

ICOA1167: ARS MEMORIA

Subtheme 02: The Role of Cultural Heritage in Building Peace and Reconciliation

Session 2: Heritage as Victim

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Abstract: A view on the history and memory in former Yugoslavia is ranging from victimization through amnesia to nostalgia. What these opposing positions have in common is their failure to recognize the full complexity of the phenomenon of collective memory and of the region's history of struggle over concepts of identity, nation, conflict and reconciliation, and the contradictory lessons of the past.

As well as the other states created after the fall of socialist Yugoslavia, Croatia has deployed national symbols strategically to promote favourable images of its heritage in “nation branding” in order to create identity of difference.

Heritage is the best example that in some ways always represents conditions of conflict in space, as the very tool and consequence of politics. For example, the reconstruction with the facsimile method of the Old Bridge in Mostar (that was destroyed in war conflict) was an attempt to reconcile the antagonism of divided city and unify it - what unfortunately did not ever happen. Therefore this “new-old” bridge that originally represented multinational identity of the city, represents today contested identity of the city and certainly did not help or enable post-conflict reconciliation. Nation state along with expert community actually produced “image of identity representation” using heritage as a social-political resource.

There is too much memory on Balkans, too many pasts on which people can draw, usually as a weapon against the past of someone else. Cynicism and mistrust pervade all social, cultural and even personal exchanges so that the reconciliation is very difficult. There are multiple memories and historical myths that form powerful counter-histories of a mutually antagonistic and divisive nature.

Destruction of heritage on Balkans (along with ethnic cleansing) should be viewed as a form of “construction”, which aided in the production of the new, exclusive and mono cultural identities.

Key words: *conflict, reconciliation, identity, heritage*

Attitude towards the past is the key for numerous regional problems still remaining in the countries of former Yugoslavia whose people have lived almost the entire 20th century in one common state and learned one common history.

A view on the history and memory in former Yugoslavia is ranging from victimization through amnesia to nostalgia. What these opposing positions have in common is their failure to recognize the full complexity of the phenomenon of collective memory and of the region's history of struggle over concepts of nation, political power, economic entanglement, and the contradictory lessons of the past. In the recent decades, this region has experienced unforeseeable counter-trends of national historicism, followed by denial of the recent past. Out of memory oblivions, the national narrative as a means of control grew up using the selected memory for desired ad hoc construction of identity.¹

During the 1990s and war conflict, new political parties searched for and projected ideas of national, religious, political self-containment, exclusiveness and historical authenticity while restoring religious and national identities based on pre-modern, patriarchal and rural values.² In such a socio-cultural space, national and folk culture has been rediscovered with the help of a retrospective mythology. In the unarticulated postulates of national rhetoric, the stability could have been obtained only through cultural homogeneity i.e. through symbolic and actual exclusion of certain groups from society.³ The „new life“ was basically marked by return to national values and “museumification” of ethnicity, along with blending of communist's and nationalist's sentiments.⁴

After the 1991-95 war, Croatia has been managing its difficult, recent past not through recognition of it but through *concealment* and *cultural reframing*, directing attention away from the war legacy. Decision to avoid the legacy of the 1991-95 war was linked to a broader absence of state-sponsored commemoration throughout the country. As well as the other states created after the fall of socialist Yugoslavia, Croatia has deployed national symbols strategically to promote favourable images of its heritage abroad – “nation branding” and suppressed alternatives for other narrative performances. This emphasis on heritage in national ideology was elaborated in Ervin Goffman's work on stigma management, which is defined as a strategy of covering and concealment rather than commemoration, and where there are no strong “agents of memory” other than the state to implement alternative versions of the past.⁵

1 Esbenschade, 1995 : 81.

2 Erjavec 2008: 53.

3 Niedermuller 1999: 22.

4 Panovski, 2006 : 61.

5 Rivera, 2008 : 620.

The perception and valorisation of post WWII heritage before the 1991-95 war, was being strongly supported and recognized by state officials. Antifascist heritage was widely accepted among the public and formed the significant part of the social life and values. Antifascist monuments were designed by famous sculptors and architects, conveying powerful visual impact in order to show the confidence and strength of the Socialist Republic. Such was the case with one of the most famous ex Yugoslav architect Bogdan Bogdanović whose numerous unique memorial sites have always been developed out of the topography and landscape as places of thinking, recalling and contemplation, thus not exclusively being conceptualized as aesthetic objects (Fig. 1).⁶



Fig.1- Partisan memorial, Mostar (Archiv/Sammlung, Architekturzentrum, Wien)

6 Subversive Urbanism, "A transcendental alternative to Balkan reality: Bogdan Bogdanović,"
"http://subversiveurbanism.tumblr.com/post/22802654170/a-transcendental-alternative-to-balkan-reality-bogdan

Bogdanovic' antifascist memorials are devoid of any symbols of communism or other ideologies, and refreshingly different from the Eastern European Socialist realism' monumental, figurative vocabulary (Fig. 2).

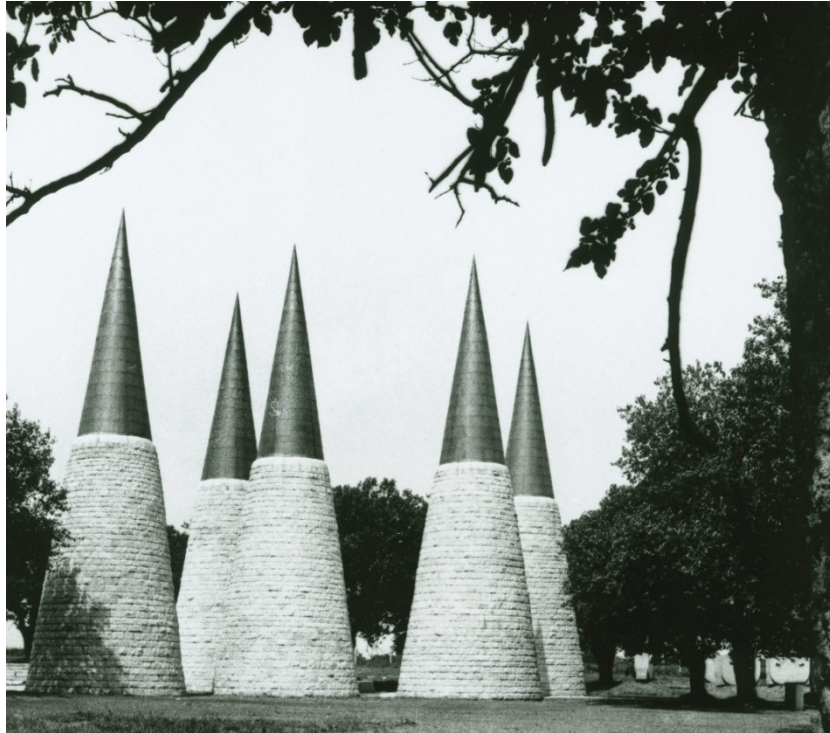


Fig.2- Memorial site Dudik, Vukovar (Archiv/Sammlung, Architekturzentrum, Wien)

Another monument that has significant artistic value along with its memorial-commemorative value is the work of famous modernist sculptor VojinBakić at Petrovagora, one of the most important antifascist monuments in the country.⁷ The monument is an architectural/ sculptural work, and its interior was home to the Museum of the Revolution, an ethnographic collection, exhibition spaces, a library, and a multimedia hall (Fig. 3).

7 Večernji list, "Petrovagora –spomeniksramote," <http://www.vecernji.hr/kultura/petrova-gora-spomenik-sramote-clanak-468653>

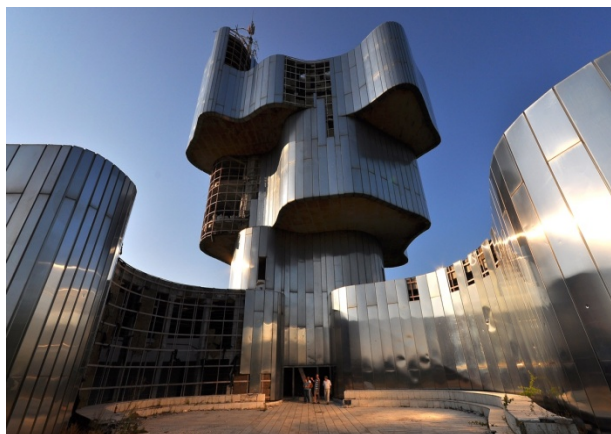


Fig.3- Monument on Petrova Gora, Croatia

After the collapse of Yugoslavia in early 1990s, these monuments were completely abandoned, and their symbolic meanings suppressed and obliterated. Modes of public commemoration towards post WWII heritage have changed drastically and new ways to publicly deal with the old memorials tended to de-idolize them, thus trying as well to erase the collective memory of post WWII period as explicit manifestation of the former political system and ideology. During the period between 1990-2000 almost the half of the total number of antifascist monuments were destroyed.

However, during the recent decade a slow process of antifascist monument renovation started but only around 100 monuments have been restored, i.e. 3% of the total number.⁸ National Register of Monuments evidences that 50% of the antifascist memorials have been destroyed or damaged during the 1991-95.⁹ The discussion has been raised on the criteria of revalorisation of this type of legacy. It is well known that the meaning of the monument must be recovered by an accurate reconstruction of the cultural situation in which the object originated and the way in which building as a cultural object in time is possessed, rejected, or achieved should be addressed.¹⁰

During the last 20 years the collective memory of post WWII period has been rejected as a marker of “former” system. The former Yugoslav legacy had been perceived either through amnesia or nostalgia. The question we are facing today is not only how to restore but also how to revitalize antifascist legacy for the future generations. These monuments are not only the markers of some remote past, but also the bearers of the universal values that are important today as well. Unfortunately in all former wars in the entire region, along with ethnic cleansing, a memorial cleansing existed that was accompanied with indifference and ignorance resulting in decontextualization of monuments.¹¹

Though many of them are still of a stunning beauty, these obsolete monuments risk losing their symbolic significance. It is obvious that their context has changed and new values need to be attributed in order to

8 Ministry of Culture of Republic of Croatia, National Register of Monuments, <http://www.min-kulture.hr/default.aspx?id=8275>

9 Ministry of Culture of Republic of Croatia, National Register of Monuments, <http://www.min-kulture.hr/default.aspx?id=8275>

10 Hays, 1984 : 20.

11 Kirn, 2012

transform and restore their original meaning. New living context for these monuments can be achieved with social and artistic actions that will attract broader public along with the participation of the local community, though with a major dilemma: whether to socialise the monument through theoretical affirmation of antifascism or to economise it.

Some recent projects evidence the attempt to revitalize these monuments without the governmental financial support, and therefore relying on very low budget and the enthusiasm of a few activist groups. Such is the project for the revitalizing antifascist memorial monuments and raising public awareness about them is creation of virtual museum Dotrščina in Zagreb. Memorial park Dotrščina was originally designed in 1960s by landscape architect Josip Seissel.¹² There are five representative monuments within the boundaries of the park designed by famous modernist sculptors. This memorial park is enlisted on National Register but most of the people are not aware of its significance or which historic event is related to this park. Virtual museum of Dotrščina is actually web site that provides basic information about the site and related events. Museum was opened in 2012 and a temporary landscape intervention was held in this park with the intention to show visually and in a symbolic way the amount of killings that happened here during the WWII. It is estimated that 7000 people were killed and therefore the intervention symbolically contained 7000 elements in order to show the scale of tragedy happened, which is almost forgotten today. Each of 7000 white ribbons is tied around a tree as an attempt to develop the culture of memory by promoting contemporary ways of marking the memory in public space by involving contemporary artistic production (Fig. 4-5). The idea is to have temporary artistic exhibitions/ interventions each year in this park which would contribute to its revitalization



Fig. 4- Memorial site Dotrščina, Zagreb (Photo by JadranBoban)



Fig.5- Dotrščina, artistic intervention (Photo by JadranBoban)

The third ongoing project is plan for the revitalization of the monument located on Katalinić' hill in Split (Fig. 6).



Fig.6- Monument on Katalinic hill, Split

This monument was built in 1958 and it is enlisted on the National Register. It served as a light-house, and afterwards as a funeral tomb for a deceased sailor who died during WWII in antifascist struggle¹³. In 1991 the monument was bombarded by Yugoslav army and since then it was in the state of decay and rapid degradation. Its symbolic significance is not only in its antifascist connotation but it can also be defined as a tribute and in memory to all deceased sailors at the Adriatic Sea. The proposal for its revitalization consists of interactive platform placed in the vicinity of the monument with a touch sensitive screen where the visitors could leave and write their messages thus connecting people by erasing spatial obstacles between the monument and the people and to enable them to freely intervene with the monument.

However the nature of heritage is always contested since it in some ways always represents conditions of conflict in space, as the very tool and consequence of politics. For example, the reconstruction with the facsimile method of the Old Bridge in Mostar was an attempt to reconcile the antagonism of divided city and unify it - what unfortunately did not ever happen. The question is which identity is trying to be re-established with this type of falsifying history. New memory places that present national identity, occupy today public spaces such as in the case of contemporary War memorial built in 2006 close to the Old City walls in Dubrovnik (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7- New War Memorial, Dubrovnik

This is causing conflicting views and opinions within community, making division between those who are linked to this memory place and those who are not, and thus becoming an example of contested heritage. Such identification with the power of the nation state produces “images of representation” using heritage as a social-political resource.

Whenever memory is invoked we should be asking ourselves: by whom, where, in which context, against what? On the other hand, there are multiple memories and historical myths that form powerful counter-histories of a mutually antagonistic and divisive nature.¹⁴ Thus, instead of being integrated, memory was uprooted and detached from life, collected and produced as a way to express its unifying nature.

13 1 Postozauumjetnost, <http://1postozauumjetnost.wordpress.com/texts/>

14 Esbenshade, 1995:79.

There is a passage in the text “Transformative power of memory” by Aleida Assman that depicts and illustrates how the trauma can defy the public acceptance of memory: “The form of politics of memory is not defined by covering and concealment but in its “opening” as a subject in the social space and by public acceptance”.¹⁵ As long as silence is the prevailed mode of dealing with the past, the memory will be used as a generator of manipulation and instrumentalization of society consciousness.¹⁶

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15 Assmann, 2011: 210.

16 Rivera, 2008: 617.

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Virtual Museum Dotrščina, Zagreb, <http://www.dotrscina.hr/>

List of Figures

Fig.1: Partisan memorial, Mostar (Archiv/Sammlung, Architekturzentrum, Wien)

Fig.2- Memorial site Dudik, Vukovar (Archiv/Sammlung, Architekturzentrum, Wien)

Fig.3- Monument at Petrova Gora (<http://arteist.hr/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Petrova-Gora.jpg>)

Fig.4- Memorial site Dotrščina, Zagreb (Photo by JadranBoban)

Fig.5- Dotrščina – artistic intervention (Photo by JadranBoban)

Fig.6- Detail of relief from the monument on Katalinic hill, Split (Photo by Dragan Mileušnić)

Fig.7- New War Memorial, Dubrovnik (Photo by Sandra Uskoković)