



WER IST WALTER?

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Elma Hašimbegović, Nicolas Moll and Ivo Pejaković

Footprints of Resistance: Material Culture and Memory of the People's Liberation Struggle in Socialist Yugoslavia

Sanja Horvatinčić

Introduction

In 1983, the art historian Katica Brusić defended her master's thesis, which was titled "The Material Culture of the People's Liberation Struggle in Gorski Kotar". Through her decades-long, dedicated field research of the "authentic monuments of the socialist revolution" in Croatian Littoral, Gorski Kotar and Istria, conducted as a conservationist at the Regional Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (*Regionalni zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture*) in Rijeka, she surveyed and documented about 250 locations dated to 1941 and 1942. In the introduction, she noted: "My colleagues [historians] investigate and write about *how* the revolution happened, while I am interested in *where* it took place. This thesis is only an attempt at one such approach to the material culture of the socialist revolution."¹ An archival encounter with Brusić's impressive scientific methodology, which she developed through her conservationist practice,² strongly resonated with my own research interests and practice, as well as with the broader issues related to the contemporary studies of monuments of socialist Yugoslavia.

"Until now, more attention has been paid to erecting monuments in honour of the revolution. Should future generations experience our revolution exclusively through these monuments, they will get the wrong idea about it. Meanwhile, listing and recording the material culture of the revolution has

1 Katica Brusić, *Materijalna kultura Gorskog kotara u toku Narodnooslobodilačke borbe* (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Odjel za povijest umjetnosti, 1983), 1-2.

2 The archive is held in Rijeka State Archives/*Državni arhiv u Rijeci*. HR-DARI-1300, Katica Brusić. I would like to thank the archival advisor Zorica Manojlović for guiding and supporting my research in the archives.

been neglected”, wrote Brusić.³ While these words primarily referred to her professional concern about documenting and preserving original sites and artefacts related to the People’s Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka Borba* - NOB), at the beginning of the 1980s, it also reflected the growing difficulties and limitations in transferring and mediating the memory of the Partisan resistance through artistic monuments. Her fieldwork resulted in impressive documentation and professional guidelines for proper memorialisation of such sites, aimed at conservation methods and non-invasive presentation of World War II locations and narratives. One such example is her proposal for listing the secret forest routes of the Partisan courier Romano Pličić-Celić as a protected cultural monument and its activation as an educational-memorial hiking trail (*Fig. 1*).⁴ This minimal, sensorial, and environmentally conscious model of memory transfer stood in contrast to the often costly artistic projects or invasive infrastructural developments that characterised Yugoslav high-modernist monument-making practices. These often failed to envision feasible maintenance and coped with growing challenges in keeping their relevance in the changing social and economic circumstances of the late socialist period. On the other hand, Brusić’s focus on documenting, protecting and presenting original sites of Partisan warfare can be interpreted as the need to uncover the numerous political and cultural layers piled up upon the legacy of the revolution and resistance and re-evidence the history from the simple facts on the ground.

The recent rediscovery of Yugoslav monuments and memorial complexes dedicated to the People’s Liberation Struggle and the Revolution, usually bound to the appealing effect of their monumentality, high-modernist features and ruined state, brings such urgency to the fore once again. As the enthusiastic reception of high-modernist monuments by Western art institutions has grown more prominent in the recent decade, the relevance of the historical sites and narratives they mark vanished. The monuments became more prone to various forms of appropriation, neglect and destruction. Despite the intentions, it seems that the international recognition of the artistic and architectural value of Yugoslav memorials and monuments achieved little in reaffirming the relevance of the sites of memory and drawing attention to the symbolic meaning of antifascism for contemporary society.

3 Brusić, *Materijalna kultura*, 1.

4 HR-DARI-832(DS-92) – *Konzervatorski zavod u Rijeci, opći spisi 1981–1993*.

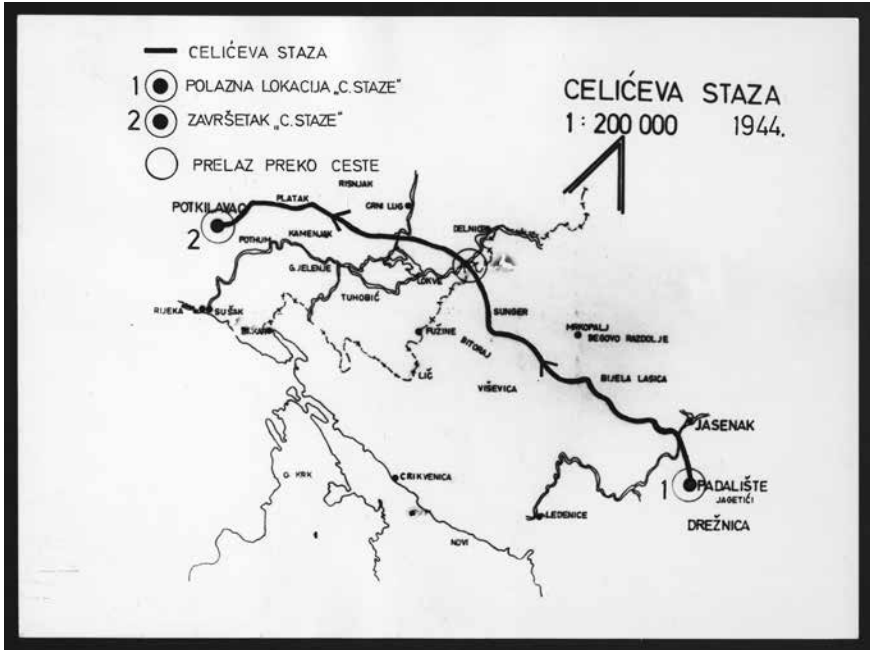


Fig. 1: The map of the Partisan trail marked by the Partisan courier Romano Pilčić-Celić. (Rijeka National Archives, Fund Katica Brusić, HR-DARI-1300)

Brusić’s work on the material culture of the People’s Liberation Struggle introduces two topics I want to focus on in this chapter. The first is the central role of the materiality of war-time sites and artefacts in the production of cultural memory of resistance in World War II in socialist Yugoslavia, including the agency of a variety of heritage practitioners and institutions in creating special NOB or resistance-related heritage categories. The second is its role in conceiving and designing new types of memorial spaces and models of memory transfer.

NOB as the framework of Yugoslav resistance heritage

Compared to some other European countries such as Italy or France, the term “resistance” was rarely used in the official political discourse of socialist Yugoslavia. Soon after the war ended, the “People’s Liberation Struggle”, “People’s Liberation War”, and “People’s Liberation Movement” (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba / rat / pokret*) became the official terms, each with slightly different meanings: by the movement, for example, more diverse

types of activities, such as civic, cultural or even religious acts of resistance were acknowledged, as long as they targeted the common goal of liberation from the occupation of the Axis powers and local (pro)fascist regime(s).⁵ In socialist Yugoslavia, the term NOB was often understood as inseparable from the socialist revolution, which defined its goal not only as a struggle against the harmful forces of fascism but also as a struggle for an alternative future political project, that is, for a fundamental social and economic transformation of the society. In the last categorisation of cultural heritage from the mid-1980s, the Republican Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (*Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture*) and the special committee of the parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia listed original sites, artefacts and monuments associated with various stages, forms and aspects of that struggle by the special category: Monuments to the Revolutionary Workers Movement, People's Liberation Movement and Socialist Revolution.⁶ Two additional explanations are needed regarding this category's name: the revolutionary workers' movement indicates the broader historical scope, which placed the period of World War II in the longer line of the history of class struggles, such as workers unions actions, national uprisings or even peasant revolts. Secondly, the meaning of the term monument is closer to that of "heritage", meaning that it primarily valued original historical sites, structures and artefacts. We will discuss this further later in the text.

While the term NOB lost its legitimacy and prominence in new official political and historiographic discourses in the post-socialist Yugoslav context, the variety of topics and aspects of World War II encompassed by that term are of interest for comparative study of antifascist resistance and its legacies in Europe today. It is important to remember the political function of this term as a state-sponsored narrative in socialist Yugoslavia and its specific use in historiography, museology and heritage system. The interpretative bias and epistemic limitations in socialism were bound to the essential political functions of the narratives of the NOB and revolution, and hegemonic ideas about the past, both of which were transferred to the

5 For the official definition of these terms, see: *Leksikon Narodnooslobodilački rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945*. (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, izdavačko-publicistička delatnost; Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1980), 681.

6 *Spomenici revolucionarnog radničkog pokreta, Narodnooslobodilačkog rata i socijalističke revolucije. Kategorizacija* (Zagreb: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture Zagreb; Odbor za spomen-obilježavanje povijesnih događaja i ličnosti Sabora SRH, 1986).

cultural heritage domain. This meant, for example, that sites of atrocities or monuments dedicated to civilians would feature Partisan or communist symbols, even when they were devoted explicitly to civilian victims. From a contemporary perspective, this can easily be interpreted as a form of political instrumentalisation of victims.⁷ However, it is also vital to emphasise that under the term NOB, topics as diverse as women's role in the resistance, transnationalism, the importance of arts and culture, the agency of the civilian population and diverse actors participating or supporting resistance found their way to museums and history books, becoming part of the commemorative culture still relevant today. In other words, with the politically motivated suspension of the use of the term NOB, the specificity and complexity of the Yugoslav historical context of World War II resistance that is embodied in that term has also been lost.

On the other hand, the historical and political-semantic scope of the apparently neutral term “resistance” – serving as a broad signifier for various European movements and individual forms of struggles that opposed Nazi and fascist regimes in World War II – should also be addressed. It reproduced the normative terminology of many western European historiographies, for instance French, in which use of the term has a historical continuity despite new interpretations and historical debates. In former Yugoslav space, the term “resistance” has come to include the “grey zones”, which used to be sidelined, ignored or rejected in socialist historiography and memory culture, as was the case with the Chetnik movement. In the former socialist Europe, which has been dominated by the anti-totalitarian interpretative matrix since the 1990s, the vagueness of “resistance” is commonly stretched to connote actions opposing “all ideologies”, in order to relativise, disavow or even criminalise the communist-led resistance, historically referred to by terms such as NOB. Even the notion of “struggle” became ostracised as the word still carries the connotation of an (unwanted)

7 The monuments dedicated to crimes and atrocities testified to the injustices and sacrifices as a necessary part of the historical struggle for a better society. The enemy was conceptualised through the political concept of fascism, thus avoiding reference to particular identities. This politically highly sensitive practice in the multiethnic context of Yugoslavia was aimed at strengthening interethnic unity and class solidarity as guarantees of future social justice, peace and prosperity. Such conceptualisation of memory is at odds with dominant (neo)liberal memory politics, focused on the notion of victimhood, and establishing revisionist equal distance from the ideas of all armed struggles, martyrs and heroes. For the critique of such dominant discourse in the field of memory studies, see: Daniel Palacios González, “Towards an economy of memory: Defining material conditions of remembrance”, *Memory Studies* 16, no. 6 (2023), 1452-1465.

political agenda for the future. If we are interested in comparative analyses of various forms and traditions of interpreting resistance in Europe, the scope of topics commonly understood by the term NOB in former Yugoslav countries correspond to or are comparable with those understood by the term “resistance” in some other countries. The term NOB should, therefore, not be simply substituted with the vague notion of “resistance”, but used precisely for the sake of clarity in reference to the specific historical context it denotes. This is particularly relevant when studying the changing heritage policies and standards.

The systematic archival and field research of NOB monuments offers an insight into the variety of approaches that surpass the stereotypical ideas about crude and ideologised socialist memoryscapes. Research has shown that this was also the case in other socialist countries, for example, in various forms of remembering antifascist struggle and communist resistance in the GDR. Rudy Koshar notes that GDR commemorative practices were quite variable despite the prevailing imagery of giant socialist-realist statues: “Hardly a town or a village in the former GDR was without a small memorial site or cemetery that symbolised communist antifascist resistance to Hitler.”⁸ He underlines the importance of differentiation between “legitimate” and “legitimising” antifascism, whereby the first refers to the “positive memories and ethical principles rooted in the idea of antifascism” and the latter defines a “self-serving strategy of the regime which used popular memory of resistance for its own political interests”.⁹

Not only did diverse social agents participate in shaping, negotiating and influencing the complex and multilayered process of constructing war memory in socialist Yugoslavia,¹⁰ but the very term “NOB monument” was also understood differently by different social groups in different periods and within particular discursive registers. This brings us back to the ambiguity over the term “monument” and the title of Brusić’s master’s thesis. By the notion of “material culture”, she referred to what had, until then, been generally referred to as “authentic NOB/Revolution monuments”. With her interdisciplinary method, combining extensive fieldwork, a form of proto-archaeological documentation of sites, oral history and ethnographic

8 Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 196.

9 *Ibid.*, 196-197.

10 Heike Karge, *Sećanje u kamenu – okamenjeno sećanje?* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2014), 245-254.

methods, Brusić shifted conservationist work on the World War II sites in the direction of developing a wholesome, interdisciplinary scientific approach. Working with the notion of material culture enabled a more comprehensive view of the complexity of historical sites and contexts. More importantly, in the context of her professional work, it allowed focusing on material that did not illustrate the existing narratives but rather provoked new research questions and methods and opened critical reflections on the junction of conservationist and commemorative forms and practices.

Focusing on the comprehensive notion of material culture enables heritage specialists to consider practices of mobilisation of a variety of material remains from the wartime period for the purposes of memory transfer. The array of such objects is commonly divided into categories of respective fields of academic interest and expertise: written documents relevant to historians, three-dimensional objects relevant to museum professionals, wartime drawings for art historians, buildings or ruins for conservationists, and so on. The logic of extracting and separating traces of the past into various niches of expertise leads to the defragmentation of complex social and cultural phenomena such as monuments and memorials.¹¹ In the socialist period, when the specific category of NOB heritage was invented, those niches were brought into closer dialogue and applied in memorialisation. In some cases, this dialogue paved a path for community-based methods of documenting the heritage of resistance as a way of learning from and through materiality. In the following two sections, I will discuss the role of material culture in museology and heritage related to NOB.

Strategies of display

Material culture has always been the crucial medium for transmitting memories of military conflicts. Used in ritual practices to heal the wartime traumas or symbolically confirm the defeat of the enemy or displaying material remains of the war – artefacts or preserved structures and landscapes – in modern heritage institutions such as military museums have been powerful tools for constructing desired narratives and images of the past. War monuments and museum collections related to (selected) historical conflicts

11 Michael Yonan, "Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies", *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no.2 (2011), 232-248.

have remained vital assets in building national heritage and memory culture in Western societies.¹² Since their birth in the 19th century, military museums and battlefield memorials have merged with commemorative rituals and propagandist aims, employing various representational strategies, professional standards, and display aesthetics. Peculiar ethnographic collections emerged as a way to display the superiority of European military powers over non-European enemies. Historical exhibitions organised to mark centennial anniversaries of the Battle of Vienna in 1683, for centuries, displayed so-called exotic Ottoman military culture which became part of the city's museum collections; many colonial museums originate from the need to collect and present the supposedly inferior weapons of the defeated peoples in the colonised territories. In socialist Yugoslavia, on the other hand, a collection of non-European weapons held by the Military Museum in Belgrade – composed of private donations since the 19th century – was displayed in the 1960s with a decolonial agenda: traditional weapons were used to affirm the long tradition of warfare and resistance of the peoples and nations of Africa and Asia, many of which were at the time waging anti-colonial wars, supported by Yugoslavia as part of the Non-Aligned Movement.¹³ This example is particularly interesting if we consider museums' role in documenting and commemorating the People's Liberation War in Yugoslavia, which often featured self-made, "primitive" Partisan weapons or tools used in the first phases of World War II.

While the Military Museum in Belgrade specialised in documenting all historical military conflicts on the territory of Yugoslavia, dozens of specialised NOB and revolution museums or museum collections were founded in the decades following World War II. Some originated from bottom-up initiatives by "individuals and groups attempting to meet authorities' expectations in a way that was not officially required", thus serving as "political and cultural expressions of self-staging of social need".¹⁴ The "museum boom"¹⁵

12 See, for example, the overview in: Ola Svein Stugu, "Exhibiting The War. Approaches To World War II in Museums and Exhibitions" in *Historicizing the Uses of the Past: Scandinavian Perspectives on History Culture, Historical Consciousness and Didactics of History Related to World War II*, eds. Helle Bjerg, Claudia Lenz and Erik Thorstensen (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011), 189-206.

13 Mirko Barjaktarović, "Staro oružje Afrike, Azije i Okeanije: Izložba u vojnom muzeju JNA", *Muzeji* no. 16-17 (1962): 137-139; *Oružje Afrike: katalog. 2* (Beograd: Vojni muzej JNA, 1962); *Oružje Okeanije* (Beograd: Vojni muzej JNA, 1962).

14 Nataša Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums: Reframing Second World War Heritage in Postconflict Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 20.

15 Ibid, 22.



Fig. 2: Locations of the NOB museums or collections in Croatia. The size of the circle indicates the number of artefacts in each museum. The visualisation is based on data taken from “Katalog muzejskih zbirki, muzejskih izložbi i stalnih izložbi sadržajno vezanih uz radnički pokret, NOB i poslijeratnu socijalističku izgradnju na teritoriju SR Hrvatske.” *Muzeologija*, no. 26 (1988), 61–133. Visualisation: Sanja Horvatinić. (Tableau Public).

in socialist Yugoslavia was caused by a similar mode of semi-official heritage production to the “monuments boom” in the 1950s, and it resulted in comparable difficulties in recording, monitoring, and overseeing them by heritage authorities. In Croatia, however, we know that by the end of the 1980s, there were as many as 150 displays, collections and permanent exhibitions related to the NOB and the revolution, of which 70 operated within independent working organisations (museums), and 80 within other organisations and socio-political communities (e.g. cultural centres, local committees of SUBNOR, local communities, archives, etc.).¹⁶ (Fig. 2)

The Croatian Museum Documentation Centre’s comprehensive survey of those museums and exhibitions indicated many problems related to the lack of professional staff and supervision, inadequate premises, and more. The survey showed that these museums and collections had over 140.000

16 Ljerka Kanižaj. “Analiza stanja muzejskih zbirki, muzejskih i stalnih izložbi, sadržajno vezanih uz radnički pokret, NOB i poslijeratnu socijalističku izgradnju na teritoriju SR Hrvatske”, *Muzeologija*, no. 26 (1988), 8-9.



Fig. 3: The museum display of fragments of the gallows in the NOB museum in Kamnik, Slovenia. (Photo archives Nenad Gattin, Institute of Art History, Zagreb).

recorded artefacts and at least twice as many unregistered ones. Most content was presented through panels with reproductions of documents and photographs, often lacking original artefacts. The reason for this, as Nataša Jagdhuhn argues, lay in the dominant museological approach, which focused on communicating historical processes and aimed to “break with perceptions of museum objects as curiosities, objects of antiquity, objects of special value for a particular scientific discipline (for instance art history, archaeology, etc.)”.¹⁷ On the other hand, Yugoslav NOB museums displayed numerous personal artefacts donated by community members or those testifying to specific ideas about resistance, such as the original fragments of the wooden gallows used by the occupation forces for public hanging of Partisan hostages displayed in the Kamnik NOB museum (Fig. 3). The artefact supplemented the museum’s narrative of resistance, while the original location of the gallows in the town square was marked by a memorial fountain dedicated to the hanged hostages. The practice of turning original artefacts related to violence and punishment into a sort of reliquiae of antifascist resilience, brings us back to the need to study such

¹⁷ Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums*, 53

specific museological context as part of the broader, interdisciplinary field of material culture studies. The topic of public hangings was a common motif in Yugoslav monuments, which served to demonstrate the heroism and martyrdom of Partisans and other resistance fighters.¹⁸ This example poses some further questions relevant to this study: the specific interest in authenticity as a way of evidence with a higher political agenda, and the difference between the presentation in museums and the use of the materiality of the historical sites, especially as a way of transmitting the memory *in situ*.

How to remember resistance

The memory of resistance and struggle against fascism in socialist Yugoslavia was not only mobilised by the aesthetic or visual narrative potential of memorial sculptural or architectural projects but also by the materiality that served, at the same time, as objective and documentary, as highly affective or emotionally engaging means of transmitting memory. Remembering is entangled with things, which enables the creation of specific human bonds between the present, past and future.¹⁹ The power of materiality, understood as relations between people and things, was often employed to enhance the quality of those bonds in museological practices and the mediative strategies of monument-making, closely related to the notion of authenticity. Furthermore, “the desire to represent the memory through the making of ‘place’ is a feature of all modern societies and is prevalent after every conflict or tragic event”.²⁰ These places often represent the heritage of a particular group, individual or community, as they can connect to them physically or emotionally. Those places-turned-heritage can be rather unusual locations, depending on what sort of narrative and symbolic meaning is constituted through them.

18 Cf. Sanja Horvatinčić, “Ballade of the Hanged: The Representation of Second World War Atrocities in Yugoslav Memorial Sculpture”, in *Art and Its Responses to Changes in Society*, eds. Ines Unetić et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 186-208.

19 Laszlo Muntean, Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, “Introduction to Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture”, in *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, eds. Laszlo Muntean, Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016), 1-24.

20 Sara McDowell, “Heritage, memory and identity”, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, eds. Brian Graham and Peter Howard, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 38.

In post-war Yugoslavia, such places were related to the NOB and were selected to best represent the character of Yugoslav Partisan warfare. We already mentioned the importance of NOB heritage sites and institutions, but why was it so crucial in a war-struck country to not only nourish the processes of making “places”, turning them into heritage,²¹ but also to document, study and preserve them?

In a lengthy essay written in 1949, Koča Popović, a highly ranked Yugoslav People’s Army general and former volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, listed a set of practical and theoretical arguments defending Yugoslav warfare in the NOB, as a response to one of the many attacks in the aggressive Soviet campaign against Yugoslavia following the Cominform Resolution in 1948.²² The resolution was a Soviet attempt to question, relativise or minimise the accomplishments of the Yugoslav anti-fascist struggle and revolutionary victory. Popović’s 1949 essay is telling for two reasons: it reminds us how crucial the 1948 Cominform crisis was for the constitution of the Yugo-centric narrative of resistance, and it underlines the vital importance of representing plausible evidence for legitimising Yugoslav claims to sovereignty and independence within the socialist bloc.

Among various other means and strategies, this was done in the following decades by presenting and commemorating as many and as convincing original Yugoslav wartime artefacts and sites as possible. This is not to say that collecting evidence and “exhibiting war” was an uncommon practice before the split with the USSR, during World War II and early postwar years. The guidelines on how to properly collect materials from the NOB for the Museum of the People’s Liberation were issued as early as 1944 in the liberated territory of Croatia and supplemented in 1945 with three more chapters.²³ The diversity of the topics relevant to the collection at the time is rather impressive: from the uprising, military actions, through the Women’s Antifascist Front, the relation between the minorities, to the economy, refugees, health system and cultural production. “Not a single detail is so irrelevant, to be forgotten”, wrote Danica Švalba, the museum’s

21 Heritage is a widely studied and complex phenomenon with many definitions. The basic definition that has been widely accepted is heritage as the selective use of the past for contemporary purposes. G.J. Ashworth and Brian Graham, eds., *Senses of Place: Senses of Time* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 7.

22 Koča Popović, “Za pravilnu ocenu oslobodilačkog rata naroda Jugoslavije”, *Vojno delo: Organ Ministarstva narodne odbrane FNRJ* 1, no.2 (1949), 17.

23 Danica Švalba, “Rad Muzeja narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske na skupljanju grade za povijest NOB-e”, *Historijski zbornik*, 1, no. 1-4 (1948), 228.

first director, arguing for collections based on crowdsourcing wartime material, which could reveal some unexpected sides of recent history.²⁴

In 1946, the “Sanitation in the People's Liberation Struggle” exhibition was organised in Zagreb. It was one of the first exhibitions that showed original artefacts (medical instruments, hand-made prostheses, etc.) and maquettes of Partisan hospitals, an effort to present sanitation as the crucial element of the successful liberation. In the following decades, Partisan hospitals became one of the central topos of resistance in Yugoslavia, musealised, reconstructed and commemorated by some of the most monumental memorial complexes. Bringing the NOB closer to those in big cities who never experienced nor could imagine the hardships of war was a common practice. To reach as broad an audience as possible, exhibiting spaces expanded to shop windows or public spaces. The exhibition project for one of the central parks in Zagreb was planned for two months and was supposed to show various events, phases and aspects of NOB. Among other activities, visitors would be allowed to try out the weapons from the Museum of the People's Liberation collection and watch open-air Partisan theatre and cinema, while city children could engage in the activities organised by the pioneers' section.²⁵

Resistance in the heritage system

Exhibiting the wartime artefacts belonged to the broader system of heritage management, which also took care of the original structures, buildings and material remains found *in situ* – the so-called authentic monuments – and commemorative markers (memorial plaques, sculptures, architectural elements) built after the war to remember and honour historical events, persons or ideas. Authentic monuments were defined as “areas or built structures in which the memory of certain past events is fixed in space and

24 Ibid., 229.

25 The authors of this two-month, open-air festival, designed for Park Ribnjak, were the museum director Danica Švalba and the architect Đuka Kauzlarić. It is worth mentioning that a number of other exhibitions were planned for the 10th anniversary in Zagreb, including the exhibition module “The resistance of our people through centuries”, held in all museums. “Zapisnik sjednice biroa CK KPH održane 21.VI. ov. g. [1951.] u Zagrebu. Početak u 17 sati: Pripreme za proslavu 10-godišnjice ustanka u NR Hrvatskoj”, in *Zapisi Politbiroa Centralnog komiteta Komunističke partije Hrvatske 1945–1952*, vol. 2, ed. Branislava Vojnović (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2006), 770.

thus preserved; physical traces which serve as material evidence of time and events in a certain location, whose authenticity adds to it an extra value, making it significant for future generations who will have the chance to learn about NOB history in the original setting.”²⁶ This heritage category was further distinguished into three sub-categories: movable, immovable, and living monuments, the latter referring to the intangible heritage transferred via living witnesses.²⁷ Movable heritage (photographs, newspapers, arms, drawings, poems, etc.) was collected, analysed, archived and musealised, while immovable heritage referred to original locations of historical events, facilities or more extensive spatial units/territories. Most common were buildings used by Partisans to host meetings, congresses and other significant historical events or temporary structures built during the war for specific Partisan warfare purposes such as military and refugee camps and hospitals. Usually located within former liberated Partisan territories, the latter served as cornerstones for the protection and planned development of more expansive memorial areas (*spomenička područja*), characterised by a high density of historical sites in natural settings, thus featuring both historical and natural value.

Located in remote locations, usually in rural regions, those areas were invested in and promoted as potential memorial touristic zones from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s.²⁸ Most memorial area development plans in Croatia were integrated with the national urban planning system, envisioning infrastructural and economic development through self-managed and self-sustainable eco-industries, traditional crafts, and agriculture.²⁹ Legal protection and professional supervision over memorial heritage were to be incorporated in a specific model of “social heritage protection” (*društvena zaštita*), by which all citizens and local organisations could actively partici-

26 Ivo Maroević, “Muzejski upotrebljavani spomenici culture [1976./1979.]”, in *Sadašnjost baštine* (Zagreb: Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti SR Hrvatske, Društvo konzervatora Hrvatske, Sveučilište u Zagrebu, 1986), 179.

27 Katica Brusić, “Metoda rada na evidenciji, valorizaciji i prezentaciji spomenika socijalističke revolucije”, *Dometi: Časopis za kulturu i društvena pitanja* 13, no. 3-5, (1980), 166.

28 See: Sanja Horvatinčić, “Monument, Territory, and the Mediation of War Memory in Socialist Yugoslavia”, *Život umjetnosti: časopis za suvremena likovna zbivanja*, no. 96 (2015), 34-61; Milan Rakita, *Prostorno-političke i memorijalne infrastrukture socijalističke Jugoslavije* (Beograd: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe, 2019), 92-108.

29 Fedor Wenzler, “Spomen područja kao specifična kategorija obilježavanja lokaliteta i memoriranja značajnih događaja iz Narodnooslobodilačke borbe”, *Arhitektura: Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i za primijenjenu umjetnost*, XIX(155) (1975), 19-23.

pate to preserve not only NOB monuments and historic sites but also keep alive symbolic, social and ideological aspects of the antifascist legacy. The construction of NOB memory and heritage was a dynamic social practice in which various agents were actively engaged on different levels, thus influencing, negotiating, or modifying the dominant narratives related to World War II. While walking in the Partisans' footsteps on the "paths of the revolution" (*putevima revolucije*) was part of the official memory culture with less of a commemorative and more of an educational purpose, it also served to encourage the mobility of the youth across the country and their encounters with the rural areas where the "revolution took place". Visiting Partisan sites in the vast network of memorial sites could open various aspects and provoke new questions about the history and legacy of resistance as one of the rare examples of shared Yugoslav cultural heritage. The presentation of the natural context and materiality of NOB no longer primarily served to present evidence but to effectively construct narratives through the immersive experience in the original historical setting. It was, therefore, essential to arrange such sites in an accessible, modern and visually captivating way.

We can approach the memory transfer through the materiality of resistance on at least two levels: (1) How the "authenticity" of the Yugoslav resistance sites was treated by conservationists and by artists/architects, and how the traditional monument was rethought to serve as a bridge between the visitors and materiality *in situ*, and (2) how the material remains of the war were extracted from their original context, and reused in artistic works included in the museums of NOB or memorial houses.

Partisan hospitals as the central topos of NOB heritage

Along with the liberated territories, the effective Yugoslav Partisan health service, with its wide network of hospitals, was unique in the context of antifascist resistance warfare in Europe.³⁰ Due to the civilian population's massive involvement in the activities around Partisan hospitals – construction, food supply, care work, cleaning, and more – and the medical services

30 Among the extensive literature on the topic, see: Đorđe Dragić, *Partisan hospitals in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1966); *Sanitetska služba u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu Jugoslavije 1941–1945, Vol. 1–4*, ed. Stanislav Pišćević (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1989).

that the Partisan health system provided to the war-struck communities, the hospitals became symbols of civilian-military collaboration and civilian support of the People's Liberation Movement. As such, Partisan hospitals were particularly apt for memorialisation and heritagisation and will serve as a case study in the present analysis.

Partisan hospital complexes were usually treated as a combination of “authentic” and commemorative heritage: authentic sites were typically supplemented by memorial markers to emphasise or describe their historical significance.³¹ An essential aspect of the conception of such memorial complexes was the assumed presence of visitors or tourists. Authentic sites and memorial markers aimed to influence the visitors in such a way as to shape their (positive) attitude towards the events these monuments signified.³² To achieve that, collecting as much information as possible was crucial. This meant researching and documenting all aspects of the site (historical sources, oral testimonies, etc.). New methods focused on the material culture of NOB, such as those developed by Katica Brusić, sought to reveal possible material evidence which could contribute to a fuller understanding of everyday life at these heritage sites.

Following the formation of specialised offices of NOB heritage within the existing cultural heritage institutions, the early 1960s marked the beginning of a new wave of specialised interest in the “authentic NOB sites”. General recommendations for conserving and presenting such historic sites were to reduce contemporary interventions and to adapt both the material and form to the natural surroundings.³³ Conservation or reconstruction of the sites relied on combined sources, including field research, personal memos and testimonies, military documents and photographs. Since Slovenian hospitals were the first in Yugoslavia to receive professional conservation immediately after the war ended, sites such as Franja Partisan Hospital or the Partisan complex of military bases and hospitals in Kočevski Rog still present exceptional examples of conservation methods.³⁴ However, the majority of the Partisan hospital sites were destroyed or deconstructed during and after the war and required complete reconstruction or a memorial

31 Maroević, “Muzejski upotrebljavani”, 180.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid, 183.

34 In 2014, Franja Partisan Hospital was listed under the European Heritage Label. See: “Europe starts in the Franja Partisan Hospital”, *Mestni Muzej Idrija*, 2024. <https://www.pb-franja.si/en/visit-us/european-heritage-label/>.

substitute. Such initiatives usually happened decades after the war, when the sites had already materially deteriorated and when their protection was gaining new momentum as part of more extensive memorial area protection plans and programs.

The first hospital to be reconstructed in Croatia was Gudnoga Hospital, at Mount Papuk in Slavonia. The Partisan hospital was formed under the military code name VI-2-A at the location of the Gudnoga stream in deep forests, several kilometres from the village of Sekulinci.³⁵ Among other reasons, the area was chosen because the site had a basic prewar infrastructure: a forestry station with a couple of wooden barracks. In late 1941, this became the base of a group of Partisans from Papuk, and in spring 1942, the Partisan hospital for the Slatina Partisan territory was formed and constructed by the end of that year.³⁶ The preserved barracks were removed and possibly reused by the Belišće Forest Company in 1946. In the 1950s, a study for the reconstruction was done based on the memory of one of the hospital's builders and a political commissar. This pioneering, bottom-up effort was undertaken by the Voćin Commission for the Memorialisation of the NOB in Virovitica county.³⁷

A more well-known endeavour of facsimile reconstruction and musealisation is the Central Partisan Hospital in Petrova Gora in central Croatia. The hospital facilities were preserved throughout the war. However, due to enormous war damage and significant post-war shortages in the region, the local population moved the prefabricated wooden barracks of the hospital facilities to nearby villages, where they were repurposed for housing. Unlike in Gudnoga, the task of reconstructing the original appearance of the hospital was entrusted to experts from the Conservation Institute in Zagreb, where a special department for documentation and registration of NOB and revolution monuments was established at the end of the 1950s. One of the department's first tasks was recording and documenting Partisan hospitals scattered throughout Croatia's mountainous regions. With the help of local guides, conservationists determined the original positions of

35 DAOS, Koordinacioni odbor SUBNOR-a Našice. Podaci za spomen-obilježja NOR-a po Slavoniji i Baranji 1957.-1970.", "Plan za rekonstrukciju partizanske bolnice i groblja u Gudnogi na Papuku". See also: E. M., "Partizanska bolnica na Gudnogi", *Crvena zvezda*, 21 February 1961, 4.

36 Regarding the history of the hospital, see: Milorad Stanivuković and Pero Stanivuković, *Vojno-partizanska bolnica Gudnoga* (Podravska Slatina: Skupština općine Podravska Slatina, 1987).

37 Since the early 1990s, the whole hospital complex with the memorial cemetery was heavily damaged and is no longer listed as national heritage.

the hospital facilities on Petrova Gora, and some of the original prefabricated wooden barracks were identified in the nearby villages and returned to the hospital's original location. The reconstruction of the hospital complex entailed the adaptation of hospital and auxiliary buildings, dugouts and cemeteries and equipping them with original and facsimile artefacts, and panels for an adequate presentation to future visitors (*Fig. 4*). With its non-invasive approach to the historical site, respect for the original construction technique and preservation of the natural environment, this conservation approach was in line with contemporary principles of conservation and restoration, such as the 1965 ICOMOS Athens Charter.³⁸

The third example concerning the conservation and memorialisation of Partisan hospitals in Croatia that I want to discuss has a somewhat different presentation model. None of the structures of the wooden barracks of the Partisan Hospital no. 7, which moved across the mountain Javornica near Drežnica in central Croatia from 1942 to 1944, were preserved after the war. After a long period of successful hiding, the Partisan hospital was burned down during the German military offensive in early 1944.³⁹ However, the original locations were revisited in the late 1960s, carefully examined, documented, and mapped by a committee composed of historians, heritage experts, war veterans, witnesses, and local foresters. Jela Jančić-Starc, the former political commissar and the hospital manager, was at the head of the team. "At those places, bits of coal, bottles, ampules, and crockery can be found in the ground. The plant life of those burnt-down places is different from the surrounding plant life at the altitude of 1.000 metres", noted Jančić-Starc, a professional agronomist by training, in her 1971 book on the hospital.⁴⁰ The movement of the wounded and hospital staff across the area, in search of shelter from the enemy attacks, left a good amount of material traces in the whole area, turning some of them into monuments in their own right, for example the mysterious fruitless cherry trees at an altitude of 1.000 metres, planted by the remains of the vitamin dose brought by the village children who walked for hours to remote and isolated locations to which the patients were evacuated before an enemy attack.

38 The Partisan Hospital in Petrova Gora is still listed as Croatian national heritage. However, it has been deteriorating due to the lack of maintenance and no sustainable heritage management program.

39 For the history of the hospital, see: Jela Jančić-Starc, *Vojno-partizanska bolnica u Drežnici 1942-1944* (Zagreb: Regionalni zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture u Zagrebu, 1971).

40 The objects found on the sites were deposited in the local museum as another form of displaying historical evidence. Jančić-Starc, *Vojno-partizanska bolnica u Drežnici 1942-1944*, 69.



Fig. 4: Reconstructed wooden barracks at the original location of the Central Partisan Hospital on Petrova Gora, Croatia. (Photo archives Branko Balić, Institute of Art History, Zagreb)

Based on this meticulous research process, which resulted in a collection of found objects and maps of hospital sites in the whole area, further steps were taken to memorialise the last location of the main hospital complex. The planned facsimile reconstruction of the hospital barracks was eventually dropped and replaced with an architectural solution that required less maintenance. Based on the rich documentation about the site – photographs, testimonies, archival documents, and topographic maps – the architect Zdenko Kolacio designed a system of modular concrete elements, reminiscent of roofed structures, which indicated the exact locations of each hospital facility, thus defining the spatial outline of the former complex. The concrete “barracks” with signs indicating their function (Guardhouse, Surgery, Typhus Ward, etc.) emerge from the site’s unchanged forest



Fig. 5: Memorial complex at the original site of the Partisan Hospital no. 7 on Mount Javornica near Drežnica, Croatia. Architect: Zdenko Kolacio, 1980. (Photo archives of the Ogulin Heritage Museum.)

setting, enabling visitors to gain an unguided sensory experience of the site and its past function. While the concrete structures suggest endurance and defiance, the emptiness these structures embrace reveals the monument's dependency on visitors' imaginations and invites them to physically engage with the site (Fig. 5). The spatial plan for Partizanska Drežnica Memorial Area predicted a more encompassing protection of the network of authentic sites and natural reserves, including memorial facilities for future visitors. The spatial plan was accompanied by a study of its economic development and environmental protection.⁴¹

Such synergy of materiality and symbolic monumentality was, in fact, one of the crucial strategies for creating meaningful resistance heritage and memorial sites in socialist Yugoslavia. Other memorialization projects, such as the complex of the Partisan hospital in Bijeli Potoci-Kamensko on Mount Plješevica in Croatia and the Partisan hospital at Mount Grmeč in Bosnia and Herzegovina, show a similar approach of combining the authenticity of the site and artistic interventions.⁴²

41 *Prostorni plan područja posebne namjene Spomen područje Partizanska Drežnica i Brinjski gornji kraj* (Rijeka: Urbanistički institut u Rijeci, 1980).

42 Dino Dupanović, *Partizanske bolnice u Drugom svjetskom ratu u Bihačkoj krajini* (Bihać: JU Muzej Unsko-sanskog kantona, 2023).



Fig. 6: Nandor Glid's sculpture in the display of the Museum of Revolution in Sarajevo. (History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Photo collection)

Materiality as an artistic strategy

Yugoslav artists were very much encouraged to take part in the monument-making processes. In this analysis, we are specifically interested in how materiality of war was employed in artistic work and what creative strategies this type of engagement with materiality assumed. One of them was the transformation of weapons and military remains into artworks, or – more specifically – monuments and memorials, through assemblage techniques, used both by local artisans and amateurs and established artists. Nandor Glid sculptures made from armaments and other metal elements were installed mostly in museum interiors (*Fig. 6*). The Slovene writer and amateur sculptor Tone Svetina made over 15 memorials composed of old armaments, in the form of both sculptures and reliefs. As a Partisan fighter in the famous Prešeren Brigade in Slovenia's mountainous Gorenjska region, Svetina was drawn to art and developed his method at the front, where he was surrounded by the remnants of grenades from World War I. The symbolic act of reusing leftover weapons for war monuments was not an exception or a novelty per se, yet the specific manner of welding of the metal parts into an aesthetic whole, symbolically silencing the military past by transposing rifles into artistic material, echoes procedures we find in modern painting and sculpture at the time.



Fig. 7: Wartime bulletshell inserted in Krsto Hegedušić's fresco in the Memorial House of the Battle of Sutjeska, Tjentište, Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Photo: Sanja Horvatinčić)

In his last monumental work – the fresco cycle for the memorial house of the Battle of Sutjeska – the painter Krsto Hegedušić inserted cobbles taken from the Sutjeska river, as well as original bullet shells and other wartime material found at the site of the famous Partisan battle in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The painter Ratko Janjić, who assisted Hegedušić with the fresco, noted that those objects were easily found all around the former battlefield and that Hegedušić encouraged young artists to experiment with the classical medium of fresco (Fig. 7).

Artists and architects used various strategies to respond to often demanding memorialization tasks at the original wartime locations and achieve the desired effect aimed at the visitors. Activating their imagination *in situ* required physical engagement and sensorial experience. Located at war-time historical sites, these monuments and memorial parks were often aimed at mobilising material traces and landscapes of the past to envision new models of collective remembrance.

The shifting value of material culture of resistance

Today, it has been almost entirely forgotten that in socialist Yugoslavia, the highest value was assigned to what were called “authentic monuments”. Within that heritage system, the term “monument” primarily referred to the period and context of their origin, that is, to the period of World War II. The priority of conservation over interpretation of war heritage had been regularly emphasised: “The potency of an immediate encounter with the authentic (ambience, structures) cannot be supplemented by a new work, however (aesthetically) valuable it may be”.⁴³ The evaluation of the memorialisation projects thus seems to have been divided between the aesthetic criteria and social interests of artists, architects, and local communities on the one hand, and the heritage protection service, which urged for the importance of preserving the authenticity of memorial sites, on the other.

This significantly differs from our current understanding of what the term monument should stand for and reflects our interest – or lack thereof – in the cultural and artistic production of socialism on which contemporary heritage policies are based, with little attention paid to the original wartime structures and contexts. The new heritage evaluation systems in most former Yugoslav countries – where original artefacts and sites receive little to no attention – reflect the degradation of the symbolic value of anti-facist resistance, and unwillingness to recognise the potential of transmitting the past through materiality.

The special value assigned to the material culture of NOB, which was institutionalised in the Yugoslav heritage system, has been redefined or entirely erased in successor Yugoslav states. The notion of shared Yugoslav memory of resistance, embedded in the term “NOB”, was replaced by strengthening national discourses or revisionist concepts about the past.⁴⁴ Yet despite the various “memory games” of the post-socialist contexts, memorials and traces of World War II resistance remain a form of unofficial heritage with, in some cases, even stronger mobilising potential than when

43 Razumenka Petrović, “Stanje i problemi zaštite i uređivanja spomenika Narodnooslobodilačkog rata”, in *Zaštita, uređivanje i podizanje spomenika Narodnooslobodilačkog rata u SR Srbiji* (Beograd: Republički sekretarijat za obrazovanje, nauku i kulturu: Komisija za uređivanje i zaštitu spomenika Narodno-oslobodilačke borbe i ratova za oslobođenje naših naroda, 1970), 7.

44 Marija Jauković, “To Share or to Keep: The Afterlife of Yugoslavia's Heritage and the Contemporary Heritage Management Practices”, *Politička misao* 51, no. 5 (2014).

they were part of the official heritage.⁴⁵ Even as ruins, or as “traces of traces”, the material culture of resistance is still present in people’s everyday lives. The growing number of grassroots projects of restoring and mapping monuments, online inventories, private military collections, and more, attests to the idea that heritage “can be found, interpreted, given meanings, classified, presented, conserved and lost again, and again, and again within any age”⁴⁶

The value of the monument-object primarily depends on the dominant value of the memory of the historical narrative it refers to. Having in mind the political importance of the historical narrative of NOB and the revolution in socialism, the value of “authenticity” and age – a documentary value – was primary. As presented earlier, even such mundane sites and objects as wooden barracks were scientifically documented, classified and conserved through heritage institutions. Simple material remains of the Partisan resistance were assigned higher value than the artworks created to mark them. This changed, however, with the loss of the material culture’s purpose to testify for a particular picture of the past, or to support the claims for “heritage” as the basis for economic development through memorial tourism.

Contrary to expectations, it seems that the institutionalisation of NOB heritage and the integration of “NOB memory” into economic development plans gradually weakened the transmitting potential of NOB material culture and original wartime sites. With the devaluation of the political significance of revolutionary memory, more and more emphasis was given – already in the socialist period – to monuments as artworks that often featured hermetic formal language. Despite the fragile bonds to the NOB narratives, monuments remain targets of politically motivated destruction, and despite their appropriation and trivialisation in global internet culture, NOB memorial sites are not entirely devoid of their mobilising social and political potential. However, the dramatic effect of the violence invested in destroying monuments – perceived primarily as a loss of cultural artefacts of socialist modernism – in many cases completely shadowed the symbolic value of the places and narratives they were supposed to mark. The new heritage system no longer guarantees the historical value of those sites, thus

45 For a broader discussion on this see my article: Sanja Horvatinčić, “Between Memory Politics and New Models of Heritage Management: Rebuilding Yugoslav Memorial Sites ‘From Below’”, *Hefte des Deutschen Nationalkomitees*, LXXIII (2020), 108-115.

46 David C. Harvey, “The History of Heritage”, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, eds. Brian Graham, and Peter Howard (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), 22.

fully disclosing heritage's instrumental purpose as an integral part of different political projects.

While the original World War II sites often became stages of new armed conflicts during the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, revealing the fragility of grand narratives and monumental gestures, some memorial sites and traces of past emancipatory struggles continue to inspire and mobilise ideas of resilience, solidarity and social justice in the present moment. This palimpsest and the rich, layered material of such sites offer a way to engage with multiple and diverse narratives and agents of the past, who compose the complex histories of resistance. What was left behind are the material traces that pertain to no value system, and that can be mobilised to mediate the (his)stories of resistance in a manner that invites questioning and learning from the complexities those material traces reveal and which present a picture of the past that is ever more difficult to reduce to a singular narrative.⁴⁷

47 This work was made as a part of the research project of the Institute of Art History in Zagreb Digital network, spatial and (con)textual analysis of artistic phenomena and heritage of the 20th century (DIGitART, 2023–2027) funded by the European Union - NextGenerationEU.

WER IST WALTER?

Resistance against Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration occurred throughout Europe during World War II. But how much do we know about this history in other European countries? Gathering 32 contributions and case studies on the history of this resistance, as well as on its transmission after 1945, especially in museums, the present book is an invitation to look at resistance in Europe in an interdisciplinary, international, transnational and comparative perspective. It is the result of the international research project “Wer ist Walter? Resistance against Nazism in Europe” which gathered historians, curators and other researchers mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany.



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