The Croatian Home in Split — Impact of an Architectural Style

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SAŽETAK
Krajem devetnaestog i početkom dvadesetog stoljeća narodi diljem Austro-Ugarske Monarhije podižu brojne zgrade za vrstu kulturnih ustanova koje nose naziv „narodnog", odnosno nacionalnog doma. Svrha takvih institucija bilo je jačanje nacionalnog identiteta, što je u multietničkim zajednicama često provociralo sukob, odnosno izazivalo otpor dijela stanovništva koje je težilo jačati drugi nacionalni identitet. U radu se navodi niz primjera na teritoriju današnje Češke i Slovenije koji svjedoče da su zagovornici drugih nacionalnih identiteta stvarali protutežu takvim nastojanjima podižući vlastite kulturne institucije istog tipa. Hrvatski dom u Splitu istovjetan je tip ustanove u čijem se prostoru putem djelatnosti raznih društava također trebao veličati hrvatski nacionalni duh, no podignut je tek 1908., što ga kronološki izmješta iz doba značajnih političkih napetosti između talijanskih autonomaša i hrvatskih narodnjaka u Splitu koje su vrhunac doživjele još 1882. Arhitekt Kamilo Tončić odlučio se za stil bečke secesije. Takav izbor stila, međutim, dio je javnosti protumačio kao protivan borbi za nacionalnu samostalnost. U članku se objašnjavaju razlike u političkim okolnostima izgradnje Hrvatskog doma u Splitu i drugih nacionalnih domova u Austro-Ugarskoj Monarhiji te se Hrvatski dom u Splitu kontekstualizira unutar rasprave koja je pratila izbor arhitektonskog stila za zgrade drugih nacionalnih domova u Austro-Ugarskoj. Iznosi se teza da je Tončićev odabir stila bila strateška odluka, koja je za cilj prvenstveno imala unošenje suvremenih europskih umjetničkih tendencija u lokalnu sredinu te uzdizanje nacionalne umjetnosti i obrta.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI
Hrvatski dom, Nacionalni dom, *Vereinshäuser*, Split, Kamilo Tončić, bečka secesija

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ABSTRACT
Toward the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, constituent nations of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy erected numerous cultural institutions universally referred to as National Houses. The purpose of these institutions was the strengthening of national identity, which was often a cause for conflict in multiethnic communities, or rather a call for resistance for the part of the community that espoused another national identity. A slew of examples on the territory of today's Czechia and Slovenia covered in the paper testify that adherents of other national identities created a counterbalance to such efforts by erecting their own National Houses. The Croatian Home in Split is equivalent to this type of institution; its spaces were intended to bolster the Croatian national spirit through the activity of various associations, yet the Home was built only in 1908, which chronologically situates it after significant political tensions between the pro-Italian autonomists and the pro-Croatian nationalists that culminated in 1882. Architect Kamilo Tončić decided to build the Home in the style of the Vienna Secession. Such a decision, however, was interpreted by a part of the population as running counter to their fight for national sovereignty. The article explains the differences in political circumstances of the construction of the Croatian Home in Split and other National Houses in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and contextualises the Croatian Home in Split within the discourse that followed the choice of architectural style for other National Houses in Austria-Hungary. It proposes a thesis that defines Tončić's choice of style as a strategic choice whose primary goal was the introduction of contemporary artistic tendencies into a local environment, and the elevation of national art and craft.

KEYWORDS
Croatian Home, National House, National Home, *Vereinshäuser*, Split, Kamilo Tončić, Vienna Secession

Hrvatski dom u Splitu — utjecaj arhitektonskog stila

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INTRODUCTION

The Croatian Home (*Hrvatski dom*)[1] in Split served as a cultural venue and social hub after its opening in 1908. It is a building constructed by architect Kamilo Tončić in the manner of the Vienna Secession. As a centre for the town's various societies, it was built in the architect's namesake street "Tončićeva", a highly prestigious location right alongside "Marmontova" — the most visited of the town's streets, the "Prokurative" — the largest of all Revival undertakings in Split, and at a comfortable walking distance from the National Theatre, the town's waterfront, and the National Square.

After twelve years of fund gathering, preliminary procedures, and preparatory construction work, the Home was erected with the purpose of hosting all associations and activities of national character in the town of Split, following in the footsteps of many such examples — National Houses — in other constituent states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. These National Houses may be typological counterparts to the Croatian Home in Split, but political and social circumstance, as well as Kamilo Tončić in the role of the Home's architect, made all the difference in the establishment and meaning of such a building in Split compared to situations abroad. This paper aims to compare the building of the Croatian Home in Split with other buildings of equivalent typology built on the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy around the turn of the twentieth century to determine the overlap and differences of their architectural characteristics and political impact, and postulates that Kamilo Tončić's choice of style was intended as a contribution to the long-term process of elevating local craft (Fig.1).

Fig. / Sl. 1 Postcard depicting the Croatian Home building in 1908, City Museum of Split photo archive, MGS 24557. / Razglednica s prikazom Hrvatskog doma iz 1908. godine, Fototeka Muzeja grada Splita, MGS 24557.
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THE TYPOLOGY OF THE NATIONAL HOUSE AND CONFLICT BETWEEN AUSTRIA-HUNGARY'S NATIONS

> [...] *These buildings emerged as a specific building type at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. They were built in the areas where one national group delimited itself against another, and where at least one of the ethnic groups felt oppressed. The one strong impulse for these delimitations was a wave of national revivals, which hit Europe in the 19th century and worsened relationships among nations existing in coherence for centuries and led to rivalry and friction. An ideal space for such squabbles was the Austro-Hungarian Empire* [...] *Czechs competed with Germans, Ruthenians (Ukrainians) with Poles, Slovenians with Germans or Italians and Slovaks, Romanians, Croats and others with Hungarians*.[2]

This description of National Houses provided by author Jan Galeta aptly illustrates the circumstances of their activity in central parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The author exemplifies the dynamic of this opposition of nationalities

through several National Houses. The Czech National House in Znojmo, built in 1881, quickly saw a response in the form of the German House in the same city in 1882. When the Slovakian population of Turčiansky Svätý Martin wanted to build a *Národný dom* (National House) in their own town, Hungarian authorities forbid the name, whereupon it was, rather pointedly, simply named "Dom" instead. The opening ceremony of the German House built in Moravská Ostrava in 1893 was publicly followed by derogatory remarks both about the building and the German population in Czech newspapers.[3] Additional examples are many: these are but a few from a long list of flaring national rivalries within the territory.

A similar situation could be found in Slovenia, where the escalation of national differences that began mounting in 1893 served as an impetus for the construction of National Houses in several cities, the most representative being in Ljubljana, Celje, and Maribor.[4] Igor Sapač stresses the fact that the Houses made their appearance within ethnically mixed cities, as was the case with Czech Houses. Likewise, they soon received a response from German citizens, with the construction of German Houses in Brežice, Celje, and Ptuj around 1900.[5] Also notable is the case of the National House in Pula, Istria, built together by Slovenes and Croatians in 1905.[6]

The Croatian Home in Split is interesting in that it does not fit into the template of National Houses as "delimiters" against another local ethnic group. The reason for this can be found in Split's political and demographic situation; the conflict of national identities in Split had a chronology different to that of Czech and Slovenian towns. While Czechs and Slovenes always contended with German opposition when it comes to nation-building efforts in the 1880s onward, no such opposing group remained in Split to contend with local Croatian efforts. The nation-based conflict in Split was that of the so-called Italian autonomists and Croatian nationalists; the former group had, led by highly influential mayor Antonio Bajamonti, controlled the town from the 1860s up until 1882, when the tide turned in favour of the nationalists[7] who won their first elections and stayed in power until the dissolution of the Monarchy. By the time of the Croatian Home's construction in 1908, the nationalists had been in control for twenty-six years.

After their defeat, the autonomists, who formerly advocated mostly for the establishment of an Italian rather than a Croatian cultural image in Dalmatia, were now gradually turning into irredentists. On the one hand, autonomists were now increasingly in favour of Italy's political control over Dalmatia, and on the other, Dalmatian nationalists were still advocating for unification with Croatia, but as a single large constituent state still within the Monarchy. Though Vienna was by no means enthusiastic about strengthening any rising nation, the latter solution was clearly more favourable, to the extent that the government led by Eduard Taaffe even started making concessions to various nationalist demands. With this (albeit minor) support, Split and Dalmatia would finally begin to see expansion and growth.[8]

1
This is a direct translation of the Croatian name "Hrvatski dom", which has attracted the attention of several colleagues (whom I thank for their constructive input). In literature written on this building and similar buildings throughout Croatia so far, this type of building has been presented under the name "Croatian House". While this is a functional translation, I would argue it does not communicate the atmosphere within these buildings as clearly as the variant used in this article. The word "home" is far more evocative of a location's relevance as a place of life, one that might even bear sentimental connotations, as opposed to "house", which more commonly refers to a building merely in the physical sense. Given the notable air of nationalist fervour among the population at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Croatian Homes were the most active and when they hosted numerous nationally inspired communities, "home" seemed a much more appropriate term. Even when considering the Croatian name in isolation, speakers of the language will note that it refers to the building as "Hrvatski dom", not "Hrvatska kuća". Scholarly literature abroad appears to have already dealt with this matter of terminology according to the rules of their own languages — this article uses names for foreign National Houses with respect to the forms provided by authors writing about them.
2
Galeta, "National Houses — Damnatio Memoriae? Architecture and Nationalism at the end of 19th and in the 20th Century", 119.
3
Ibid., 122, 124.
4
Sapač, "Javne palače", 145.
5
Ibid., 147.
6
Ibid., 145.
7
Kečkemet, *Prošlost Splita*, 164.
8
Kečkemet, *Jučerašnji Split*, 12. Austria used these concessions to try and indefinitely stall the matter of Croatian-Dalmatian unification. Even though the resulting state would still be part of the Monarchy, what the nationalists wanted was Croatia's annexation of Dalmatia. Dalmatia was governed by Austria, and Croatia was governed by Hungary: an annexation would then cede Dalmatian territory to Hungary, which was to be avoided.

The economic and cultural situation in Split improved, within limits appropriate for what was then a small European town. Government funding, growing industry, and developing entrepreneurship helped mitigate the effects of the infamous "wine clause"[9] of 1891 and the disease of grape phylloxera, which combined to ruinous effect for the initially prosperous Dalmatian winemaking business. A significant rise in import and export launched the Split harbour to third place in terms of naval traffic intensity within Austria-Hungary. In a dozen years, steady growth would have the modest town see a surge of ambitious projects: the restoration of the Split cathedral belfry (1886 – 1909), construction of the Archbishop's Palace (1901 – 1903), the Sulphur Baths (1903), the Tobacco Administration building (1904 – 1905), the *Velika realka* (the town's real school, 1908 – 1910),[10] and many others. Among these undertakings was also the construction of the Croatian Home.

THE CROATIAN HOME IN SPLIT: CONSTRUCTION, STYLE, CONTEXT

The end of the nineteenth century had already made evident the need for a building that could offer an ideal space for the unification of all associations of national character, considering that these groups were organised under improvised conditions, scattered across various locations in Split. Construction of a Croatian Home in Split was already discussed around the 1890s, but Gajo Bulat — a prominent figure of the nationalist party and mayor of Split — instead advocated for funds to be directed toward the construction of the National Theatre, which would then also host the associations in search of a proper workspace. The theatre was indeed realised in 1893, but lacked the space required to house the town's numerous associations as planned.[11] The prioritisation of the theatre building would prove to be critical for Split's Croatian Home, whose construction in 1908 allowed it to be far more architecturally, culturally, and politically significant than it would have been fifteen to twenty years prior, not least because of Kamilo Tončić's choice of style.

Before discussing the Home's style, it is important to provide an overview of stylistic choices made in other cities of the Monarchy when it comes to the construction of National Houses. In his article "National Houses in Moravia and Austrian Silesia before 1914", Jan Galeta notes that for Czech nineteenth century National Houses, the most typical choice was an Italian Renaissance Revival style, used for example by Theophil Hansen in 1873 on the *Besední dům* (Beseda House) in Brno. Their German House counterparts, on the other hand, were built in the German or Northern Renaissance Revival style, such as the 1893 *Deutsches Haus* by Felix Neumann in Moravská Ostrava. The eventual popularisation of the Baroque Revival style would see it used both by German and Czech National Houses, as it was the Austrian "state" style. Czech National Houses, but not German ones, would also go on to adopt the Vienna Secession (Figs. 2, 3).[12]

Fig. / Sl. 2 Theophil Hansen, *Besední dům*, 1873, Brno. "VitVit", CC BY-SA 4.0. / Theophil Hansen, *Besední dům*, 1873, Brno. "VitVit", CC BY-SA 4.0.
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Fig. / Sl. 3 Felix Neumann, *Deutsches Haus*, 1893, Moravská Ostrava. / Felix Neumann, *Deutsches Haus*, 1893, Moravská Ostrava.
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Fig. / Sl. 4 František Edmund Škabrout, *Narodni dom*, 1896, Ljubljana. Petar Milošević, CC BY-SA 3.0. / František Edmund Škabrout, *Narodni dom*, 1896, Ljubljana. Petar Milošević, CC BY-SA 3.0.
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Fig. / Sl. 5 Kamilo Tončić, The Sulphur Baths, 1903, Split. / Kamilo Tončić, Sumporne toplice, 1903, Split.
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9
An Austro-Hungarian trade agreement that provided vastly superior trading conditions to Italian winemakers, enabling them to sell their product at far lower prices than their Dalmatian competitors.
10
A type of secondary school that focused on natural and formal ("real") sciences: mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry, and geography, alongside several (exclusively non-classical) languages.
11
Kečkemet, *Prošlost Splita*, 191.
12
Galeta, "National Houses in Moravia and Austrian Silesia before 1914", 232 – 233.
13
Ibid., 234.
14
Sapač, "Javne palače", 145.
15
Haslinger, Hein-Kircher, and Jaworski, "Einleitung", 7.
16
Research of some historians even refers to Split in the 1910s as the Dalmatian city with the greatest "anti-Austrian sentiment" as a consequence of Stjepan Szilva de Szilvás's governorship of Dalmatia. De Szilvás was a county governor who particularly scorned events and activity promoting Yugoslavian unity. While the construction of the Croatian Home slightly precedes the 1910s, such an amount of tension between the population and the government did not manifest suddenly; it was a culmination of mounting disdain towards the Monarchy leading up to its dissolution. See: Buljan, "'Najjugoslavenskiji grad' — politički život Splita u Austro-Ugarskoj", 45.

As can be seen from the previous paragraph, National Houses did not shy away from employing a variety of styles throughout the history of their construction. A host of published research has proven that choice of style was largely left to the architect himself, while the buildings' commissioners asked only for monumentality. Galeta mentions that the competition for the *Deutsches Haus* in Brno in 1888 outlined only that "the building itself should not only be practical, but in its exterior appearance it should show monumentality and an appropriate character for a 'German house'." Likewise, the author provides a Czech example: the *Národní dům* in Moravská Ostrava, which was to be "dignified, its character readily indicative of its purpose, but without great splendour [...] With regard to the surroundings (the cathedral and school) the Renaissance style seems like the most suitable, yet the use of any other style is not excluded." Here, a style is preferred, but not conditioned.

Igor Sapač notes that the most monumental Slovenian examples in Ljubljana, Celje, and Maribor were all constructed by Czech architects in the Italian Renaissance Revival style; a fact that left locals unbothered because, once again, the lack of specifically Slovenian characteristics on the building's exterior was unimportant — only its monumentality mattered (Fig. 4).[14]

In a general survey of National Houses (in this case termed *Vereinshäuser* — club houses) in Eastern Central Europe, Peter Haslinger, Heidi Hein-Kircher, and Rudolf Jaworski observe a similar phenomenon: the request for a kind of monumentality that blends in with existing surroundings. Through what they dubbed "architectural mimicry", they mention that the *Vereinshäuser* were largely adapted to local conditions and could only be distinguished from town halls, theatres, train stations, or other representative buildings through some effort in observing iconographic details, and most importantly, corresponding inscriptions. This was, the authors say, by design: the buildings were intended to exemplify temperance and the ability to fit one's own project and ideas to the existing architectural structure of the city.[15]

The Croatian Home in Split, much like other National Houses before it, did not have a style decided by its commissioners. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it also had no opposing National House or nation to contend with in the town itself. Instead, the dominant tension that came to the fore was one directed toward the Monarchy itself: there was a notable wariness of Austria among the population who had by now developed certain ideas about their national identity and its accompanying cultural heritage — ideas that were not in line with the cultural image of influential Vienna.[16] This is why, despite the lack of local opposition and the liberty given to Kamilo Tončić as the Home's architect, its design in the manner of the Vienna Secession turned out to be quite controversial.

Secessionist architecture barely existed in Split when Tončić revealed his project for the Croatian Home in 1906. It was his own project of the Sulphur Baths constructed in 1903 that

inaugurated the style locally, but in the following three years, the Baths were followed by few other works in the same style, save for examples such as Villa Plevna in the same year or the Duplančić house in 1906, both by Eduard Žagar, or the Nakić house in 1906 by Špiro Nakić. In the eyes of some citizens, the Sulphur Baths had already established a poor precedent for the secessionist style due to their *ruferinnen* (callers, beckoners) sculptures — female figures with upper torsos unclothed, arms positioned around their mouths in a calling gesture. An anonymous author in the *Dan* (Day) journal would note that "the building answers all hygienic demands, but its façade does not befit the Christian beaux arts as it contains some statues whose nudity is an affront to Christian chastity."[17] While this initial moral remark was concerned with specific secessionist ornament, the public's problem with the Croatian Home was of a political nature, and concerned the design of its exterior as a whole. A commentary by an anonymous author in the *Naše Jedinstvo* (Our Unity) paper from 1906 reads:

> *... and we think that the design of the Croatian Home created by Mr Tončić is beautiful, but it seems to us that the Croatian Home ought to be ours in its exterior as well. Mr Tončić's design displays German, specifically Viennese architecture, looking after the school of Mr Wagner, but we have our own, oriental architecture.*[18] (Figs. 5, 6)

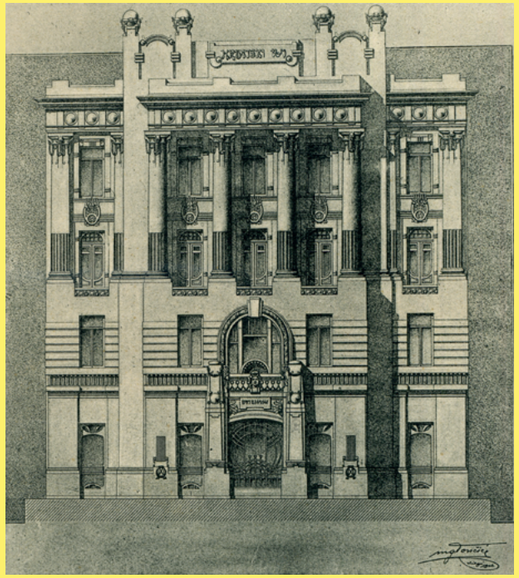

Fig. / Sl. 6 Kamilo Tončić, design of the Croatian Home's frontal façade. City Museum of Split photo archive, MGS 16308 / Kamilo Tončić, dizajn prednje fasade Hrvatskog doma. Fototeka Muzeja grada Splita, MGS 16308.
↑

Far from Slovenian and Czech custom which seemed approving of all designs so long as they displayed (tempered) monumentality, citizens of Split seem to have also had in mind styles that belong to the Croatian architectural repertoire, and those that do not; the Vienna Secession positioned itself firmly in the latter category (though the unknown author of the quotation above does concede the beauty of the building). While it is more than evident that it is the "German-ness" of the style that is problematic, the call for "our own, oriental architecture" is also interesting. It is possible that the author could have been simply referring to Dalmatia as part of the European East, as the region has indeed acted as part of the historical south-eastern frontier of Europe.

It is more likely, however, that such a statement expressed a preference toward eastern cultural elements that took root in Dalmatia throughout the centuries as a consequence of Ottoman influence. Testaments to this are many; as an example, we may consider the Perović house on the town's waterfront built in the Moorish Revival style. In his book concerning this very building, author Joško Belamarić writes about several other eastern cultural reflections in the town: distinct carpets from Bosnia sold on its market up until even the 1950s, orientalising architectural ornament by architect Emil Vecchietti on not only the Perović house, but projects such as the National Theatre in Split, and most notably, the busiest hubs of the town overwhelmingly populated by locals whose traditional costume made evident influences from the East.[19] Authors of many nineteenth century travel narratives, such as Hermann Bahr or Maude Holbach, consistently

Fig. / Sl. 7 Emil Vecchietti, the "Perović" house in the Moorish Revival style, 1896, Split. / Emil Vecchietti, kuća Perović u neomaurskom stilu, 1896, Split.
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Fig. / Sl. 8 Jan Kotěra, *Národní dům*, 1907, Prostějov. Jiří Komárek, CC BY-SA 4.0. / Jan Kotěra, *Národní dům*, 1907, Prostějov. Jiří Komárek, CC BY-SA 4.0.
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17
Kezić, *Arhitektura secesije u Splitu*, 99. Quotation translated from Croatian by the author of this paper.
18
Šverko, *Splitska škola za dizajn*, 94. Quotation translated from Croatian by the author of this paper.
19
Belamarić, *Freud u Splitu: Neomaurska kuća na splitskoj obali*, 62–64. The author also notes that this situation was much the same in all major towns along the Dalmatian coast.
20
See: Holbach, *Dalmatia: The Land Where East Meets West*; Bahr, *Dalmatinische Reise*.
21
Prijatelj, *Slikarstvo u Dalmaciji 1784 – 1884*, 72.
22
Jindřich Vybíral, "Síla i budoucnost jest národu národnost = The Strength and Future of the Nation is National Identity", 580.
23
Ibid.
24
The building is covered extensively in: Roháčková et al., *Národní dům v Prostějově 1907 – 2007*.
25
Lazarini, "Nationalstile als Propagandamittel in der Zeit der Nationalbewegungen", 251.

corroborate such an image of the town.[20] This Oriental legacy had formerly been recognised even by the Italian autonomists. The iconographic programme of the *Teatro Bajamonti* built during the governance of mayor Antonio Bajamonti, the theatre's extremely prominent and influential investor, depicted among other things "the future of the Dalmatian region that should, according to Bajamonti's concept, 'connect the industrious West and the wealthy East'."[21] All in all, the imprint of Oriental legacy within the local cultural image was unmistakable, and likely to be embraced by opponents of "the German" as a tool that helps them maintain distance from Viennese influence (Fig. 7).

Maintaining a rift between the culture of a constituent nation in the Monarchy and Vienna's own was a potent strategy, as was the accusation of being too familiar with the trends of Vienna. Traditionalist and modernist architects at the turn of the century in Prague frequently levelled accusations of dependence on Vienna against one another.[22] Though the size of the architectural scene of Prague at this time is far more comparable to the likes of Zagreb rather than peripheral Split, the conflict of Prague's architects nevertheless demonstrates well the ubiquity of nations' cultural distancing from Vienna in one way or another. A passage from the Czech *Národní listy* strikes the reader as a representative example of such antagonisations of Vienna at the time: "Vienna has always looked only after itself and its success; in the mistaken belief that, as the heart of a centralized state, it might acquire greater glamor, greater wealth and power, it has been and shall remain the arch-enemy of all national development."[23]

The architecture of National Houses also saw attempts at combining the secessionist style with national elements. One such example is Jan Kotěra's National House in Prostějov (fig. 8), built in 1907 with a secessionist base, but clad in rich folklore-inspired decoration.[24] This seems to be in line with a popular architectural strategy in the time of discourse about national styles, as pointed out by Franci Lazarini: an approach whose designs are very close to the Secession in many aspects, but one which chooses to import models from ethnographic tradition rather than models of past architectural styles. The author mentions this approach as the third variant among architects' strategies when dealing with "national" architecture, with the first variant being the choice of a Revival style as representative of a nation (e.g. German Renaissance for German Houses), and the second being a more complete turn towards a nation's vernacular architecture (Fig. 8).[25]

In light of this particular topic, it is important to mention Kamilo Tončić's most vital endeavour, whose beginnings ran parallel to the design (1906) and construction (1908) of the Croatian Home. In 1907, Split saw the founding of what author Ivana Šverko refers to as the "Split Design School" — an institution dedicated to the elevation of local craft largely based on thorough study of traditional Croatian ornament, with Tončić as its director. This school was not a minor addition

to the line of educational institutions in Split, but an effort backed with an incredibly ambitious vision and thorough research. Within the school, Tončić founded a collection of Dalmatian craft that would nearly immediately become the cornerstone collection of the Ethnographic Museum. Tončić would later also establish the Split Gallery of Fine Arts. As Šverko points out, these institutions, though autonomous, were founded one after the other by no mere happenstance: they were to also serve as an institutional framework that maintains readily available learning material for the attendees of the Design School.[26] Additionally, material from the school's archive (very little of which remains) acts as proof of how well-informed Tončić was about happenings abroad. Examples include copies of prestigious magazines such as London's *The Studio*, Darmstadt's *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, and Bergamo's *Emporium*.[27] To ensure his vision of the school was achievable, Tončić also undertook visits to Pula, Cormons, Trieste, Graz, Vienna, Innsbruck, Linz, Klagenfurt, and Prague.

We have mentioned this information to illustrate that, given Tončić's own involvement with the elevation of national craft with an emphasis on Croatian ethnography and thorough consultation of sources abroad, he was extremely unlikely to be unaware of similar activity happening in architectural circles, especially so close by. Kotěra's National House in Prostějov was constructed in 1907, but the application of ethnographic templates in architecture goes even further back — Franci Lazarini refers to the Hungarian architect Ödön Lechner who began merging folkloric and secessionist morphology already around the 1900s.[28] Tončić began work on uplifting Dalmatian ethnography via the Split Design School in 1907 but had been advocating for it well in advance. Why is it, then, that the Croatian Home's 1906 design was conceived purely in the manner of the Vienna Secession, and remained unchanged until its finalisation in 1908? To introduce architectural ornament inspired by Dalmatian folk ornament on its façade only seems natural given Tončić's preoccupations and the interest of the public. The opportunity to glean more about this from archival documentation is unfortunately lost to us,[29] so we must make sense of what we can given the context.

Writing on the subject of National Houses (*Vereinshäuser*), Michaela Marek mentions that their architecture cannot be understood as an expression of national identity or a description of a national culture, but that the choices behind every National House are backed by a strategic positioning specific to its architect.[30] Certainly, the abundance of Czech and Slovenian examples with varying styles have demonstrated as much, with the exception of German Houses in the Monarchy that appear loyal to the German Renaissance Revival style. The choice of the Vienna Secession and what appears to be conscious omission of national elements from the decorative repertoire of the façade of the Croatian Home also seem to exclude any effort of "nationalising" architecture on behalf of Tončić. I believe his own "strategic positioning" lay, at least partly, in the same intent with which he had created the ornamentation of the Sulphur Baths: to introduce well-established models of quality craftsmanship as part of a basis for the education of Split's own future craftsmen within the Split Design School.[31]

Another matter Tončić was very likely aware of was the fact that it was unnecessary for the Croatian Home to make any national declaration through style, because, as Monika Pemič and Jan Galeta argue, the associations and events within a National House speak of its national dedication unambiguously.[32] In fact, the very first event to take place within the Croatian Home in Split was the First Dalmatian Art Exhibition: an undertaking that sought to present Dalmatia's most promising modernists.[33] The symbolic power of the events National Houses hosted was proven through countless attempts of their erasure, perhaps most notably (but not exclusively) during the rise of totalitarian regimes. The Croatian Home in Split was no exception: in 1942, it was converted into the headquarters of the Fascist Youth and had its façade stripped of all secessionist decorative elements.[34] Examples abroad are, of course, many: the Slovenian *Narodni dom* by Max Fabiani in Trieste was destroyed in a fascist retaliatory act in 1920.[35] As mentioned earlier in the text, the National House in Pula was burnt down that same year.[36] The *Serbski dom* of Slavic Lusatian Sorbs in the town of Budyšin (Bautzen) in Germany was used as the seat of the NSDAP after 1937 and its interior purged of Sorbian heritage. The National House in Celje had its façade decoration stripped by National Socialists in 1941.[37] For nations other than those founding the National Houses, let alone entire regimes, the symbolism of the Houses was untenable (Fig. 9).

Fig. / Sl. 9 The Croatian Home after its decoration was stripped by fascists in 1942. Ministry of Culture and Media, Registry of Cultural Heritage. / Izgled Hrvatskog doma nakon što su fašističke snage uklonile dekoraciju s pročelja 1942. Ministarstvo kulture i medija, Registar kulturnih dobara.

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CONCLUSION

The Croatian Home in Split distinguishes itself from National Houses in the central Austro-Hungarian Monarchy firstly through lack of local conflict between nations. Where for Czech, Slovenian, and German examples it is a cornerstone of their construction, it is not a factor at all in Split. Secondly, the Vienna Secession as the Croatian Home's style of choice was perceived as politically inappropriate, where Czech and Slovenian National Houses admitted any style that fulfilled the criterion of monumentality. Ultimately, the style of the Croatian Home in Split is not a statement of national identity or cultural affiliation, but a strategic choice meant to further Kamilo Tončić's far-reaching vision of invigorating local craftsmanship by providing high-quality referential material.

The Croatian Home in Split has proven highly illustrative not only of the social and cultural pulse of the town at this time, but of an architect's choices and their significance outside the context of a building itself and its typology. Much more could perhaps be learned from researching other elements of the Home, such as its considerable history with the Croatian and later Yugoslav "Sokol" (Falcon), movements that also played no small part in the context of politics and nation-building. Another matter that stands to be addressed is

26
Šverko, 152, 170.
27
Ibid., 22.
28
Lazarini, 251.
29
There is very little archival documentation related to Kamilo Tončić available; the reason for this was his reaction to the unjust treatment he underwent in the aftermath of World War II. During the war, Split came under fascist occupation. The invaders forced themselves into the space of both Tončić's Sulphur Baths and the Croatian Home for their own purposes, but not with any cooperation from the architect. After the war and the re-establishment of Yugoslavian rule, money was scarce and blame abundant; as Tončić was also the director of the Sulphur Baths, he found himself imprisoned and most of his property confiscated under arbitrary allegations of aiding the invaders. After his release, he returned to the property of his villa in Split to collect what he could of his belongings, with the villa now turned into an apartment building and inhabited by strangers. Dejected, Tončić and his wife Pia began gathering all of his documents, projects, literature — his life's work — and proceeded to burn them at a pyre in the villa's courtyard for days. Šverko, 100–109.
30
Marek, "Gebaute Geselligkeit – gebaute Nationalkultur. Fragen an eine unbekannte Baugatt ung des 19. Jahrhunderts und ihre Ausprägungen in Ostmitteleuropa", 279.
31
We have proposed an explanation of how such an impetus came to be in Split through the transfer of ornament from Vienna to peripheral Split at the *Professional Worlds of Architectural Ornament* conference in Paris, organised on the 13th and 14th of March 2024 by the Institute national d'histoire de l'art. A text on this topic is currently being prepared for publication.
32
Pemič, "Die eigene Präsenz manifestieren: Die Slowenen und ihr Zentrum in Triest", 181; Galeta, "National Houses — Damnatio Memoriae?", 126.
33
An exhibition that was problematic even for many artists in Zagreb, who sought to centralise artistic life in their own city while simultaneously caring little for modernist currents. They found the event so impactful that they accused the Dalmatian artists of cultural and artistic separatism that ran counter to the long-standing efforts for national unity supported by both Dalmatia and Croatia for almost fifty years at the time. The exhibition's significance and circumstances have been exhaustively researched in: Bulimbašić, *"Medulić", the Association of Croatian Artists (1908–1919): Art and Politics*.
34
Šverko, 95.
35
Pemič, 163; Galeta, "National Houses — Damnatio Memoriae?", 126.
36
Sapač, 145.
37
Lazarini, "The Architecture of Cultural Institutions in Slovenia in the Period of Historicism", 82.

a rather conspicuous omission from this paper: the relation of the Croatian Home in Split to other Homes across Dalmatia and Croatia — an inclusion long considered, but decided against once the depth of discourse surrounding the style of the Croatian Home in Split alone became apparent. These, and no doubt other topics, await further analysis.[38]

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38
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