objective grounds for leaving the language beyond this framework: only a small number of the population (about 8,000 people living mostly in the villages) speak their own language (Bogomolova, 2011).

The importance of preserving the native language in its active use is fully realized by the bearers of the tradition. So, according to a young Lusatian Serb from Bautzen, the language is the most important tool of familiarizing with the culture and identifying oneself as its bearer. In an interview he gave to the German international public broadcaster Deutsche Welle, Stefan does not agree with the way the criteria of belonging to the Serbian people are interpreted by the main law: “The basic law says: Sorb is one who feels that way. I have a different opinion on this: you must speak Sorbian. I just can not imagine how you can feel like a Sorb if you do not speak this language” (Sorben – a Slavic minority in Germany, 2012). A similar opinion is expressed by an actor of the German-Sorbian People’s Theater from Bautzen: “If the language disappears, identity disappears as well. For me, as a Lusatian Serb, this means that as long as I can, I must try to slow down this process. But this depends on the participation of everyone” (Goldenzweig, 2017). These statements of informants confirm the thesis of the Russian researcher Evseeva that “identity is the result of an open process of identification into which an individual is involved in the process of socialization and social adaptation, and this result is never final, he becomes such only with the death of the individual” (Evseeva, 2009, p. 15).

## **7. Conclusion**

Thus, the training of professional cadres for the educational, public and creative organizations of Sorbian people today is of great importance. In the conditions of migration of ethnic representatives to the major cities of Germany, the insufficiency of protecting the public and cultural interests of the Lusatian Serbs at the regional and federal levels, and the problems with the numerically prevailing German

population in the country, the complexity of the approach to the preservation of the culture of the small people is of fundamental importance. Possession of the Sorbian language, knowledge of the history and traditions of its people, which is acquired in educational institutions of various levels, becomes the factor that preserves the vitality and uniqueness of Sorbian culture. The educational, social and creative initiatives of the Lusatian Serbs allow the new generation not to forget about their roots and do everything possible to ensure that their rich historical heritage is in demand by modernity.

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