

# The role of Museums in the Construction of the Social Memory of the 1990's in Croatia

*Museums are institutions whose mission is to sum up, preserve and communicate the objects of heritage. We can interpret them as places of memory where ideas about history, past and tradition are being materialized and stored. The aim of this paper is to show how social memory was created and changed in the Croatian museums in the nineties. Using the example of the exhibition catalogue analysis from the period 1985-1995 from the Ethnographic museum in Zagreb and the Croatian History Museum, the author's goal is to show which historical motives, personalities and traditions are systematically being introduced and emphasized in museums and which ones are subject to attempts to have them "erased".*

**Keywords:** Croatian History Museum, Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, social memory, place of memory, museums

The need for sense strengthened the meaning of history and culture of memory<sup>1</sup> and the nostalgia for the past was reflected in the opening of many museums and other institutions of heritage. The aim of this paper is to show how social memory is created in museums using the example of exhibitions and exhibits. By observing their change during the 1990s, I witnessed different episodes, personalities and traditions being introduced in the exhibits, as well as the things that were removed from them. I chose two museums in Zagreb as my specific area of research – the Croatian History Museum and the Ethnographic Museum. By choosing these two museums as an example, I focused on different images of the past, on the one hand the ones interpreted with history and the official, authorized discourse, and on the other hand the ones shaped with tradition and traditional motives and symbols. History has an important role in shaping the national identity and making the political system legitimate. Every past is interpreted by using someone's personal memory and history becomes meaningful the moment we interpret the past in the context of the present. Therefore history is based upon the past that came out of the culture of me

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<sup>1</sup> The culture of memory is one of the approaches of studying social memory which is primarily focused on individuals, individual narratives and practices.

mory. Cipek states that finally “the connection between the culture of memory, memory of a specific group and the official interpretation of history is created in a museum” (Cipek 2011:19). Tradition is also involved in shaping the national identity and its affirmation. The need to protect the cultural heritage and preserve the tradition played an important role at the beginning of the nineties in shaping and awakening the national awareness and identity. In that sense the Ethnographic Museum focused on re-establishing the forgotten traditions which were supposed to „revive the roots“ of Croatian tradition in the new period and to be a foundation for the creation of new traditions which would be a part of the newly established and independent Republic of Croatia.

I started the research with an assumption that museums have an important and influential role in the construction of social memory, firstly because they are cultural and information institutions whose mission is to be “interpreters of history and cultural heritage” (Vrkljan Križić 2004:355). I start from the assumption that the exhibits and exhibitions changed in the nineties and that they primarily reflect the politics of memory, respectively the frame in which the political discourse is being channeled by using remembrance. The politics of memory changing the exhibits and exhibitions can best be seen in the light of the removal of any kind of marks that remind of Yugoslavia, socialism and revolution and, alongside that, when new motives connected with the sovereign and independent Republic of Croatia are used. I tracked those changes through the exhibition catalogs of the two museums mentioned above, where the exhibitions were held from 1985-1995. In the documentation of the museums I found the list of catalogs of all the exhibitions in the period I was interested in. The exhibitions, respectively their catalogs, which were included in the analysis, are my personal and arbitrary choices from these lists. When I gathered all available catalogs from the specified period I made a selection based on how interesting and diverse the topic of the exhibition was, respectively I chose the catalogs I considered suitable for my research<sup>2</sup> and detailed analysis. Besides browsing through the exhibition catalogs I also did semi-structured interviews with the museums’ employees. I talked to the curator<sup>3</sup> from the Ethnographic Museum and the curator from the Croatian History Museum. I was interested in the way exhibitions were constructed before and after the nineties and what kinds of attitudes about the past were being transferred. When and how does the change in the exhibit occur? Is there any space for individual narratives in the museums or is the emphasis on the official discourse?

Surely the museums have an important role in the process of creating a social memory, as carriers and guardians of tradition and memory; therefore I think this subject field is inevitable in the field of researching social memory. It is especially interesting to observe the changes in Croatia after Yugoslavia fell apart, when identity was getting re-defined and the tradition and practices different from those before were being emphasized.

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<sup>2</sup> Research for this publication was conducted as a part of a course “Anthropology of social memory“. That resulted in a paper mentored by doc. dr. sc. Nevena Škrbić –Alempijević. I based the theoretical frame and presumptions on the concepts and approaches processed as a part of that course.

<sup>3</sup> Information about the interviewees is stored at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Philology in Zagreb

## Museums as places of memory

“Warriors who are the nation’s heroes are not in the focus anymore, the new places of memory where victims of nation are being worshiped have taken their place. Victims for the nation become heroes.” (Cipek 2011:26)

Social memory presents images about past that are constructed in the present and our perception about the past is always influenced by the present circumstances. Therefore the construction of memory is “a modern process by which communities choose suitable fragments from a total of historical events, reinterpret them and make them a foundation for the construction of today’s group identities.”<sup>4</sup> I chose museums as the example because I consider that they are undoubtedly strongly correlated with memory and that they create the representation of a certain history. By choosing an object from museum’s holdings the memory becomes visible and tangible through an imaginative (re)collection and (re)presentation in exhibitions. Objects represent a materialization of the memory of sorts. The primary purpose of museums is to preserve those objects, and in that way preserve a certain memory, which in turn creates and transfers certain stories about groups, individuals or about a certain past.

From the 1980s there has been a change in comprehension of what memory is. This primarily refers to “the role of a museum, respectively of a museum’s employee, as an interpreter of those objects, in creating a coherent story about a certain past which the audience would understand from an array of discontinued fragments which are chosen as a testimonial of that past.”<sup>5</sup> The social memory is subject to institutionalization but it is also inseparable from the individual narrations and interpretations, in this case those of the museum’s employees.

I will observe the museums as realm of memory<sup>6</sup> where the memory is embodied and stored. The purpose of the existence of these places is to stop the time and materialize the non-material, and they are created with two procedures, the historical moments which first disappear from the flow of history and then they are reinserted there (Nora 2006:29). The individual memory depends on a change in socio-political context in which an individual lives, and the places of memory are organized and are presenting the past, creating new meanings which communities and groups accept in order to make their present, modern life meaningful. Therefore I will, using the examples of exhibition catalogs of the two museums, observe whether forgetting previous dominant narrations about history is present, and, on the other hand, whether creating new narrations is present at the same time, or whether the (re)affirmation of old and long forgotten narrations is present.

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<sup>4</sup> A course „The role of museums in creating social memory“ held by dr. Sc. Nevena Škrbić-Alempijević on May 18 2011 in Kumrovec as a part of the International Museum Day (the publication has not been published). I thank dr. sc. Nevena Škrbić-Alempijević for allowing to use her materials as well as for giving comments and suggestions during the process of writing this paper.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding this approach I primarily used the work of Pierre Nora who is also the creator of a *realm of memory* concept, which signifies „any significant appearance, material or non-material by its nature, which became through time or human will a symbolic component of the memory heritage in a certain community.“ (Nora 1996:xvii).

## Two museums – an historical context

“Museums have played a central role in construction of a coherent national discourse that reinforce a sense of collective identity and social cohesion through common understandings of order, aesthetics and symbols.” (Rivera Orraca 2009:32)

The Croatian History Museum was founded when the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia and the Museum of Croatian History were merged. Changes that happened in the nineties in the Museum were “simply a consequence of those political circumstances and those changes were visible inside and outside the museum. The Croatian coat of arms has emerged and the Croatian flag is in our hall”, explained the curator. She stated that then “when all these political changes were present, in the rush of reborn nationalism and emphasis of everything Croatian”, they expected “that the authorities that came will have an understanding for a national museum, that it will all be expressed through a national museum which will get a bigger space and a permanent exhibit.”

However, the Museum still doesn't have a permanent exhibit. Nevertheless, soon it should be moving to a new building so the Museum will finally, after more than 160 years of existence, get a permanent exhibit so it can accomplish its goal and mission, for it is important to know the past “of your own people so you could understand the present, realize and accept the fact that the Croatian national identity was shaped in correlation with other nations.”<sup>7</sup> It is already visible in the museum's mission that we can observe it as a place of memory, respectively a place where the national historical heritage is embodied and stored through material testimonials and interpretations of history.

Ethnographic department of the Croatian National Museum (today the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb) was established in 1919 by merging the already existing ethnographic collections with Salomon Berger's textile collection.<sup>8</sup> After the adaptation of the building in 1972, the Museum got a new permanent exhibit, which has not changed to this day, and its curator confirmed this: “Legends that were supposed to be harmonized with the new socio-political context were never set up.” The changes which occurred in the nineties in the Museum are connected with the topics of occasional exhibitions which mostly referred to the presentation of Christian holidays. The curator also stated that “the interest for those topics was quite big (...), considering the fact that socialism lacked that part connected with religiousness.” The Museum already had a lot of innovations in the nineties in the sense of the presentation of the exhibition itself. “The way of exposing and exploring the issues which outgrow the narrow cultural-historical perspective is the novelty”, explained the curator. Even though a museum is a place “where you could exhibit and problematize topics which are connected with the newly established socio-political context, there were no exhibitions which dealt with the questioning of the national identities or the elements of national identity or politically sensitive topics.”

We can notice that there were changes in museums in the nineties. Names of institutions were changed, as well as their decoration (the Croatian flag and coat of arms). However, some other expected changes did not happen. Croatian History Museum did not get a

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.hismus.hr/hr/o-muzeju/povijest-muzeja/> (07 Jan 2012)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.emz.hr/povijest-1.html>, last visited (08 Nov 2012)

bigger space and a permanent exhibit, which would be expected considering the contemporary political and social tendencies, and the promotion of national thought and identity, and Ethnographic Museum did not deal with topics connected with the presentation or exploration of the national identity, nor did significant changes in the permanent exhibit occur. Novelties seen in the work of Ethnographic museum were connected with the catholic tradition, which was neglected to that date, and with the novelties in the presentation of the exhibition. Even though the authorities of the time did not explicitly use museums as instruments for making the political system legitimate, the indirect influence through interpretations and presentations of exhibitions made by museum employees is still visible and it manifests in the subject field of exhibitions on which museum employees worked. I will present this analysis in the following chapter.

## Analysis of exhibition catalogs

I observed the changes that happened in that period using the examples of exhibition catalogs, noticing what came into use and what had ceased being used in certain museums. In his work *Collective memory and real history* Knapp claims that “our feeling about what is symbolically useful from the past will depend on our present feeling of what is important and the values presented through what we borrowed from the past will only be the ones we already share” (2006:89). Therefore, the way we interpret tradition depends on our current needs, therefore on the present. In order to consider the changes in museums and in exhibitions in their entirety, it is important to analyze not only the exhibitions that were set in the nineties (1991-1995), but the ones that were set before the nineties in the museums in question, precisely between 1985-1990.

## Croatian History Museum

### a) Exhibitions from 1985 - 1990

As I previously pointed out, the Croatian History Museum was founded when the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia and the Museum of Croatian History merged. Therefore, I will analyze the exhibition catalogs from both institutions issued up to 1990. I have chosen to analyze the following exhibitions: *Women of Croatia in the Revolution*, *The contribution of the Yugoslav diaspora to the National Liberation War* and *Vladimir Bakarić* from the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia (Table 1) and *Croatian lands and the French Revolution*, *Josip Jelačić and Ivan Mažuranić* from the Museum of Croatian History (Table 2). The exhibitions set up by the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia are focused on the glorification of partisan resistance and the National Liberation War (NOB)<sup>9</sup> and that is visible from the name of the institution itself and from names of the exhibitions from that period.

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<sup>9</sup> NOB in the text that follows.

<b>Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia</b>		
<b>Title of exhibition</b>	<b>Year of exhibition</b>	<b>Author(s) of the exhibition</b>
Women of Croatia in the Revolution	1985.	Andro Purčić
The contribution of the Yugoslav diaspora to the National Liberation War	1985.	Lucija Benyowsky
Vladimir Bakarić	1987.	Katarina Babić

*Table 1 List of exhibitions selected for analysis from the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia, according to the criteria of the prominence and diversity of topics of exhibitions, the availability of catalogs and the coverage of the period covered by the research*

<b>The Museum of Croatian History</b>		
<b>Title of exhibition</b>	<b>Year of exhibition</b>	<b>Author(s) of the exhibition</b>
Croatian lands and the French revolution	1989.	Maja Škiljan, Marina Bregovac Pisk, Ela Jurdana
Josip Jelačić	1989.	Maja Škiljan
Ivan Mažuranić	1990.	Jelena Borošak- Marijanović

*Table 2 List of exhibitions selected for analysis from the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia, according to the criteria of the prominence and diversity of topics of exhibitions, the availability of catalogs and the coverage of the period covered by the research*

The exhibition *Women of Croatia in Revolution* (1985) observed and analyzed the role of women in the revolutionary workers movement between the two world wars and the socialist revolution until 1985. The author emphasized the women's struggle seen through the prism of the socialist revolution and workers' movement which resulted in their political and economic emancipation. Motives such as the sickle and the hammer which are unique symbols of communism and communist parties are present there. In the catalog itself we can find Josip Broz Tito's quote from one of the conferences where he commended the women and supported their role in the fight for liberation.

Croatian Republic committee SUBNOR was the sponsor of the exhibition *The contribution of the Yugoslav diaspora to the National Liberation War* (1985) and it dealt with the way the diaspora viewed the events in their home country. The author emphasizes the value and role of newspapers in manipulating the news from the home country. Tito and the partisans were originally presented as criminals, but in 1943 Tito was portrayed as a Croat who

has “salvaged the face” of the nation and Draža Mihailović and his chetniks were accused of betrayal. After that the American Croats become actively involved in helping the NOB. They started organizing public assemblies, radio shows and press conferences so the American public would find out about Tito’s partisan resistance.

The exhibition *Vladimir Bakarić* (1987) brought a general overview of the history of the communist movement in Croatia and Yugoslavia. Vladimir Bakarić “is one of the strongest and most creative persons who left their mark on Tito’s era of our socialist revolution” (Babić and Purčić 1987:7). It is emphasized that Bakarić openly advocated a peaceful coexistence of Croats and Serbs “because in the memory of Serbs in Croatia he remains the one who was most consistent in advocating the brotherhood and unity of Croats and Serbs in Croatia” (Babić and Purčić 1987:10). Finally, the authors conclude that the contemporary condition has nothing to do with opinions and stances of Bakarić and other intellectual revolutionaries.

With the analysis conducted on the exhibition catalogs of the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia it has been confirmed that “the aspect of iconization of socialism became visible through the activities of the Museum of the national revolution which started to generate a cult of the Yugoslav president Tito” (Pletenac and Potkonjak 2007:180). In order to affirm and strengthen their governing position, the communist authorities based their narrations on the glorification of the socialist movement of Yugoslavia and the NOB, using the Museum as an instrument and the channel for making the political system legitimate. The sponsorships of exhibitions contribute to this finding, such as the exhibition *The contribution of the Yugoslav diaspora to the National Liberation War*, which also have a role in making both the political ideas and the system legitimate, and they are also a proof of political authority.

Exhibitions that were set by Museum of Croatian History were extremely nationalist and focused on the glorification of the famed Croatian history and the important historical personalities who were a part of the national movements for the liberation of Croatia from foreign domination. The exhibition *Croatian lands and the French Revolution* (1989) marked the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French revolution and it was very significant because it preceded the significant changes in Croatia and, in a way, it could be said that it had predicted them. “Influences of the French revolution, as well as the changes that followed in the whole Europe, were reflected on the Croatian lands too” (Tomičić 1989: 9). The context of the French revolution discussed in this exhibition, respectively the disintegration of the previously dominant regime and the beginning of a new era, could have been transferred to the contemporary situation in Croatia.

The exhibition *Josip Jelačić* (1989) brought a view on a significant personality in the Croatian history “in that time when the restoration of national myths began and when the importance of Jelačić’s legendary dimension partly obscured the historical facts about him” (Škiljan 1989:1) The quote makes it obvious that in those days it was important to emphasize the glorious Croatian history, especially the famous personalities, because of the emerging democratic changes and the wish for independence.

The second exhibition dedicated to an important personality was *Ivan Mažuranić* (1990), and it was sponsored by the Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia. The exhibition

emphasized Mažuranić's role in the Croatian national revival. The goal of this exhibition was to contribute to the understanding and the cognizance of Croatian history and to give a proper importance to the prominent personalities who created our history. The authors believed that getting to know the history could contribute to the reawakening of the national consciousness. Analysis of these exhibitions showed that the need for a new "national revival" and the idea about a free people can be recognized as a motive in all of those three exhibitions. With their topics and content they signaled the emerging changes.

## b) Exhibitions 1991-1995

After 1990 political changes occurred in the state and in the activities of museums as well, respectively in their exhibitions. Museum of Revolution of the peoples of Croatia and the Museum of Croatian History merged into the Croatian History Museum in 1991. Exhibitions I chose to analyze in this period are *Stjepan Radić, Croatian political poster, National movements in Croatia, What Croatia used to defend itself, Photographic records of Croatian antifascist movement 1941-45, Meeting of the worlds: Croats and Americas*, published in cooperation with Ethnographic museum in Zagreb.

Croatian History Museum		
Title of exhibition	Year of exhibition	Author(s) of exhibition
Stjepan Radić	1991.	Ela Jurdana
Croatian political poster 1940-50	1991.	Snježana Pavičić
Meeting of the worlds: Croats and Americas	1992.	Lucija Benyowsky, Ivan Čizmić, Ankica Pandžić
National movements in Croatia 1883-1903	1993.	Ela Jurdana
What Croatia used to defend itself: small arms in the Croatian war for independence 1991	1994.	Janko Jeličić
Photographic records of the Croatian antifascist movement 1941-45	1995.	Nataša Mataušić

*Table 3 List of exhibitions selected for analysis from the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia, according to the criteria of the prominence and diversity of topics of exhibitions, the availability of catalogs and the coverage of the period covered by the research*



Croatian president Franjo Tuđman sponsored the exhibition *Stjepan Radić* (1991), and the exhibition marked the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stjepan Radić's birth. Jasna Tomičić, the author of the exhibition catalog, stated that the basic program of the museum's activity in those years was to show personalities from the Croatian history and that "the connection between events in Croatia at that time and Stjepan Radić's life and activity are unbreakable" (1991:13). The choice for this topic was largely influenced by the contemporary democratic changes, in the words of the author of the exhibition: "Democratic changes in the most recent Croatian history, whose basics were already seen in the concepts and activities of Stjepan Radić, will probably have an influence on the great interest of visitors. Everyone can learn something about his past, learn the basic references of one rapturous period of the not so distant Croatian history" (Tomičić 1991:13). From the example mentioned above it is possible to understand the political context of the period in which the catalog was made. The motifs and the traditions used in this exhibition are interesting. I would like to point out a picture as an example, the one where Radić is portrayed in a village party surrounded by musicians wearing folk costumes, where Radić himself holds a pamphlet in his hands where only one word is emphasized and visible – home. Folk costumes are a very important motif because they represent the symbol of Croatian national identity.<sup>10</sup>

The author of the exhibition *Croatian political poster 1994 - 50* (1991), Snježana Pavičić, dealt with the topic of political posters, reading the political symbolism of the posters and then critically observing the NDH and the socialist revolution periods. The author believes that the political posters are "instruments of ideological propaganda, where the apolitical examples get indirectly introduced into the political forms of the society in which they arise" (Pavičić 1991:11). On the one hand, we look at the posters which promote Tito and the Partisan resistance, and on the other hand, the posters that propagate the *Poglavnik*<sup>11</sup> and NDH. On the partisan poster the most common symbol is the five point star *petokraka* on partisan berets, helmets and flags, or as an individual element, and in some places it is placed within a context with the hammer and sickle symbol. Other symbols such as swastikas, do not appear isolated, but combined with a zoomorphic symbols that usually represent monsters. There is also a motif of the snakes in the catalog back in the part where the author states that "the presentation of snakes is more communicative in terms of a faster and clearer presentation of all dangerous characteristics of opponents, than some other graphical symbol" (Pavičić 1991: 75). The motif of the snake can be linked to the symbolism of fraud and danger, which we can contextualize into the pre-war period and the beginning of the war in Croatia, while other symbols are associated with the socialist imaginarium. The author has also observed that the political posters in the 1990s might have predicted the approaching changes: "Last year's campaign posters, with their minor semantic shifts, particularly the encouraging and promising messages, hinted that something different was happening" (Pavičić 1991:13). The author observed them from the perspective of the time when the war in Croatia started and it is probably influenced

<sup>10</sup> This subject was covered by other scholars. See more in the papers: Kale, J. Je li „narodna nošnja“ narodna? (2008); Kulturna industrija narodne nošnje (2010) and Bonifačić, V. Etnološka istraživanja i kanonizacija „izvornih“ narodnih nošnji u Hrvatskoj 1930-ih (2008).

<sup>11</sup> The title used in the political posters, which was referred to the head of the ustasha movement in NDH, Ante Pavelić.

her perception when she analyzed the posters so we can conclude that the catalog shows the context of the time when it was created.

The exhibition *The meeting of worlds: Croats and Americas* (1992) marked the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of America. The emphasis was on the contribution of diaspora to the establishment of an independent Republic of Croatia: "The American Croats as well as the Croats from other parts of the world have given in support of the most recent democratic developments in Croatia. The opinion prevails that the moral, political and economic help of the Croatian diaspora is one of the most important factors in the struggle for modern and independent Croatia" (Čizmić 1992: 10).

In the preface to the catalog of the exhibition *The popular movement in Croatia 1883-1903* (1993). Jasna Tomičić claims that "by learning about our history, about the ups and downs, we will understand the present better" (Tomičić 1993:3). The context of the time when it was created is visible in this catalog as well as the wish to emphasize aspects that can be applied to the contemporary situation: "Many past events can be associated with the present. Certainly, there are different social, political, economic and social circumstances; however, the motives were often the same" (Tomičić 1993:5). Though there is a different socio-political context, the motives are repeated or remain the same, and they all point to the desire for freedom that is a key element of historical events. The history of the popular movements can be placed in context and linked to the symbolism of the magyarization of the Croats in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the motive of the centuries of struggle and danger which had been threatening Croatia for centuries (dynastic struggles, Ottomans, Hungarians, Serbs).

The exhibition *What Croatia used to defend itself: Small arms in the Homeland War* (1994) is a presentation of the war through the perspective of the weapons that were used. Authors pointed to the questions put by foreigners who visited the exhibition as a pretext for the exhibition: "One of the most common questions that were asked at our exhibitions on the theme of Homeland War was the quest for an explanation of why the conflict in our country started. Suppressing our outrage and sadness, we patiently interpreted our history and laid out the causes of the aggression on our homes" (Tomičić 1994:9). The task of the Museum at that time was to collect the documents and other relevant materials about the war. It was important to hold the exhibition abroad, and thus point to the situation in Croatia. An exhibition *Living with War Against the War* was held in 1992<sup>12</sup>, where the material collected thus far was presented, and in this way the civilian resistance to the war in Croatia was shown.

The aim of the exhibition *Photographic records of the Croatian antifascist movement 1941-45* (1995) was to show the life of soldiers in a moment of respite. "The war we find ourselves in today, once again in Croatia, 59 years after the end of World War II, is the war to defend the sovereignty and the Croatian territories. The President of the internationally recognized and independent Croatia Franjo Tuđman, was a participant in the antifascist struggle" (Mataušić 1995:9). From this quote we can see that it is easy to read the political context in which the catalog was created. Josip Broz Tito is not mentioned anywhere in the catalog, but the contemporary situation in Croatia is.

<sup>12</sup> There is no catalog for this exhibition, and the author is deceased.

As seen in catalogs, in the early nineties the official policy of the past, based on an uncritical glorification of the role of Tito and the Partisan movement was gradually abandoned, and with the advent of the new government the official discourse was changed and began to focus on Croatia's glorious past and the continuing struggle for freedom through the ages. The sponsorship by the President Franjo Tuđman, for example, for the exhibition Stjepan Radić (1991), can be interpreted as evidence of political power and an attempt to legitimize of the national policy of the new government.

## Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb

### a) Exhibitions 1985 - 1990

Another institution where we can observe changes in the museums is the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. Exhibitions that I have chosen for analysis (Table 4) are *Funerary customs and ceremonies*, *the Folk Intimacy*, *The communities and rural architecture in the vicinity of Zagreb*, and *Jewelry - traditional in the contemporary*.

Ethnographic Museum		
Title of the exhibition	Year of the exhibition	Author(s) of the exhibition
Funerary customs and ceremonies	1985.	Branko Đaković
Folk intimacy	1986.	Ivanka Ivkanec
Communities and rural architecture in the vicinity of Zagreb	1987.	Nada Gjetvaj
Jewelry - traditional in contemporary	1989.	Ivanka Vrtovec

*Table 4. List of exhibitions selected for analysis from the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia, according to the criteria of the prominence and diversity of topics of exhibitions, the availability of catalogs and the coverage of the period covered by the research*

The exhibition *Funerary customs and ceremonies* (1985) was characterized by the cooperation with the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade and other Yugoslav institutions, and the presentation of the customs and rituals of traditional forms and patterns of symbolic behavior in the area that made up the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The author analyzes the elements of the customs which show the presence of the cult of the dead. "The snake is an established symbol of pagan mythology which provokes many conflicting opinions. It is associated with fertility cults, but it is also as a symbol of knowledge and deception" (Đaković 1985:10).

The author of the exhibition *The Folk intimacy* (1986), Ivanka Ivkanec, used the holdings of the ethnographic museums of the Yugoslav constituent republics which touched on the subject of sex and sexuality, for which she stresses that they had been ignored previously

in museums and classified as a sphere of private life. In turn Nada Gjetvaj focused her exhibition *Communities and rural architecture in the vicinity of Zagreb* (1987) on the urbanization of rural communities in the wider Zagreb area, and observing forms of rural settlements, types of houses and farm buildings.

The exhibition *Jewelry* (1989) presented the traditional jewelry from the museum's collection which included items from the area of former Yugoslavia and authentic jewelry made by Aranka Njirić-Varga. Njirić-Varga created objects in the field of applied art. In fact, most of all she renovated old jewelry and turned it into new folk jewelry, which was in fact presented at the exhibition. Some of the ornamental motifs and symbolism that have been used in authentic jewelry and jewelry from the collection are the motif of the cross, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms, the rhomboid (which is interpreted as a significant representation of snakes and lightning) and uterus (which is interpreted as a symbol of fertility and power). The distinction that characterizes exhibitions before 1990 is the collaboration with other Yugoslav institutions and the comparative research of the traditions and elements across the area of the former Yugoslavia.

## b) Exhibitions 1991- 1995

Exhibitions that I have chosen to analyze in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb (Table 5) from the indicated periods are *The architectural heritage and its restoration*, *For this young year*, *The Christmas light*, *The memories of Kupa valley - an ethnographic expedition in 1923* and *Memories of Zagreb - ethnographic pictures of the city*.

<b>Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb</b>		
<b>Title of the exhibition</b>	<b>Year of the exhibition</b>	<b>Author(s) of the exhibition</b>
Architectural heritage and its restoration	1992	Nada Gjetvaj
The Meeting of Worlds - Croats and Americas <sup>1</sup>	1992	Lucija Benyowsky, Ivan Čizmić, Ankica Pandžić
For this young year	1992	Josip Barlek
Christmas lights	1993	Josip Barlek
The memories of Kupa valley - an ethnographic expedition in 1923	1993	Nerina Eckhel, Aleksandra Muraj, Vesna Zorić
Memories of Zagreb - ethnographic pictures of the city	1994	Aida Brenko, Željka Jelavić

*Table 5 List of exhibitions selected for analysis from the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia, according to the criteria of the prominence and diversity of topics of exhibitions, the availability of catalogs and the coverage of the period covered by the research*

All of the exhibitions named above mention the contemporary destruction wrought by the war in Croatia and highlight the present threat of the destruction of cities, monuments, and Croatian cultural heritage:

“The ravages of war wrought on wide areas of the Croatian territory have left behind massive physical damage. The inconceivable and unprecedented rampage inflicted by the enemy aimed to destroy cities, villages, religious buildings, monuments, objects of economy and industry, as well as natural rarities and the beauty of our country. In one word the aim was to destroy everything that was Croatian and anything reflecting the presence of Croats in this area” (Gjetvaj 1992:1).

Through the exhibition *Architectural heritage and its restoration* (1992) the author wanted to point out the importance of preserving cultural heritage and to encourage awareness of the devastation and of the need for the protection of cultural heritage. Emphasis is placed on the destruction of all that is Croatian, especially the Croatian cultural heritage and identity, which had been attempted many times throughout history: “From the most ancient times until today, in the eternal struggle to survive on the native soil” (Gjetvaj 1992:5). Apart from the need to preserve traditional architecture and the highlight on the folk costumes as symbols of the Croatian identity (“the folk costume was worn by members of the various social classes in Croatia at certain moments in its history, highlighting it as a symbol of their own identity” (Brenko, Jelavić 1994:5)), other themes were dealt with by the exhibitions of the time. Most of them are related to Christian holidays, Christmas and Easter.

The exhibitions *For the young year* (1992) and *Christmas light* (1993) talk about the spiritual renewal of the Croatian people, and the emphasis is put on the importance of the preservation of customs and traditions and the traditional Croatian heritage. In the foreword to the catalog the author states that “the awareness of the cultural identity of the Croatian nation is stronger than all the troubles inflicted by the brutal anti-Croat war” (Barlek 1992:3). The aim of the exhibition was to respond to the questions of the relevant and general public related to Christmas, its symbols and symbolism. Christmas is a family holiday, whose purpose is unity and the joy of peace. The Christmas symbols of fire, candles, apples, straw, green twigs, green corn, seeds, bread and nurseries are mentioned. An important role in the pre-Christmas period, but also in the Christmas period is played by the light (morning services, the Yule Log, candles, lights) as a symbol of Christianity. It is interesting to observe the etymology of the word Christmas Eve (*Badnjak*), “the name of *Badnjak* comes from Proto-Croatian word “bodar” or “Badar” which means “to be awake” (Barlek 1993:10), which is important with regard to the conditions prevailing in the country. Both of the exhibitions are dedicated to the Radić brothers and encourage hope for a better future, “and in these difficult times we must hold the light within ourselves, no matter how hard it is, because we will only be able to experience it through Christmas and wish it to others in a spirit of love and peace” (Barlek 1993:3).

The exhibition *The memories of Kupa valley - an ethnographic expedition in 1923* (1993) ob-

serves the research project of several ethnologists, historians and other experts. The goal of this endeavor was to capture a vanishing tradition in order to protect it. The authors of the exhibition draw a parallel with their research, and point to the danger of war that threatened the area, also stressing the need to preserve the Croatian tradition: “In the hope that a new Kupa valley world based on the most beautiful and best accomplishments of past generations will grow from the debris of war” (Muraj, Eckhel and Zorić 1993:3).

In addition to exhibitions that have discussed the disappearance and endangerment of the Croatian tradition, and finally the very need for its preservation, there were those that brought novelties to a different area. Innovation in the terms of the presentation of the exhibition could be seen in the example of the exhibition *The memories of Zagreb - ethnographic pictures of the city* (1994). The curator of the Ethnographic Museum explained that this exhibition, “introduced a new way of presenting, where we attempted a little departure from the previously traditional presentation of objects in showcases and we tried to introduce a different type of presentation with some ambient presentations. This was somewhat the first time a subject thrust ethnology from the rural environment into the urban context. “

Unlike the Croatian History Museum, the Ethnographic Museum was focused on raising the public awareness and pointing to the need to preserve the Croatian tradition and protection of the cultural heritage in the period of war. Each of these exhibitions addressed the themes that are different in themselves, but which contained motifs and symbolism that are at the heart of the Croatian tradition.

## To conclude on the analysis of the exhibition catalogs

Based on the analysis of exhibition catalogs, we can conclude that the themes and content of the exhibition can be divided into several levels, taking into account the fact that these are two different museums and different periods of exhibitions; therefore each item does not necessarily apply to both museums:

- the socialist imaginarium: primarily related to the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia and the glorifying of the socialist revolution (e.g., sickle and hammer);
- the cult (and ritual worship) of Tito: the cult and ritual worship Tito were one of the main strategies of legitimizing the communist policies in Yugoslavia (Cipek 2007:16-17), which was manifested in exhibitions by the constant “insertion” into all analyzed exhibition of the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia;
- the role of the diaspora: it was scrutinized through the exhibitions at the Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Croatia, the Croatian History Museum and the Ethnographic Museum, the moral and material assistance of the diaspora was emphasized;
- national thematic: glorifying the famed Croatian history is visible at the end of the 1980s in the Museum of Croatian History, and later in the Croatian History Museum, and has served as a legitimization of political ideas and power;

- prominent Croatian historical figures: they were presented in exhibitions that were set up in the Museum of Croatian History, and later in the Croatian History Museum;
- traditional motives and symbolism: involving primarily the traditional costume as a symbol of Croatian identity, through several exhibitions in both museums, then the anthropomorphic symbolism which metaphorically depicted various periods, people, etc.;
- the protection of Croatian cultural heritage and tradition: on many occasions in exhibitions at the Ethnographic Museum the need for the protection of cultural heritage and the preservation of Croatian tradition, which was endangered because of the war in Croatia, was highlighted, and which would contribute to the establishment and strengthening of the national identity;
- urban ethnology: with the exhibition *The memories of Zagreb - ethnographic pictures of the city* in the Ethnographic Museum, the authors have shown that the ethnographic museum is a space in which the ethnography does not necessarily deal only with the rural culture and rural class, but that it can deal with the urban culture.

After analyzing the exhibition catalogs of both museums I would conclude that museums are „the site of symbolic transaction between the visitors and the state” (Dovydaitytė 2010:80). Through the exhibitions, the channels of communication between visitors and museum staff, we observe “the implementation of revised historical narratives, and the systematic creation of new symbols, holidays and traditions” (Pavlaković 2011:217). It is also visible through the exhibition that the museum, with a selection of specific legends and artifacts, participates actively in the creation of social memory, and affirms itself as a place where memory is created.

## Twenty years later ...

Should we remember atrocities in hope of understanding them but risk emotional paralysis? Or forget, free ourselves from their burden but destroy a crucial part of our identity and the means of understanding the past both for our generation and the next? (Muniak 2009:2)

Since this paper discusses the social memory in museums in the 1990s, when Croatia was in a state of war which left a lasting impression in every respect on the lives of its citizens, and on the museums, it is impossible to observe and analyze the catalogs of the period outside the contemporary context.

From today’s perspective, when we look at the museum activities in daily life in wartime Croatia (1991 - 1995), we know that the museums were active in the gathering as well as the presentation of a variety of topics, explicitly or implicitly referring to the contemporary state in the country. According to the curator of the Croatian History Museum, in the early 1990s the relevant material was collected in three ways: “in the field, in the ongoing war on the battlefields, in the abandoned barracks of the YPA and in the loans or gifts from the defenders.” However, this period was finalized by the exhibition *TheHomeland*

*War*<sup>13</sup> in the Croatian History Museum, which commemorated the twenty years anniversary of the fall of Vukovar and was a *hommage* of sorts to all those who participated in the war. The exhibition gave a general chronological thematic representation of the war because, as the curator explained, “a general overview was required, without much elaboration. (...) What we are missing is the image of the other, these multiple perspectives which are now often used in museums and which want to show not the mainstream, or our view, but the viewpoint of the other.”

The question is whether the museum can be a place where the conservative issues are handled and can it meet the expectations and challenges that are placed before it? Can the museum be a place of reconciliation? When is the proper time to open themes like these? It is tempting to say never, but it is inevitable that this issue needs to be taken up, on the level of the museum as well. From the analysis of exhibition catalogs, we could notice that in the nineties exhibitions were related to the subject of war. However, I think we need a certain historical distance for these issues to be viewed critically. The curator of the Ethnographic Museum thinks that “in the nineties the society was not ready, and neither were the museums, to promptly respond to some challenges because it simply takes some time for things to crystallize.” How much more time is needed for the museums to act on this issue is hard to say, but certainly time will show.

## Conclusion

“It must be remembered the theory of Renan, that the nation is not only a community of memories, but also a community of oblivion. Therefore one should not live burdened by the past, instead the past should be critically examined and presented, and the past should be controlled and not be allowed to master the present. “(Cipek 2011:26)

The museum is a place where history and memory encounter) and its role as a place of memory and the construction of social memory is relevant and irreplaceable. Ambiguous symbolism is built into museums and their activities. Its employees provide, intentionally or not, their own interpretations, their own attitudes towards the past and in some moment they act subversively against the official discourse. I think that all of the beauty and completeness of such institution is contained in this, the place where memories coexist between employees and visitors of the museum, creating a certain image of the past that is known only to them at that moment.

Images of the past that I have observed and analyzed in both museums are seemingly different and incompatible. I hold the opinion that there is no clear distinction between history and memory, moreover I hold that these concepts are complementary. In addition, I believe that even the history that the Croatian History Museum focuses on, and the tradition which is the focus of the Ethnographic Museum are not in contradiction, but that they are equally involved in creating the memories of the 1990s and in the construction of the national identity.

<sup>13</sup> The exhibition The Homeland War was set up in the Croatian History Museum between 1 December 2011 and 28 October 2012.



The concluded survey, or the analysis of exhibition catalogs 1985 - 1995 has shown that the in nineties changes really occurred in the museums and their exhibition activities which confirmed the initial assumptions at the starting point of the survey. Even before 1990 it was possible to read the approaching changes and the socio-political context from the themes, motifs and symbols. The assumption that is not confirmed is that the exhibitions reflect primarily the politics of memory. Namely, Croatian History Museum does not have a permanent exhibit to this day, which is paradoxical, however, because it is a national museum of the state that fought for its independence twenty years ago and whose political authority considered that it was extremely important to stress the Croatian national symbols and the Croatian glorious past. Although this was not manifested in the form of a permanent exhibit, it is visible in the exhibition themes and the motifs and personalities that were used in them, from which we can conclude that in a way the museum was used as an instrument and a channel of political ideas. On the other hand, according to the curator, in the last twenty years the Ethnographic Museum has not covered "politically sensitive subjects." However, she believes that the museum "has contributed in some way, e.g. in the construction of the attitude towards the Christian and godly, where the museum was set up as a place of public speech about something that was until then solely in the sphere of the individual, intimate or familial." "For example, the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade was exploited for the Greater Serbia policy (...) and that museum served that idea," explained the curator, "here this was fortunately not the case (...) which I interpret by the marginality of the ethnology, the profession" which again opens up new questions and repercussions and requires deeper analysis. Though the museum was not directly used as a medium for the dissemination and implementation of political ideas, the socio-political context of time in which the exhibitions and their catalogs were formed was reflected in it. In addition, each exhibition that was analyzed bears the mark of those involved in its conception and creation, their individual perceptions and interpretations of the period and the phenomena they address. Therefore, museums are great examples of places where we can observe the creation of social memory, and at the same time they are places in which the same memory is forgotten or filtered.

*Translated by: Tomislav Redep*

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