

# THE “PEDANTIC AMATEUR” KARLO DIENEŠ AND THE SOCIAL ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE 1920s

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Karlo Dienes, an amateur photographer and pharmacist from Nova Gradiška, left us with a valuable collection of photographs which offers plenty of research opportunities. This research focuses only on their social role. In this paper, we ask three questions: what motifs did he photograph and to what had he aspired in doing so, how did photographs and photography impact his social connections and status, and, finally, how could he present them to the public and thus influence the visual culture of his era.

Keywords: *photography collection, amateur photographer, vernacular photography, illustrated newspaper, visual culture, Karlo Dienes, Nova Gradiška*

## INTRODUCTION

Karlo Dienes (Nova Gradiška, 16 June 1895 – Nova Gradiška, 31 August 1981) comes from a family that migrated from Hungary to Nova Gradiška in the mid-19th century and that successfully combined their work in pharmacy, agriculture and small business (soda factory)<sup>1</sup> (Valentić 2006:50–52). He graduated in pharmacy and took over the family pharmacy, and he started taking photographs during the First World

<sup>1</sup> His family originates from northern Hungary (Borsod County), they were proclaimed nobles in 1663. Karlo's great-grandfather Josip was a pharmacist, and his grandfather Danijel (born in 1822

War. At that time, his work was already systemic, so he returned from the war with more than 1,500 photographs and a clear idea of how he wanted to continue recording the main events and changes in the world around him with his camera, and thus preserve them for the future. His interests included more than photography, which led to a rich and diverse collection, currently kept in the City Museum of Nova Gradiška, that serves as an important source for researching not only the local history from the 20th century (documents, posters, postcards, coin collection, etc.).<sup>2</sup>

This paper will analyze his valuable photography collection, which mostly consists of his own photographs, but, as a social chronicler, he also added other people's documentary photographs. It should be noted that the rich collection (over 13,000 negatives and an unknown number of developed photographs) is currently being organized. Unfortunately, the accompanying documentation has not been preserved, and the motifs of a large number of photographs have yet to be determined, as well as the dates on which they were taken. Dienes's Diary, in which he recorded everything he photographed, is very useful in this endeavor.<sup>3</sup> The Diary is also the main source for researching the historical and social context in which he worked as an amateur photographer. Therefore, this research is also based on the Diary (bibliography references: "D") and one part of the photography collection, which has been somewhat organized, and covers the period from 1920 to 1928 (around 2,200 negatives).<sup>4</sup>

Since this collection does not comprise art photography, nor professional reportage or scientific photography, the analysis relies on the growing literature

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in Bečej, then called Óbecse in Southern Hungary) came to Nova Gradiška and bought a pharmacy in 1853, which he and his heirs managed for the next 110 years. All of them were active in public life (City Council, various associations) (Duišin 1938:177; Valentić 2006:50).

<sup>2</sup> Dienes's collection was donated to the City Museum of Nova Gradiška in 1993 by his daughter Maja Dienes Vučićević.

<sup>3</sup> Dienes kept his Diary from 1916 until his death. The entries are almost daily, but very short, and they list what he did and who he met that day. He describes in more detail things that left a deeper impression.

<sup>4</sup> The collection can be museologically organized only through teamwork, cross-referencing the Diary with negatives and photographs. The transcription of the Diary is being carried out by Suzana Leček and Ivan Grkeš, with financial support from the institutional projects "Vizualni identitet hrvatske nacije i domovine u prvoj polovici 20. stoljeća" (Visual identity of the Croatian nation and homeland in the first half of the 20th century, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, headed by Tihana Petrović Leš, PhD) and "Izvori za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje od srednjeg vijeka do 20. stoljeća" (Sources for the history of Slavonia, Srijem and Baranja from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, Croatian Institute of History – Department for the History of Slavonia, Srijem and Baranja, Slavonski Brod, headed by Suzana Leček, PhD). The museological processing of the collection and its digitization is led by Ivica Brtan (City Museum of Nova Gradiška).

regarding the third and broadest area – vernacular photography, which includes particularly interesting research into amateur private photography (snapshots). The expansion of academic interest to this group is also connected to a new approach to photography, which no longer focuses on aesthetics,<sup>6</sup> but on social context and role (Chalfen 1987; Tagg 1988; Bourdieu 1990; Nickel 1998; Batchen 2000, 2001, 2008; Edwards 2001; Langford 2001; Pinney and Peterson 2003). This approach moves away from the old hierarchy which placed art photography at its top, and from the “cultural subordination” of vernacular photography (Tagg 1988:17). The process also follows a turn within the humanities which, since the 1970s, have begun to take an interest in social phenomena seen from “below.” Vernacular photography proved to be an abundant source of new, unused material.

Keeping this research in mind, we asked the question about the social role of the photographer and his photographs in a specific socio-historical context. The article deals with the period that came before today’s mass-culture, which for Batchen “might best be regarded as a neurosis rather than a pleasure” (Batchen 2008:123). During the first decades of the 20th century, photography was still a pleasure, which, due to technological progress, left the circles of professional photographers and rich amateurs and became available to the wider public as well. Moreover, during the 1920s, a reversal occurred in larger centers: photography ceased to be a rarity and became a mass act, and new ideas of democratization and social empathy gradually made “photo-inflation” acceptable (Lugon 2008; term according to: Kallai 1929). Photography as a global phenomenon (Pinney 2020) transcended the borders of its originating environment, so developments from the global scene were quickly adopted in Croatia as well (Tonković 1994). However, some numbers should be kept in mind. For example, in Great Britain, 4 million people could obtain a camera before the First World War (which does not mean that they actually possessed one) (Edwards 2012:5). In Croatia, which did not have that many citizens and was still predominantly an agrarian and poor country, the circle of photographers, both professionals and amateurs, was much smaller. However, even in these circumstances we can recognize the problems that accompanied the spread of photography elsewhere.

Dieneš corresponds to the definition of an amateur snapshot photographer who engages in photography to record (private) events and entertainment only in part, and does not even belong to the group that strives to achieve an artistic impression (amateur photography clubs or, at least, following literature on photography) (Chalfen 1987:12). In fact, he falls into a broad group between these two categories. As a chronicler, but

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<sup>6</sup> However, since the 1960s, they have become interesting to artists as well, as some professional photographers started adopting so-called “snapshot aesthetics” (Zuromskis 2020:300–304).

also as a socially and politically active person, he was interested in a much wider range of motifs than those who took photographs solely for the sake of private reminiscence. In addition, the fact that he was aware that he was taking photographs for posterity required a certain quality. He referred to himself as a “pedantic amateur” who cared about the quality of the photos that entered his collection (Pismo fotografu Benčiću [Letter to the Photographer Benčić], 24 May 1926). The fact that artistic creativity is not important to authors of vernacular photographs does not mean that they are “made without consideration for aesthetic appeal” (Beil 2020:6).

As the Dieneš collection poses a number of research problems that will be addressed over several project periods, we decided to start with the social context and the part of the collection that includes public photography. Here, we asked three questions. The first one pertains to the person taking the photographs and his choice of motifs: what does he photograph and what shaped the interest, and thus the visual identity, of his collection. The second question concerns how had photography affected Dieneš’s social connections and status. The third refers to the manner of reproduction (exhibition, publication), the possibilities of influencing the visual culture of his era. As the analysis focuses on the social role of photography, not on stylistic or content examination (as an art or documentary object), in addition to looking at the photographs, we will also use the Diary as our main source for understanding Dieneš as a photographer and the social role of photography in a certain social and historical context.

## MOTIFS AND INFLUENCES

### Motifs

The first question we asked relates to the motifs found in Dieneš’s photographs. The choice of motif is a personal one and it reflects the mental world of the person taking the photograph. Unfortunately, we do not have access to the collection in its entirety. Only a small part of the photographs can be found in the albums, which, in such large collections, indicate what the creator considered important and how he systematized the visual notes of the world around him in his mental space. The rest is placed in their original sleeves (or without them), sometimes with chronological notes, but more often without any. Therefore, this systematization is not the author’s own systematization, nor is it museological. It was designed for the purposes of this research, and could be organized in another manner.

As an *amateur photographer*, Dieneš’s main subjects were family members.

However, the research focuses on another significant category, public motifs, so the private motifs will be described only in basic terms in order to point out their research potential.

His private photographs, with a few exceptions, can be classified as snapshots. Dieneš often photographed members of his family and friends, in their surroundings (house or garden), so their poses became more casual.<sup>7</sup> Knowing that the photographs are intended for a private circle and for remembrance within the family ("home mode," from: Chalfen 1987:8) also contributed to their relaxed nature. They were also undoubtedly the most meaningful to them, as demonstrated by Barthes (1981). Outside of this circle, these photographs may appear banal and conventional, and thus uninteresting (Batchen 2008:121, 132). A different perspective of photographs that are the same, but different, and an interest in the social context is necessary in this situation, in order to realize their value (Batchen 2000:262, 2008:124–125). Then their conventionality is no longer seen as an aesthetic defect, but as a communicative advantage. It facilitates the viewer seeing reality in an already accepted and recognizable way (Chalfen 1987:127–128; Batchen 2000:268).

For the purposes of future research, we classified private photographs into three categories.<sup>8</sup> The first, most common kind of photographs are the ones showing his family, friends and guests, and are an excellent source for researching family relationships and the network of their social connections (Peterson 2011:377). The second category includes photographs that serve as reminders that many bourgeois families also owned land, sometimes for personal use (vineyards), sometimes used for additional income or, as with the Dieneš family, as one of the main sources of income. Photographs of harvests, planting orchards or erecting buildings on the farm document the economic situation and are a far cry from the romanticization of nature popular at that time. Tourism can be seen as a special, third category, although the photographs taken in the 1920s are mere indications of its future relevance (cf. Chalfen 1987: chapter 5). A cursory glance at photographs from the 1930s shows how the family became more mobile, crossed regional (sea) and state borders (Paris), and the tourist motif grew into one of the most important ones.

We continue with a more detailed analysis of public motifs which seeks to provide answers to two questions: what motifs interested Dieneš as a chronicler and what influenced his understanding of visual memory.

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<sup>7</sup> During the 1920s, he was not yet married and lived in a house with his mother Olga and brother Nikola (who managed the family business), and his sister Marga (married to Vladimir Maretić, son of linguist Tomislav Maretić) often visited from Zagreb with her children, Zvonko and Milivoj. His nephews were the most frequent motif during those years.

<sup>8</sup> Radically different approaches are also possible. Cf. Belaj 2020.

**Important events.** These comprise a significant group, which undoubtedly reflects Dienesš's political activity. He was one of the more agile members of the H(R) SS party, the district organization secretary and the president of the city organization in Nova Gradiška for many years. He turned down the higher position of the people's representative, to the regret of the party leadership, due to business and family obligations. However, locally, he played an important role in the activities of the party, and was a member of the City Council as its representative for some time. He directly participated in political events in Nova Gradiška and the district, and his family, friendship and political connections in Zagreb gave him the opportunity to extend his influence to the capital as well, and thus often to the national level. These photographs aroused the greatest interest of the public, which will be discussed later.

He took photographs at large H(R)SS<sup>9</sup> assemblies which featured speeches by Stjepan Radić and a number of other party officials, from those in Zagreb (Assembly at Borongaj, 1923, Assembly on Marulićev Trg, 1924), to assemblies in Nova Gradiška and the surrounding area (in Oriovac, Vrpolje, Pakrac, Požega). A related group consists of events held by associations, be it sports, cultural or humanitarian, but they all carried a political (and national) significance in the interwar period. On several occasions, he photographed various activities of the Hrvatski sokol athletic organization, such as the grand celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the Croatian kingdom (1925) in Zagreb, or local ones in Nova Gradiška, Cernik and Oriovac. He also photographed the celebrations of the organizations Hrvatski radiša, Hrvatski skaut and the "Graničar" singing society in Nova Gradiška, as well as events that he considered important for national culture, such as the unveiling of the Strossmayer monument (1926) or the great exhibition of peasant art products for which he also helped procure exhibits (1927).

Likewise, he recorded important religious events, the most attractive being the Corpus Christi processions. Apart from Nova Gradiška, he photographed them in Zagreb and Vienna. Particularly interesting for Nova Gradiška were the images taken at the blessing ceremony of the new bells in 1922 for the Nova Gradiška parish church, led by Archbishop Bauer (the old ones were melted down during the war) (fig. 1).

It should be mentioned that, as a chronicler, he went to all kinds of events, not only those that he politically supported. For instance, he recorded the ceremonial 101-gun salute from Zagreb's Strossmayer promenade in honor of the newly adopted (and hated in advance) Vidovdan Constitution in 1921, or a year later the regime's celebration of Zrinski and Frankopan Day (the Croatian celebration was held a day earlier).

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<sup>9</sup> The party changed its name: Hrvatska republikanska seljačka stranka (Croatian Republican Peasant Party, HRSS) from 1920 to 1925 and Hrvatska seljačka stranka (Croatian Peasant Party, HSS) afterwards, so these abbreviations are used for the years in question. The H(R)SS abbreviation is used for the entire period (1920-29).



*Figure 1: Bell blessing ceremony in Nova Gradiška.  
(GMNG-FKD. Photography collection, 605)*

**Famous people.** Photographing events presented technical challenges in terms of finding a position with a good view and capturing movement. On the other hand, taking photographs of public figures posed a different type of problem. Of course, if they were taken at public performances, one could photograph freely. However, for a better, portrait photo, personal consent was required. Thus, it is interesting to see the extent to which this “novelty” was still rare and what kind of response it elicited. The problem of taking photographs of famous people was already discussed in the 1860s (Rudd 2016:207). The increase in the number of photographers, especially amateurs, who made money from photographs of famous people, led to the creation of the term “right to privacy” in the 1890s, and the first regulations to protect this right (Mensel 1991). However, Croatia of the 1920s did not yet resemble the global centers, where swathes of professional and amateur photographers stalked famous or beautiful people. In the local context, the relationship between a famous person and an unknown photographer was still regulated by civil decency.

Dieneš's experiences show that this phenomenon was not unknown in our country, but also that it was not so common that it would become a problem that should be proscribed and limited in various ways. Thus, Dieneš was able to photograph the Serbian politician Stojan Protić during his visit to Zagreb. He saw him on the street, stopped him in front of the Palace Hotel and simply asked to take his photograph (1 June 1922). After the gathering of peasant choirs, he also photographed peasant writers Mihovil Pavlek Miškina and Mijo Stuparić. He also recognized the poet Dragutin Domjanić, with the latter happily posing for him and saying “that he was asked to be

photographed on the street on multiple occasions” (22 May 1927).

Dieneš photographed others figures after public appearances, blending in among the photographers waiting for them, such as Ante Trumbić and Svetozar Pribićević. He caught Don Frane Bulić and Đakovo bishop Antun Akšamović after a ceremonial academy assembly while leaving the University building. Archbishop Akšamović showed a new trait at that time – good communication with the media (he thought Dieneš was a reporter). Perhaps he did not find the situation pleasant, but he managed it well, he joked about persistent photographers and, finally, “thanked me for the attention.” (“Oh look at those photographers – these spies, who always find you!... Here comes the spy photographer again – look, pointing his camera like a volley gun”) (6 November 1926) (fig. 2).



*Figure 2: Bishop Akšamović after the ceremonial academy assembly at the University of Zagreb. (GMNG-FKD. Photography collection, 6717)*

People he was acquainted with and with whom he could arrange a photo shoot were easier to manage, and the photo session was usually organized at their home or in their workplace. This is in line with a practice that became popular at the turn of the century – home portraiture, where both professional and amateur photographers took photographs of individuals in their homes (Peterson 2011). The fact that some of them shared the same political views (for example, Mato Drinković) helped in this aspect. Those he knew better were even easier to record. He photographed the mayor of Nova Gradiška, Ivo Kramarić, on several occasions. Family ties made it easier for him to photograph Tomislav Maretić, the ill-disposed famous linguist (who asked “Is



this really necessary?”, and finally agreed so the family could keep his photograph “when I’m gone!”) (27 March 1923; 11 December 1923). Friendship made it possible for him to photograph Milan Šufflay. His portraits of Maretić, Šufflay or Vjekoslav Klaić are no different from professional photographs (fig. 3). Their well-thought-out poses and lighting (window) are similar, and the home environment – in their cases, the workplace – spoke more about the persons than the imaginary scenography found in photography studios.



Figure 3: Milan Šufflay in his study. (GMNG-FKD. Photography collection, 438)

This is how, over many years, he systematically created a gallery of more or less famous characters that were interesting to him. In included images of people of various profiles, from the Russian emigrant, Admiral Oskar L. Starck, the painter August Posilović, or Dienes’s pharmacy professor Julije Domac. It was a kind of visual diary of the people he met and wanted to preserve in memory. Along with the Diary, these photographs are a valuable source for researching social networks and communication within and between social groups, as well as the concepts of privacy and private space.

He also noted that some people did not give permission to be photographed (and he was polite and discreet and did not insist). One such request was denied by Zdenka Smrekar (D 5 July 1925), and an acquaintance from Nova Gradiška “was deeply convinced that there was a devil in the camera!... Otherwise, he liked to read and was well-educated and very diligent.” (D 21 January 1924). However, these two situations remain isolated examples of rejection in a world that was increasingly embracing new

media. For his part, Dieneš tried his best to make the whole process pleasant and mutually beneficial. As a rule, he sent the photographs to the people that were in them and thus, in some way, repaid them for posing and left them with some kind of control over the photograph that now belonged to someone unknown or to the public.

**Modernization.** Another significant topic – next to important people and events – was modernization and how it changed the image of the city and the everyday life of its inhabitants. Dieneš was interested in new industrial plants, for example, he photographed oil exploration (“spinning”) near the village of Rešetari and the processing factory “Salubra” which produced flour for children. However, he mostly photographed the changes in the city. As he regularly visited Zagreb, he also witnessed how it changed over time. He recorded the demolition of Dolac and the construction of the new market (fig. 4). He tried to preserve in memory certain buildings that he heard would soon be demolished, and he also photographed the construction of new buildings (Institute of Physics, new buildings of the Faculty of Medicine, bathing facilities on the Sava river). Dieneš was particularly impressed by the construction of an entire new city neighborhood in Peščenica (“an entire Villenviertel,”<sup>10</sup> 11 August 1922), as well as the creation of an elite neighborhood on Pantovčak and north of Ribnjak. In his native Nova Gradiška, he photographed the erection of a bowling alley and gazebo of the Croatian Home, the first bus that connected the town with Požega, and the construction of a sanatorium at Šumetlica.



*Figure 4: Changes in the city. Dolac before being demolished.  
(GMNG-FKD. Photography collection, 6329)*

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<sup>10</sup> German das Villenviertel – villa quarter.

**Cityscapes and landscapes.** In Zagreb, he photographed the city from the tower of the cathedral on several occasions, not focusing on modernity, but on the attractiveness of the city and the quality of the shot. ("The air was very transparent. Sljeme seemed to be very near." 28 March 1922). Likewise, in Nova Gradiška, he tried to capture the best possible shot from church towers, paying attention to the quality of the view and lighting (18 September 1925; 2 June 1927). He often took photographs of nature around Nova Gradiška. His family owned property outside the city, so he regularly walked to the property and was inspired to create "the same and different" landscapes or views of Nova Gradiška. On certain occasions, he also demonstrated a sensibility for natural light effects (an aspect usually reserved for art photography), such as unusual light in a summer storm ("Suddenly, the clouds to the west parted, the sun shone through – but above us the gloomy clouds still rained down on us! I took a photograph of this rare sight." (16 July 1926)).

Towards a complete collection. As a chronicler, Dienesš wanted preserve an image of what he could not photograph himself. So he took advantage of the well-established photography trade, which emerged along with the first mass-produced *carte-de-visite*<sup>11</sup> photographs in the 1860s. Their original purpose was to provide a visual likeness of public figures to the common man, and the possibility of purchasing them quickly stimulated the urge to collect (and was wholeheartedly encouraged by merchants). This even became a sort of social or national obligation (Rudd 2016:197–198). The custom spread to all walks of life, so, for example, during the interwar period, you could find pictures of Stjepan Radić and Vladko Maček, along with family photographs, even among peasant families. Dienesš's correspondence with the photographer Benčić demonstrates why photography, and especially collecting, was still inaccessible to many. The prices, depending on the size and demand, ranged from 10 to 80 dinars<sup>12</sup> (Pismo S. Benčića [Letter from S. Benčić], 18 May 1926).

Dienesš, on the other hand, was part of the elite and could buy whatever he wanted for his collection. So he ordered photographs of the mass games organized by Hrvatski sokol and Lorković's funeral from Foto Tonka (for information about her: Magaš Bilandžić 2015) (7 April 1926), and pictures from Dalmatia from Foto Tomlinović (18 February 1922). He procured what he could in Zagreb, buying in newspaper and magazine offices, cinemas and bookstores. Being a good client and contributor, the editorial office of *Svijet* provided him with some photographs for free, and he bought

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<sup>11</sup> Small photographs, 9 x 6 cm, pasted on cardboard, replaced by larger cabinet photos (10.8 x 16.5 cm) in the 1880s.

<sup>12</sup> To give a frame of reference: In the 1920s, 1 kg of bread cost 5 dinars, and the average worker's wage was 23 dinars for a day of work. Workers' wages were roughly equal to the price of a poorly furnished rented room (Mirković 1968:326). Peasants had almost no money at their disposal.

others from their photographers (for 10 dinars on average) (15 April 1927). Some images he obtained from other countries, using various methods. He asked a friend in Germany to send photographs of President Paul von Hindenburg's 80th birthday celebration (4 August 1927). Dienneš did not shy away from writing to prominent people, for example, in order to obtain a photograph of the Danish journalist and writer Karin Michaelis, he wrote to Hans Bredow, the father of the German radio network, in Berlin, and to the doorman at the Viennese hotel where she was staying (9 February 1928).

He wrote a letter to the correspondent of *Jutarnji list* at the conference in Genoa, asking for "characteristic photographs", which would include: "the first session, then the leaders of individual delegations in various situations – in general, anything that is of historical value, and could serve as a comment of that great event." (24 April 1922). Although politics was one of his priorities, he significantly expanded this concept of "great people and events" thematically, fortunately for us today.

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In the interwar period, photography was often associated with national sentiment, which saw visual communication as a way to give the nation roots in time (linking the past, the present, and the future) and to provide spatial integration (local – national) (Edwards 2012:7, 213). The choice of political motifs and people shows that for Dienneš, national sentiment served as important motivation for creating his collection. In this context, he understood the national in the broadest sense – from politics and the economy to culture or, to a lesser extent, landscapes (space) and monuments (history). This awareness evolved into a moral duty, as he said himself in the conversation with Klaić: "When I took his picture, I told him that it was our duty to honor our great men and to collect and respect their memories." (24 May 1927).

The photographer's personality should also be taken into account when choosing motifs, as the choice depends on individual interests, worldview and available knowledge. With Dienneš, the focus on the present came from his personality, and perhaps also his youth. He was still in his twenties, a pharmacist (natural sciences) by profession, he lived as part of a family that ran its own farm, and he entered politics and dealt with concrete, practical problems. Thus, he used photography to record current events and figures, unlike many amateurs who focused on historical motifs (Edwards 2012).

## Influences

The wide range of motifs described raises a question: how did Dienesš envision the collection of photographs of events and people worth recording?

Generally speaking, the thematic breadth of the collection reflected the emergence of new types of photography (in addition to art photography): reportage, scientific, advertising, industrial photography. They expanded the range of photography motifs, so basically every object in the world became interesting for photography (Lugon 2008:220). However, a role model always narrows the circle of motifs for individuals. With Dienesš, the formation of his visual perception of the world, and thus his collection, was decisively influenced by the illustrated newspapers he followed for years. His library, as was discovered, included newspapers from the birthplace of photojournalism, Germany (Freund 1981:105) *Die Woche* and *Frankfurter Illustrierte*, and he also acquired Austrian (*Radio Welt*), as well as the most significant Croatian illustrated newspapers (*Ilustrovani list*, *Dom i svijet*, *Svijet*).<sup>13</sup> These newspapers gave precedence to image, rather than words, with photographs becoming the main carrier of information about the world. A comparison of their visual design and the content of Dienesš's photography collection reveals great similarities. In fact, Dienesš's collection seems like a composite of what could be found in these newspapers: various events from the world of politics, economy, culture, sports, entertainment and everyday life (housing, fashion) (Kolveshi 2006:29–31). Certain differences can be identified, for example, Dienesš's political motives are determined by party affiliation (while newspapers try to remain neutral), and there is almost no signs of sport. However, that was a question of personal preferences. In any case, it could be said that illustrated newspapers gave him an idea of what could be a possible motif, but also that their illustrations showed him what would make a good photograph. This kind of imitation was characteristic not only for amateurs, but for professionals also. This was not only a matter of a lack of inventiveness, but also about the usefulness of following established patterns. As noted, the knowledge of what makes a good photograph and which motifs are interesting has an international character, and by adopting the same patterns, photographers from different countries become recognizable on the world scene (Jolly and Palmer 2019). This noticeably repetitive iconography (ibid.:62) was disseminated, to a greater or lesser extent, through illustrated newspapers to everyone who owned a camera.

One of the main characteristics of illustrated newspapers since they first appeared in the 1840s is their international content and distribution, which makes them

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<sup>13</sup> They were published: *Ilustrovani list* (1914-18); *Dom i svijet* (1888-1923), *Svijet* (1926-1938).

interesting and available everywhere (Smits 2020). For this reason, they are considered an important manifestation and promotional element of the global culture of modernity (Ersoy 2016:332). However, at the same time, they also function as an agent of national unification (Edwards 2012:7, 213). Both of these components are evident in Dieneš's photographs, which are global in choice and style, and simultaneously national with regard to the concrete motifs and the purpose he gives them.

Other influences are harder to determine with certainty. We know that he did not subscribe to any photography magazines, which started to be published in Croatia at that time, but he occasionally went to exhibitions that included photographs. For example, he attended a mountaineering exhibition where he particularly noticed "many beautiful photographs from every corner of our homeland." (22 January 1922). The exhibition takes on a different meaning when we take into account the fact that the best amateur photographers during those years worked exclusively as part of mountaineering societies and were the main promoters of art photography (Tonković 1994:126–128). Dieneš learned technique from the photographers from whom he bought equipment. He was friends with one of them, Lujó Mosinger (31 October 1922), so we can assume that Mosinger had a somewhat greater influence on Dieneš's understanding of the new medium. (For more information on the Mosinger family see: Tonković 2011a.)

## TO BE A PHOTOGRAPHER

### Social networks

Photography is a means of communication, in fact, exchange is considered the most common way of social use of photographs (Edwards and Hart 2004:13). The reason for its existence is not only personal recollection, but circulation, even if it occurs only among family members or between generations. To describe its role since the mid-19th century more vividly, some compare it to the social networks of today (Coddington 2016; Rudd 2016). Thus, Dieneš sent his selected photos to friends and acquaintances. To his family in Croatia and abroad (in Hungary and Germany) he sent images of the family (18 January 1922; 28 September 1922; 29 January 1923; 27 November 1926; 21 December 1926), and they would send theirs in turn (31 October 1922; 29 December 1923), which revived ties between people who hardly saw each other anymore. His friends from the army asked for war pictures (14 October 1921; 21 November 1921; 18 December 1921), he would send new photographs of the city to people who left Nova Gradiška (16 December 1921), and gave photographs to his

fellow citizens as gifts when he would accidentally capture them on film (27 April 1927). Thus, photographs enriched family and social ties and helped to maintain them over long distances.

Photography became a topic of conversation and a motive to establish communication. When he met a military photographer at a friend's house, they first exchanged experiences, and then Dieneš looked at his photos, and the photographer finally lent him his films to develop the photographs he wanted (12 October 1922). On another occasion, while photographing the demolition of Dolac, he ran into another acquaintance, and when they realized that they were both interested in photography, his friend invited him home to show him his photography equipment (28 August 1927). Dieneš would show off his photographs to friends (17 September 1925), and sometimes, while he was still a bachelor, he talked about his "experiences with a camera" with girls (23 May 1927).

In addition to his private life, photography also influenced his relationships with public figures. These were mostly short communications about a specific photograph, while a more lasting effect was felt in his relationships with politicians in H(R)SS. Although they were already acquainted, learning that Dieneš knew how to take photographs added another dimension to his "usefulness." He made a habit of sending photographs of events related to the H(R)SS to Košutić, Pernar or Krnjević, which intensified their relationship somewhat (8 January 1922; 16 February 1923; 19 November 1924). From time to time, they even asked him if he had photographs they were missing, for example, of Radić and the Romanian politician Lupu at the assembly in Vrpolje (8-12 February 1926; 14 February 1926).

## A photographer in public space

The act of taking photos affected Dieneš's status at public events as well. This could lead to uncomfortable situations, such as the time he tried to film the riots in Zagreb after a ban prohibiting the election assembly of the Croatian Bloc was issued, when he was almost arrested (8 December 1922). However, he was not a reporter and he did not try to take such pictures again, and the atmosphere calmed down. His other experiences are extremely positive. In general, he was allowed into the first rows because of his camera, and even the police let him through their cordon into the area for dignitaries and the first photojournalists. He used this to his advantage during the opening of the pontoon bridge Stara Gradiška – Bosanska Gradiška (27 August 1922), at the HRSS assembly in Oriovac ("My little camera once again helped me in finding a good spot! I asked people if I could move to the front to get a better picture, and everyone obliged," 2

February 1923). At the grand celebration of the unveiling of the Strossmayer monument, he passed through the police cordon, reached the monument where he “moved freely, everyone was courteous to me as a ‘photographer’” and thus he “took beautiful pictures, moreover, I saw and heard everything!” (7 November 1926). Delighted by this turn of events, he even sketched his position in the Diary (fig. 5). He also photographed a gathering of peasant choirs from an excellent position on the “other” side of the cordon. (“My camera again meant that I was able to stand freely in front of the cordon and take photos carefree.”) (22 May 1927).

This also led to a new sense of privilege. After the police withdrew at the unveiling of Strossmayer monument, “the public ran like wild from all sides to the monument, to see the wreaths and the monument. It was a sorry sight to behold as that crowd came running towards me and eagerly wanted to see more of the ceremony.” (7 November 1926).

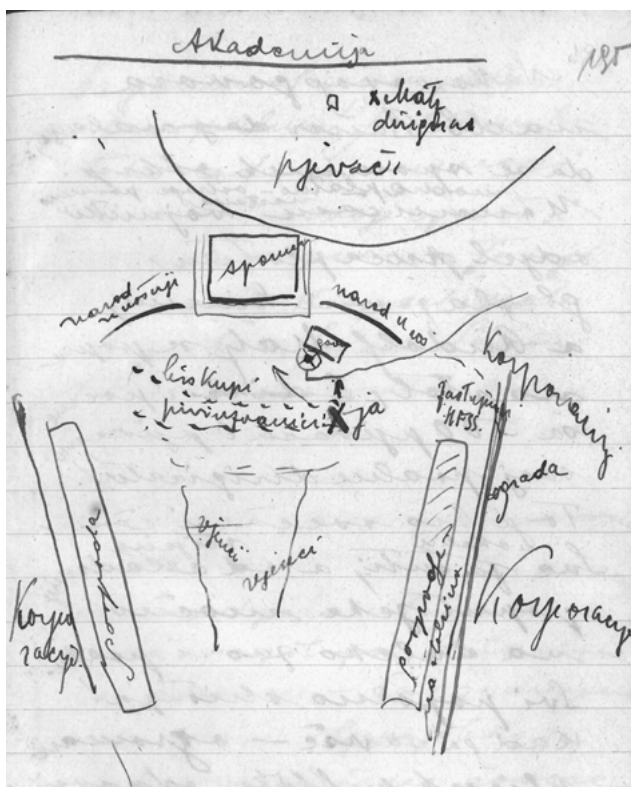


Figure 5: Sketch of Dienesš's position from which he photographed the unveiling of Bishop Strossmayer's monument ("x me"), next to the monument itself, the bishops and guests of honor. (Diary, 7 November 1926, pp. 195)



### The public in private space

The selection of photographs, even their material design and presentation, are a special subject of research (Langford 2001; Edwards 2001, 2020; Edwards and Hart 2004; Batchen 2004; Di Bello 2007). The material aspect of the original presentation in the Dieneš collection cannot be reliably analyzed because the albums and framed photographs were not handed over to the Museum in their entirety. In addition, the things we will focus on are not even present in the collection at all, but we know they existed and how they worked due to the Diary. These are albums that are not intended primarily for family. The way photographs are presented is closely related to their function and the circle of people they are intended for (Spence and Holland 1991). Thus, Dieneš arranged some photographs into private albums, intended for private family memory. He would have his favorite images framed, but given their sheer number, most of them remained invisible. However, in this case we are interested in photographs that were intended for guests and the public to look at. He arranged these photos in a special album (or albums) or hung them in a semi-public area of the house. These photographs showed public figures, and affirmed the host's political and cultural identity to a wider circle of spectators, as well as his high social status which enabled him to form a collection that was not accessible to everyone. Aside from this social role, they also reveal some cultural phenomena – the modern interest in famous people and collections, but also the visual communication practices of the time.

Dieneš arranged photos of famous people in a special Album (written in capital letters in the Diary). This practice had globally existed for decades, since cartes-de-visite made photographs of famous people available to a mass audience in the 1860s (Plunkett 2003). An interesting fact is that the first few years already revealed what people would be interested in: prominent politicians and actors (ibid.:64–68, 70). During the 1920s, the trend of collecting photographs of famous people (whose autographs were sought afterwards) spread throughout Croatia as well (Tonković 2011b:197). Dieneš recorded some of them himself, while he acquired others, and he tried to obtain autographs from the people in the photographs. This is how visual memory gained additional weight, a unique confirmation of the presence and contact with the person in the image (Batchen 2004:41). He collected a number of autographs, for example, from Archbishop Bauer (13 August 1922), Russian theater actress Maria Germanova (2 February 1921), actors of the Moscow Art Theatre: Olga Knipper-Chekhova and Stanislavski himself (18 November 1922), German violinist Willy Burmester (3 June 1921) and film actress Ossi Oswald (8

May 1922; 9 May 1922). This was a new form the old home scrapbook (Dieneš owned one as well), in which more interesting guests were noted, and it was customary to write an educational message along with the signature. Photography introduced a great novelty, as the text was replaced by images, and the circle of people in the album went from local to truly global. However, they both served the same public function and were shown to guests in order to affirm the social status of the host. For example, when visiting one acquaintance, Dieneš was shown a “welcome book” kept since 1887 which contained “a lot of interesting signatures.” (16 December 1921).

Since the advent of photography, personalizing photo frames or even combining several of them to create additional meanings had been quite popular (Batchen 2000). Although this was usually done with a private purpose, it could also have a public one, as was the case with Dieneš's *spomenlist* of the Croatian Bloc (it contained signed photographs of Stjepan Radić, Mirko Košutić and Mate Drinković, and the space between the images was decorated with ornaments by graphic artist Antun Posilović and framed with “folk colors”) (29 January 1922; 4 February 1922). Although he made it for himself, it was still meant to be presented to others. Because of political and social activities, his house was also a public space to some extent, and numerous guests could immediately notice the host's political beliefs. The fact that he personally took photographs of leading opposition politicians and obtained their signatures also improved his status. In addition to this private *spomenlist*, he had a similar one made for HRSS at Radić's request, which was then displayed in the window of Radić's bookstore, in a public space (16 March 1922; 23 April 1922).

## Exhibiting in public space

Exhibiting photographs in the windows of various shops, although mostly those with photography equipment, had been a common way of presenting them since the 19th century. It brought profit for the shop owners and authors, and changed the visual representation of the world for passers-by and customers. Using this practice, Dieneš exhibited his photographs of the Hrvatski sokol mass games (28 July 1925) and the blessing ceremony of the Hrvatski sokol flag in Oriovac (20 September 1926) in the window of the Bauer bookstore.

Another popular way of circulating images were photographs of certain events or people (public and private) arranged as postcards. So far, we know of only one such public use of Dieneš's postcard photographs. These were photographs of the blessing ceremony for the bell of the church in Nova Gradiška, whose proceedings contributed to paying off the bell (17-18 August 1922; 20 August 1922; 24 August 1922).

## Publishing

However, for changing visual culture, print media are more important, as they have a wider reach. It is therefore interesting to see to what extent was publication accessible to an amateur like Dieneš. As a prominent member of the Nova Gradiška elite, known to be involved in photography, he secured local commissions on several occasions. The author of the monograph on the “Graničar” singing society asked him to photograph two motifs from Nova Gradiška, and the photos were published (29 April 1926; 25 June 1926; Benković 1926, s.p. /between pages 16–17/). However, the local audience of this book pales in comparison to the one offered by the new medium – the illustrated press.

Dieneš's collaboration with *Svijet*, the only illustrated weekly at the European level in Croatia (Koščević 1992:16) published at the same time or even before some of the most important similar world magazines (Galjer 2012:110) is particularly noteworthy. When *Svijet* was established, Dieneš was visited by an agent from Zagreb who asked him to send photos of local events to the editors as often as possible (6 November 1924; 6 August 1926). This interest in amateur photographers was common in the early stages of illustrated newspapers (Ersoy 2016). Photographs were usually bought on the international market, and some were created by in-house reporters, which became a profession in Croatia at that time (Koščević 1992). However, the newspapers asked for contributions from amateurs for years, especially for reports on events from the provinces. So they were not only a mix of various contents, but also types of images, from art to amateur snapshot photography (Gervais and Morel 2017). Dieneš was happy to oblige, and the editors were satisfied with the quality of his work and soon published some of his photographs, such as the celebration of the “Graničar” singing society (6 July 1926; “Proslava jubileja” 1926), the blessing ceremony of the Hrvatski sokol flag in Oriovac (19 September 1926; “Hrvatska sokolska slavlja” 1926) or dance exercises performed by female members of Hrvatski sokol (24 October 1926; “Ritmički uzgoj” 1926).

Another significant “beneficiary” of Dieneš's photographs was H(R)SS. While *Svijet* was primarily interested in local celebrations, the party was concerned with only one topic – political gatherings. This segment of Dieneš's photography reached the widest audience, eventually entering the literature on the history of the interwar period and thus becoming a visual symbol of an era. His work was featured in the party's *Božićnica* [Christmas Calendar and Anthology] publications from 1923 onwards (*Božićnica* 1923:92, 93, 96, 107, 127, 131; *Božićnica* 1929:44, 72). When Radić's daughter Milica asked him for photographs for *Božićnica* the day after the HRSS assembly on Mažuranić Square in 1924, he was already a trusted collaborator (16

September 1924). That year he saw as many as four of his photographs published (Božićnica 1924:205, 223, 238). The photograph of Radić and his wife Marija passing through a “row of 140 flags” (p. 205) became famous, it was also used in literature (Mužić 1988: s.p.; Matković 1999:172), and it has only recently been attributed to him (fig. 6). This is due to the practice of newspapers not crediting authors of photographs, especially amateurs. During the work on organizing the collection, it was confirmed that he is the author of some other photographs published in the literature, for example the one depicting Radić in Oriovac (Božićnica 1923; Jareb 2022: cover page, 28). Moreover, I was personally surprised when we identified that some photographs I recently published, which I found in the private collection of Ivan Vinkov (Vinkovci), were his. These include the mentioned photograph of Radić and his wife Marija and Radić’s speech in Cernik (Božićnica 1924:205; Božićnica 1929:72; Leček and Grgić 2020:23, 13) (fig. 7). This means that amateur, and not only professional, photos circulated among the interested public.



Figure 6: Stjepan and Marija Radić after the HRSS assembly on Mažuranić Square.  
(GMNG-FKD. Photography collection, 962)

Newspaper selections had their own content and quality rules, and if we also keep in mind the competition from professionals and other amateurs, we can imagine that publishing a photograph was no easy task even then. However, this does not mean that Dienes’s other photographs are not of high quality or interesting. As an example, we will mention only one image that was not chosen for *Božićnica*: A profile portrait of Radić, standing on the tribune during a large assembly on Mažuranić Square in Zagreb



Figure 7: Stjepan Radić speaks in Cernik.  
(GMNG-FKD. Photography collection, 5751)

(1924). An almost identical photograph from Foto Tonka was published in *Božićnica*, with Radić speaking and lightly gesturing with his right hand (it went on to become one of the most popular images of him). However, Dienes's "more passive photograph" reveals its meaning when we know the context (Batchen 2000:268, 2008:128). Dienes wrote in his Diary that he actually took the photograph of "the president during prayer at 12 o'clock" (14 September 1924). Now the calm, closed silhouette of Radić suggests composure and no longer seeks enlargement, as the relationship between the figure and the empty space (the sky) can have a deeper meaning. Today, the image is – at least for historians, because the "reading" of the photograph depends on the context of the viewer (Edwards 2001:8) – more interesting than the comparatively numerous photographs of Radić at various assemblies. It tells us something new about the mentality of that era, a world in which it was normal to interrupt an assembly for a moment and say the *Hail Mary* with 140,000 people (fig. 8 and 9).



*Figure 8: Stjepan Radić speaks at the HRSS assembly on Mažuranić Square.  
(Božićnica 1924: 221)*

Finally, photographs that fall under quality reportage photography were selected for publication. On the one hand, this shows that Dienesš adopted the patterns of illustrated newspapers, became “recognizable” and thus usable. On the other hand, he was given the opportunity to participate with numerous other collaborators in creating the visual identity of the newspaper, and thus the visual culture of his time (Gervais and Morel 2017). The urge to publish photographs from events he attended makes Dienesš a sort of harbinger of “citizen journalism,” which appeared much later, where amateur reporters share information via the media and social networks (Berger 2009:41). However, in Dienesš’s time, contributions were ultimately decided by the editorial staff, and it remained limited to the occasional addition of professional and reportage photography.

In conclusion, we could say that Dienesš co-shaped the visual culture of his time to a certain extent. Moreover, later interest in the subjects he photographed made his photographs significant with the passage of time, affecting the future to which he wanted to leave the images of his world.



Figure 9: Stjepan Radić in prayer at the HRSS assembly on Mažuranić Square. (Zagreb, 1924). (GMNG-FKD. Photography collection, 913)

## CONCLUSION

The photography collection of Karlo Dienneš (1895-1981), a pharmacist and amateur photographer from Nova Gradiška, is a valuable source for anyone interested in 20th century society. This research focuses on a short period (1920-28) and deals only with public photography. No stylistic analysis was performed; instead, the social context was examined. Here, we asked three questions.

The first was related to the choice of motifs and what influenced this choice. The research showed a wide range of motifs (politics, famous people, modernization, culture, landscape) and that the selection mostly corresponds to the visual identity of illustrated newspapers Dienneš followed. We can say that he adopted the modern visual culture, which was both global and national at that time. Thus, Dienneš chose motifs that are international by type, but photographed them in a specific national and political context.

The second question concerns how had photography affected Dienes's social connections and status. The research confirmed that he used photographs to strengthen private family and social ties, but also to promote himself in the public space. Certain advantages from photographing public events (being allowed in the front rows) also gave a feeling of privilege.

The third question related to the manner of reproduction, the possibility for an amateur to co-shape the visual culture of his era. In this context, presentations in a semi-private space, to guests (album, *spomenlist*) and various possibilities of presentation to the public (exhibition, photo postcards, publication) were pointed out. The publication in illustrated newspapers (*Svijet*, *Božićnica*) is particularly interesting, as it, on the one hand, confirmed that Dienes adopted the visual culture they promoted, and, on the other hand, that he was given the opportunity to participate in shaping it. Moreover, his political photographs that were published and disseminated by the H(R)SS eventually entered the literature and became part of the standard visual representation of the party and the 1920s, thereby fulfilling his wishes for his work – to preserve the memory of his era for the future.

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## “Pedantan amateur” Karlo Dieneš i društvena uloga fotografije 1920-ih

*Suzana Leček*

Amaterski fotograf i novogradiški ljekarnik Karlo Dieneš ostavio je vrijednu zbirku fotografija koja nudi široke istraživačke mogućnosti. U ovom smo se istraživanju ograničili samo na njihovu društvenu ulogu. Pri tome smo postavili tri pitanja: koje motive je fotografirao i što mu je u tome bio uzor; kakav je bio utjecaj fotografija i fotografiranja na njegove društvene veze i status; te na koje ih je načine mogao predstaviti javnosti i time utjecati na onodobnu vizualnu kulturu.

Ključne riječi: *fotografska zbirka, amaterski fotograf, vernakularna fotografija, ilustrirane novine, vizualna kultura, Karlo Dieneš, Nova Gradiška*



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