

EVOLUTION OF THE MUSEUM EXHIBITION "SLOVENE DENTISTRY COLLECTION"

EVOLUCIJA MUZEJSKOG POSTAVA SLOVENSKE ZUBARSKO ZBIRKE

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SUMMARY

In 1993, the Museum of Recent History Celje was the first to put on display its unique dentistry collection; we exhibited dentistry instruments, devices and equipment used in the past by dentists and dental technicians in Slovenia.

Thanks to a private collector from Celje, Franc Štolfa, DMD, a considerable number of these items have been preserved. He has collected about 3000 artefacts that were donated to him by individuals from all over Slovenia and which testify to the development of dentistry in Slovenia in 19th and 20th century. Dr. Štolfa had been cooperating with museums, and in 1991 donated the entire collection to the Museum of Recent History Celje in exchange for permanent care and protection. Experts from the museum now maintain, protect and document the collection: they develop it and present it to the public. The main items in the collection include surgical rooms, dental and dental-technical instruments, devices and equipment, photographic materials and literature on dentistry.

Over the last decade the dentistry collection has moved several times from one location in the museum to another, while we continued to work intensively on finding a suitable site where an exhibition could be set up that would meet museological standards and regulations. Setting up the exhibition in these spaces is for now an experiment. It, however, gives both the custodians of the museum and members of the public, at least in terms of Slovene museology, a unique opportunity to evaluate the concept of the exhibition and think it over. Once a better solution, in terms of both form and content, is provided, the exhibition will be modified and put into its final shape.

Key words: history of dentistry, medical heritage, dentistry collection, museum collections, 19th and 20th century, Celje, Slovenia

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Despite the reputation Slovene medicine has enjoyed world-wide, it is yet to find a place in Slovene museums. Dr. Zvonka Zupanič-Slavec of the Institute for the History of Medicine at the Medical Faculty in Ljubljana has been trying for years to set up a comprehensive museological presentation of the history of Slovene medicine; however, the idea has so far not been realized. But thanks to enthusiasts, private collectors who care for our heritage, a considerable part of the medical heritage has nevertheless been preserved; in our case it was the Celje dentist, Dr. Franc Štolfa, who over the decades collected a number of artefacts that speak of the development of dentistry in Slovenia. He obtained the artefacts from individuals from all over Slovenia. Since the collection grew in size considerably, Dr. Štolfa conceived the idea of a dentistry museum. As private collector, he contacted museologists, and in 1991 he decided to donate the entire collection, one of the biggest in Europe, to the Museum of Recent History in Celje for permanent care and protection. For the donation of this big museological collection, the Slovene Museological Society presented Franc Štolfa with the Honorary Valvasor Award in 1997. The director of the Museum of Recent History Celje, Andreja Rihter, accepted the challenge at the time, and curated the dentistry collection for the museum. Its main purpose was to secure and protect a rare part of our cultural heritage – the medical technical heritage that had until then not been represented in Slovene museums. The professional staff of the museum have since taken care of the collection (most of it has been conserved; about half the artefacts have also been restored), protected and documented it. Because the collection has expanded considerably over 10 years, it is being developed continuously, and we have also opened it to the public. The basic types of artefacts in the collection include surgical rooms, dental and dental-technical instruments, devices and equipment, photographic materials and literature on dentistry. Most artefacts come from the end of the 19th century and the 20th century; the oldest dates back to the 18th century.

MUSEOLOGICAL PRESENTATIONS

1993

In May 1993 the Slovene dentistry collection was presented to the public for the first time; however, we were only able to exhibit one part of it because of a lack of space. Museologically, the exhibition was designed

so that two dental surgical rooms were first presented, followed by a technical display that featured dental and dental-technical instruments and devices.

The first surgical room dates from the period before the First World War. This dental chair already had a movable headrest, to which a reflector was attached. Next to the chair were the foot-operated dental drill and a spittoon. To the right of the chair were the basin and two cabinets with medications, scales and manuals. The integral (and above all painful!) part of any such surgical room was the foot-operated dental drill that was used for drilling and trimming teeth. This kind of a drill remained in the



A scene from the exhibition, 1993

Detalj s izložbe iz 1993.

surgical room for back-up even after electricity was introduced. The surgical room included other devices (the stove for dental flasks), apparatuses (the apparatus for dot welding) and, of course, implements (forceps, impression spoons, a burner) and instruments. The room also included a desk that was used by the dentist and his assistant, the dental technician's desk together with the corresponding implements, gold smelting devices, and a foot-operated machine for polishing dental crowns and dentures.

The second surgical room dates to the 1930s, but it was in use for years even after the Second World War. It already had a hydraulic dental chair with a movable head- and backrest, and the instruments were fairly similar to today's. On the tray there were dental mirrors, dental probes, pumps for amalgam fillings, and dental tweezers. Other items on the table included a box with the drill heads, two glass vessels for small instruments and wadding, and medications they used in everyday practice; then there was a separator and two contra-angles and a handpiece into which the drill was inserted. Next to the chair was a small table with some tools and a sterilizer. Next to the table were an x-ray illuminator and a dry-air sterilizer. Also visible were the implements for pressing amalgam fillings and a portable dental drill.

In addition to the two surgical rooms, the display room features glass cabinets with dental and dental-technical materials: old dental and dental-technical instruments, devices and equipment that the dentists used to alleviate pain and replace missing teeth. The exhibits illustrated the development of technical equipment and dentistry in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The exhibition ends with five dental chairs, from around 1880, 1908, 1920, 1944 and 1955. These interesting museological artifacts are also in their own way illustrative of the development of dentistry.

Because of limited space, professionals and the public could get to see only certain parts of the collection after 1993, and even these were moved several times because of renovations to the museum. However, we continued to work intensively on finding additional space for the best possible museological presentation and storage required by the museological standards and regulations for such a specific collection. New premises for the dentistry collection were given for use to the Museum of Recent History Celje in 2001 by the Municipality of Celje. With the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, the museum was renovated for exhibition between 2001 and 2004.

2004

Setting up the exhibition of the Slovene dentistry collection anew, our main priority was to protect and preserve the materials that were unique in Slovenia in terms of their content. We wanted the exhibition to be as comprehensive, clear, understandable, simple and not uncluttered as possible, but at the same time educational and telling for various groups of visitors.

This permanent exhibition that particularly targets young people and experts, but is also intended for other visitors, has involved the following activities:

- preparation of the premises for the exhibition.
- protection and documentation of the collection (safeguard protection, documentation of the collection, photographing of the artefacts, computer documentation),
- preservation and restoration of the artefacts (preservation, restoration),



Spatial layout of the surgical rooms, 2004

Prostorni raspored ordinacija, 2004.

- processing of and scientific research into the materials, defining a scientific basis for the exhibition (research into materials for permanent exhibition and the catalogue, processing of and scientific research into the materials),
- creation of accompanying brochures (production and printing of promotional materials, publicity for the exhibition – announcements in the media),
- exhibition equipment (production of exhibition equipment),
- setting up of the permanent exhibition (setting up of the exhibition).

At the same time, the team setting up the permanent exhibition worked on defining the scientific basis for it. This included the following activities: research into the materials, determining exhibition scenario, and scientific and the museological design of the exhibition: Andreja Rihter (author of the idea; project management until the end of 2000), Marija Počivavšek (conceptual design; project management 2001-2004), Dušan Kramberger, MA (conceptual and visual design), Franc Štolfa and



Muzeozobek (Museological Little Tooth) – a corner for the youngest ones, 2004

Muzeozubič – kutak za najmlađe, 2004.

Jože Prelog (authors of exhibition layouts), Boštjan Perovšek (sound space conceptualization and design), Jože Domjan (graphic design) and Aleš Šega (film production).

The participants of the Pre-school of Museology 2004 also contributed with ideas on the design of the experimental exhibition that was opened in September 2004.

The final result were the following:

- renovated waiting room,
- renovated three surgical rooms,
- renovated technical equipment,
- a children's didactic corner,
- information point: multimedia, internet connections to web sites with dental collections, dentistry and medical literature,
- film: promotion and the importance of healthy teeth for a healthy life.

The project was carried out with the help of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and the Municipality of Celje.

2007

In 2006, the museum was renovated. It became evident that new facilities would be necessary for occasional exhibitions and educational programmes for various target groups; the dentistry collection was thus moved into the adjacent room in the spring of 2007. Here, too, we used the conceptual design developed in 2004. However, we increased the number of exhibited artefacts by adding another surgical room and a display depot (with dental chairs, accessories, implements and equipment).

For now the exhibition is experimental. The custodians and the public thus have an opportunity that is rare in Slovene museums to assess the design of the exhibition. When a better solution develops, in terms of both content and design, the exhibition will be given its final shape.

However, the essence of the exhibition remains the same throughout:

- technical dental heritage that needs to be protected and preserved for future generations,
- tooth as a body part important for the health of the entire body,

- the structure of the tooth,
- dental care,
- dentistry as preventive and curative activity,
- demystification of dental treatment.

We wish and strive to attract various visitors to come and see the dentistry collection:

- professionals: dentistry students, students training as dental technicians, active and retired dentists, dental technicians;
- general visitors: children, schoolchildren, high school students, university students, families;
- special visitors: people with special needs

An important role is played by the museum Communication and Public Relations Department. It establishes contacts and prepares various programmes for kindergartens, primary and secondary schools and col-



Saint Apollonia keeping a vigilant eye over the dental collection, 2007

Sveta Apolonija bdije nad zubarskom zbirkom, 2007.

leges across Slovenia, as well as for the students of the medical faculties (in Ljubljana, Maribor and Rijeka). The latter are always the most regular, faithful and curious visitors.

We are certain that Saint Apolonia, who has been watching over the removal of the dentistry exhibition around the Museum of Recent History Celje over the past 15 years, has realized that the removals of her collections are not a sign of neglect for this heritage; on the contrary, each removal is a new improvement for the collection that, because of its origin, scope and uniqueness for the history of Slovene medicine, is of national importance.

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SAŽETAK

Godine 1993. u Muzeju novije povijesti Celje za javnost smo prvi put otvorili stalni postav koji je po svome sadržaju jedinstven u Sloveniji. Izložili smo, naime, stari zubarski alat te pomagala i opremu koju su u svome radu rabili dentisti, zubotehničari i zubari.

Zahvaljujući privatnom kolekcionaru sačuvan je zavidan dio građe: celjski stomatolog primarijus dr. Franc Štolfa skupio je oko 3000 komada građe te vrste koja svjedoči o razvitku zubarske struke u Sloveniji, napose u XIX. i XX. stoljeću, a koju su mu povjerili pojedinci iz čitave Slovenije. Primarijus Štolfa povezoao se s muzejskom strukom i 1991. čitavu je zbirku povjerio Muzeju novije povijesti Celje na trajnu zaštitu i čuvanje. Kao stručni djelatnici muzeja sada se brinemo o toj zbirci, čuvamo je, dokumentiramo, upotpunjujemo je i, naravno, prikazujemo javnosti. Osnovne vrste predmeta u zbirci su: zubarske ordinacije, zubarski i zubotehnički instrumenti, pomagala i oprema, fotografska građa te stručna literatura.

Tijekom desetljeća i pol zubarsku smo zbirku u muzeju više puta selili, a ujedno smo za nju sve godine intenzivno tražili dodatne prostorije za što bolju muzejsku prezentaciju, u skladu s muzejskim standardima i normativima. Postava zbirke u raspoloživom prostoru za sada je eksperimentalna. Kustosima muzeja i javnosti tako je ponuđena u slovenskoj muzeološkoj sredini rijetka prigoda da ideju cjelovito ocijene i razmisle o njezinu daljnjem razvoju. Nađe li se bolje sadržajno i oblikovno rješenje, postav će biti modificiran i realiziran u svome konačnom obliku.

Ključne riječi: povijest zubarstva, medicinska baština, zubarska zbirka, muzejski postavi, XIX. i XX. stoljeće, Celje, Slovenija