

Sites of Conscience as Guardians of the Collective Memory

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Abstract: Wars, suffering, torture, hundreds of thousands of people that have been displaced or missing, poverty and the destruction of the monument. These are just some of the events that marked the end of the 20th on the Balkans and that are part of our shameful, not glorious past. Do we need to remember it at all, and how? What stories are 'permitted' and which are 'forbidden'? What is the adequate way to mark the suffering and how to do it without offending either side? What are the relations between memory and monuments, archives and museums? How can we understand the dual nature of monuments: as ideologically driven tools of memory (fixed memory) and / or as constant sources of creative construction and opening up of memory? Possible answers to these questions and also a solution is to create Sites of Conscience, or public memorials that make a specific commitment to democratic engagement through programs that stimulate dialogue on pressing social issues today and that provide opportunities for public involvement in those issues. Public memorials are physical representations or commemorative activities that concern events in the past and are located in public spaces. They are designed to evoke a specific reaction or set of reactions, including public acknowledgment of the event

or people represented; personal reflection or mourning, pride, anger, or sadness about something that has happened, or learning or curiosity about periods in the past. The sole process of creating of public memorials is memorialisation. Since the Sites of Conscience may tell stories of mass atrocity or daily, individual struggles, they seek to serve as significant new tools for building lasting cultures of human rights and democracy. Using the past to engage people can and will help in making a difference in the present.

Keywords: monuments, archives, museums, memorialisation, the Sites of Conscience

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is the result of the research activities, which were conducted recently by the author for UNDP BiH. It considers creating and setting up the Site of Conscience in the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹

Recommendations for the design and programme activities for the Site of Conscience given in this paper

were made on the basis of field surveys,² individual interviews, a series of consultations³ with different focus groups, and recent documents.⁴ Key questions that we have tried to answer are: What do the locals think of memorialization and how do they perceive it? What does the Site of Conscience mean to them? What are the needs of the local community in the context of creating the memorial, and what are the attitudes of victims and prisoners? How to interpret a situation from the experts' point of view, as well as what are the possible solutions for the Site of Conscience programme and what is the view of the Government of BD BiH on this issue? In this regard, the methodology included on the one hand, theoretical approach, used mainly for the purpose of making parts of the documents relating to the definition of memorialization, the analysis of its paradigms, features, characteristics, challenges and goals, coherence with other transitional justice mechanisms. On the other hand, the direct examination in the field produced a range of tasks related to the characteristics of the Brčko approach to this process, and offered recommendations.⁵

This comprehensive method has contributed to the definition of appropriate standards and criteria for achieving emotional and educational functions of the memorial, which creates the appropriate culture of memories and overcomes the history of human rights violations and war crimes, and which supports the prevention of recurrence, providing an open and inclusive inter-ethnic dialogue on human rights violations and war crimes that occurred during the conflict from 1992 - 1995.

Finally, it should be underlined that the recommendations presented in this document are only part of what the Brčko community stated as needs in the proc-

ess of memorialization. Two ideas that were the most acceptable to all participants of the consultation process were chosen as the starting point. From the perspective of the profession, these proposals are the most suitable to fulfill the purpose of memorialization within the transitional justice practice: to achieve the peaceful everyday life of all constituent peoples, based on the democratic values.

A. BRČKO DISTRICT - HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION

"In the process of globalization and standardization by which the modern world is affected, our goal is to ensure the "European class" status of the region, with:

- developed multi-ethnic culture of life,
- established democratic milieu,
- organized business and creative environment, and
- economy and most of the public sector in private hands."

The development vision of the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina until 2020 (Nacrt Strategije razvoja Brčko Distrikta BiH 2008 – 2012 11)

Due to its natural characteristics, Bosanska Posavina has always been an attractive spot for people/newcomers and colonization, and often exposed to raids and conquests. Brčko as a settlement began to develop near the old raft by the river Sava. There is evidence of human inhabitants during the Stone Age. However, only in the 16th century, namely in Turkish documents from 1548, the village was first mentioned as Brčko. At this location, on the border between East and West, a border military post was built. Together with the surrounding villages during the successful campaign by Austria against Turkey, which took place in the early 18th century, they were completely destroyed. The border station

developed into an important place for trade between Austria and the Ottoman Empire, and during the 19th and early 20th century Brčko was becoming an important point for the export of agricultural and other products from its hinterland in Bosnia and import of industrial products from the West. With the onset of salt transport from Tuzla, Brčko became a significant transit hub for the export of salt and other goods in Slavonia and Srem. Since the establishment of the Danube steamship company in 1830, which had its agency and port on the river Sava, Brčko became a trading center. During this period, Brčko exported about 25 tons of dried prunes to Austria, Germany, England and the USA. Also, steamship lines Brčko - Belgrade and Brčko - Oršava were opened, and the first ships sailed the Sava in 1862.

Despite the successful economic development in Brčko, there were many social problems. Large population growth and uncontrolled urbanization had resulted in very high levels of unemployment, which was an important and adverse factor in general socio-economic development of Brčko.

Brčko experienced a new economic boom in the last two decades of Yugoslavia. ⁶ Three department stores, Faculty of Economics, Hotel "Seagull", a new cultural center, more modern housing estates were opened. There were four high schools in the town and 13 elementary schools in the municipality. The municipality had 10 factories with more than 20,000 employees. More than 50 cultural organizations were operating in the area. Sports had also been developing.

In April 1992, it was agreed to form three new municipalities (Serbian, Croatian and Bosniak) in the town. The agreement was never implemented peacefully, as on May 1st 1992. an armed conflict started in

Bosnia and Herzegovina. The war in Brčko unofficially started the day before, after the demolition of the bridge over the Sava, when an undetermined number of civilians crossing the bridge were killed.

Brčko District was officially established on March 8th 2000, one year after the final decision of the international arbitration for Brčko (the area has been the subject of an inter-entity dispute after the signing of the Dayton Agreement). District had been declared on the entire territory of the municipality of Brčko, from which 48% ended up in the Serb Republic (including the town of Brčko), and 52% in the Federation BiH. ⁷ The Serb Republic authorities have never officially accepted the decision of the international arbitration, by which the city was taken from them. With this decision the Serb Republic lost its territorial continuity and was physically divided into western and eastern parts almost five years after Dayton, which led to dissatisfaction in this entity. The Government of the Serb Republic still believes that the establishment of the Brčko District violated the basic structure of the Dayton agreement, by which BiH is regulated as a state with two entities in the territorial ratio of 49-51%.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURAL LIFE IN BRČKO DISTRICT

The state of culture in the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina is mainly dictated by the Government of Brčko District of BiH, more precisely by its subdivision for sports and culture. This is particularly true in the field of planning, programming, institutional strengthening and funding of sports and cultural organizations and projects. Associations and organizations engaged in cultural matters are scattered in all the inhabited regions of the District, and their activity has a

solid (but not sufficient) infrastructure. A large number of events are now a tradition (theater / theater meetings, art colony, BD Day, etc.) (113). The central cultural institutions in Brčko are Public Library, Art Gallery and Culture Center with three sections (town choir, string orchestra and drama studio). Most of the cultural program is being implemented in three ethnic societies: the Bosniak Cultural "Rebirth", Serbian Cultural and Educational Society "Prosvjeta" and the Croatian Cultural Society "Progress." There are also Arts Club, Art Lovers Association, Association of Visual Artists, Literary Club and professional society "Baštinar" in the city. In rural areas there are around 10 cultural and art societies, which have an ethnic prefix in their titles, and their programmes are geared towards fostering ethnic traditions and culture (114).

There are 155 buildings located in the Brčko District that are marked on the basis of their historic or architectural value as objects of cultural and historical heritage (Novosti, November 11 2012). Some of them are City Hall, Sava or Atik Mosque, Kočić / Kučukalić house, building Islahijet, the Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the White Tower Gradašćević, Azizi Mosque in Brezovo Polje, and Tsintsar Cemetery in Bijela. On the temporary list of the Commission for Preserving National Monuments there are twenty objects from the District, as well as a townscape - part of the Vuk Stefanović Karadžić Street in the area called Serbian Town.⁸

Even though there were attempts to raise the level of meeting the cultural needs of all citizens in the past 13 years, the effects are still not satisfactory. With the exception of occasional events, everyday cultural offer is very poor. There is no cinema, theater, museum, skating rink, concert and stage spaces in Brčko, and the

gym capacities are weak. Interesting and good content is not offered to the youngsters on a daily basis.

Therefore, we may conclude that the time of reconstruction of infrastructure exclusively has passed, and that the time has come for creating the content and for utilizing the existing potentials (objects). Majority of existing objects are still functional, they are in use, and have been restored lately. Some of them are still in need of financial investments, such as a venue currently under restoration that will house the Art Gallery.

Culture, as a key segment of social life, is also a prerequisite for overcoming the problems that inevitably arise with changes in the structure of transition states. Culture, therefore, instead of hearing the superb artistic value and creative potential of citizens, still reflects ethnocentrism and thus returns to the level of politicization of cultural diversity and sensitivity to national connotations in every practical act.⁹ In the opinion of citizens, regardless of the actual nature of the conflict that history will definitively determined in years to come, there is a prevailing view that the war was a clash of civilizations (religion and culture). That is the reason why they observe culture like something with national prefix.

II. MEMORIALIZATION – THE CONCEPT

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

Jewish Proverb

Commemorative activities, primarily raising memorials and monuments, are most directly related to the needs of individuals, families and society as a whole to remember certain characters and events (Barsalou, J.

Baxter, V. *The Urge to Remember...*). It is clear that the victims of human rights violations cannot forget, and that the state must find a way to preserve the memory of such crimes. Memorials - monuments, museums, commemorative activities (in the domain of intangible heritage) and a variety of initiatives in education are a good way to prevent denial of crimes. However, there are many cases in which the civil society took on the role of the state and has enforced these measures.

One of the simplest definitions of the memorialization explains it as a process of creating public memorials. By public memorials we mean different projects and activities that take place in the public sphere, with the idea of preserving the memory of the events, periods, and famous people that had an important role in the life of an individual, family or community as a whole (Brett, Bickford, Ševčenko and Rios 1). Their forms can vary - from monuments and memorial days through organizing marches, to the initiative of changing the names of streets etc, or oral history projects, endowments, web sites and more. The general intent is to organize commemorations on the location where an event occurred. However, in order to strongly influence the potential audience and to transfer the desired message, it is better that those activities are conducted in socially and politically significant locations, such as the central town squares, or areas where important political events took place. In practice, the application of selective memory is often present, which includes remembering only the things we can benefit from, and with which we can support our version of remembrance (form of confession and blame).

There are two dominant paradigms of memorialization - classical (neotraditional) and modern. Although their names are chronological, a clear time line between

them does not exist. The main difference between them is in the set goals, or in the activities that lead to the goals. Within the classical paradigm, artistic approaches were identified through the monuments of solid material, often of monumental proportions (6). Their idea lies in the construction of the authority of a particular event or person. When we talk about the modern approach, it involves different artistic visualization, potentially avant-garde forms or actions based on the new social settings. The modern paradigm emphasizes the educational potential of the process, which is supported by programmes and debates, instead of the pure physical representation of an event. This claim is based on the paradoxical situation that the static, monolithic and unchanging memorials made of a hard material and designed to assure that specific events in the past are going to be forever remembered, after a while become invisible and blend in the middle, and are deprived of fundamental importance for the life of the community. Although they may at some point be crucial for the construction of collective memory, the fact that they may become 'invisible' and forgotten can have a traumatic effect on the victims and their need for acknowledgement and remembrance of their suffering.

No matter what its form is, the most obvious function of the memorialization is the emotional reaction in observers. But not only that. It is important for education, which is being implemented through various programmes and through launching an open and inclusive dialogue process. It also helps with a critical review of the past and the pressing social issues, as well as it helps to draw lessons for the present and for the future.¹⁰

Memorialization, as a process, is deeply politicized. It reflects the political, cultural, historical and social reality in a country because the ruling elite, especially political

factors, play crucial role in who will be remembered and why. This actually means that the general public will not remember everything, but priority will be given to those events, periods or persons designated by the ruling elite as important and will be remembered in a certain (subjective and arbitrary) way. Of course, this does not imply that the ruling elite necessarily have negative intentions when it comes to memorialization.

A. MEMORIALIZATION PROCESS(ES) IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE BRČKO DISTRICT

Memorialization activities are very widespread throughout the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are, however, ethnic and exclusive, and characterized by a lack of institutional coordination, lack of adequate legislation and conceptual misunderstanding of the phenomenon of memorialization in the context of transitional justice. A key feature of memorialization in BiH is approach of recognition and blame, and almost exclusively accompanied by sacral/ religious ritual. Furthermore, the absence of joint memory projects of two or more ethnic groups is noticeably absent, or any activities that would focus on the consequences of violation of law, and crimes, highlighting the suffering of a particular social or ethnic group. Finally, there is a lack of initiative or civic self-initiative in the direction of visiting places of suffering of others or the public acceptance and recognition of their suffering.¹¹

Neotraditional paradigm completely describes the process of memorialization in BiH. It is characterized by heroic, but also suffering presentations of the past, through raising, memorials or cemeteries dedicated to the fallen soldiers and civilian victims of war. These

monuments contain the names of the victims, year of birth and death, as well as written messages that often highlight the heroic death in defense against aggression, justice struggles, and the plight of the ethnic representation, and the collective responsibility of the other side. Memorialization in BiH includes religious rituals, laying wreaths and flowers, the presence of families and friends of victims, and the wider (ethnic) community activists, representatives of veterans associations and civil war victims.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow are extended version of basic ideas,¹² heard during the consultation¹³ process, and amended primarily to achieve the full potential of the memorialization process through the formation of Site of Conscience. Other aspects such as interactivity, two-way communication, expertise, etc. are also taken into account. Their essence is not in their appearance or artistic value, but in the didactic potential of activities and programs that are organized, as well as ideas to which they aspire.

A. "PRACTICAL" MEMORIAL IN THE FORM OF SPORTS CENTER

It is more than clear that in regions where massive human rights violations were motivated, among other things, by the ethnicity of the victims, is going to be hard to achieve consensus on when, why and how to remember. How to bring together the different experiences of violations and, in general, how to provide recognition for the crimes that were committed are also questions with more than one answer. In such cases, one of the appropriate solutions is to identify the type

of a facility needed in a particular community, instead of a direct commemoration of an event or a person related to a particular ethnic group.

"Practical" memorial has three sections:

1. emotional (private) – it consists of a memory room or any other form in which the victims' families and other visitors can express their emotions and respect for the victims; in such a space should be a list of the killed and injured, photographs, images of torture, etc.
2. educational (public) - Documentation Center and Archive, which treasure relevant information about the victims (for example, life before the war, the circumstances of suffering, etc.), an oral history of victims' families, the list of places of torture and description of injuries that have occurred in these areas, court records, "artifacts" of war to represent everyday life and other subjects related to the conflict; within it, through various forums, promotions, literary evenings, and similar we would have a living dialogue about the past;
3. practical - the infrastructure in the field of use for which the object was created.

During the preparatory study on the current state and needs of the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there was a notable lack of adequate space for sports events. In this regard, it is important to note that the consultation participants, and those who were individually interviewed, identified the construction of the "practical" memorial as the most appropriate way of memorialization. Youth groups even conducted a poll in which they emphasized the rink as the greatest desire, while some individuals voted for the range of extreme sports.¹⁴ And in terms of profession, the sports center is a great solution, as the sport itself promotes

positive values, healthy living, teamwork and fair play, and certainly contributes to the quality of co-existence, as one of the most important long-term goals of memorialization.

During the meeting, several potential sites were suggested - the old riverbed of the Brka where sports facility is going to be build in near future. Another idea was Ficibajer resort, located a few hundred meters from the town center, where a partial infrastructure for such a center already exists.

B. "UNFINISHED" MEMORIAL IN THE FORM OF WEB PORTAL

The lack of spatial and physical barriers, attractive facilities, ease of use, low-cost maintenance and construction, orientation to young people - these are the advantages for the process of memorialization.

Although unfinished memorials can also be permanently open art competition, park memories, traveling exhibition, etc., the most acceptable forms in the District are web portals. The participants of the BD Consultations proposed the list of dead and missing persons as web portal memorial, but in this paper meaning of the web portal memorial is extended to achieving active dialogue and better co-existence. "Dry facts" are neither interesting for outside visitors, nor for young people, who are important target group for the memorialization process in BiH.

Therefore, the author of this study proposed that the web portal consists of the following parts:

1. register of the missing in BD during 1992-1995 - the first step would be to create a database; this list could be updated on a daily basis, and since it is available to everyone, it could be regularly reviewed, and mistakes could be easily corrected;

2. blog for commenting, sharing opinions and experiences - everyone could write and thus get some relief, however, there would be an administrator whose role would be corrective, which means to control that the offensive and inappropriate content are not placed in public;
3. virtual museum with a gallery of donated artifacts - many people keep objects from the war or objects associated with it, some memories, photos, documents; their impact is much larger if placed in the public sphere, where they could be available to everyone as a reminder of the past; invitation for donating objects would be constantly open; all of them could be digitized and placed on the website; physical objects could be placed in the Art Gallery depot;
4. online museum inventory book - if we want to form a traveling exhibition, it is necessary to collect the memories or the so-called "biographies of things", the idea is to make some sort of questionnaires for the donors; they could put a photo on of their memories from the period 1992-1995 and columns could be as follows: name, sex, date and place of birth, occupation, type of memory, why is that memory important and why should not be forgotten / why it is important that other see or hear, photography, drawing, video; also some of the questionnaires would be printed and distributed at various points in the city, where people would fill them, and then they would be placed into the portal by the administrator
5. Basic inventory book - with the list of everything donated
6. Blog for positive stories - the influence of the so-called "warm human story" is much more than a

description of war casualties; latter often deepen the conflict and provoke negative emotions towards others. Items 3, 4, 5 and 6 would form a symbolic sub-project "Years eaten by the war". In contrast to the atmosphere in the classical heritage museum presentations (exhibitions, publications, and catalogs), this action is an attempt at representing heritage in a more intimate and more personal light.

The realization of the concept of an unfinished memorial is symbolic and continuous journey of individuals and collectives in terms of review of their roles and responsibilities in creating the current social realities, as a result of a traumatic past. Since its completion would depend solely on the engagement of individuals, no ethnic group would be privileged. On the contrary. If you fill the platform, you are represented. That is, looking at the broader social context, the essential advantage of this solution.

C. THE CONCEPT AND PROGRAMME OF THE MEMORIALS

When we talk about the process of memorialization, the most important long-term aspect is prevention of the violations of the human rights. In Bosnian society it is accepted as essential.

However, the concept of prevention in BiH society is not entirely clearly defined, as seen during the consultation process. Should we prevent such crimes never to happen again anywhere in the world? Or never again to anyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina? And, finally, does it prevent the crimes and violations never to happen again to us, as an ethnic group? A fundamentally important thing arises from these questions when it comes to setting up a memorial - who is the recipient of the me-

morial, or who is the audience? To answer that, we must consider the bigger picture.

In most cases recorded in the modern history, it is about the crimes of the repressive regime and there we find only two opposing sides. In the case of the Bosnian conflict, the situation is much more complicated, which is why the focus of the process of memorialization needs to be *phenomenological*, ie. it must be *on the effects* of the conflict.

In fact, there is no crime or event or date that would be representative for all of the three constituent peoples and all ethnic groups. In addition, the whole process must be interesting, understandable and reaching young people, as they are the driving force that can lead to social, institutional and political transformation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In order to achieve this, it is important to enable the use of relevant documents on human rights abuses and war crimes, so one could have a comprehensive, credible and legitimate way to analyze the past. This would prevent manipulation, negative interpretations and revisionism.

When we talk about the activities, initiatives should be open to the memories of other communities and establishing inter-ethnic communication, thus creating the potential for building a shared vision of the future. In addition, we should insist on joint visits to places of suffering.

While there were indeed many examples of anti-war activism or heroism, only few Brčaci are mentioned as examples of the good neighborhood relations (different ethnic groups helped each other at the risk of their own life, and some of them were killed). Also, throughout the former Yugoslavia examples of individual or organized activist approach to fighting the war campaign are also known. The activities mentioned, al-

though recorded, are not sufficiently promoted and known to the public.

The facts show that that while creating the Site of Conscience it is necessary to think about its touristic potential, as well. Of course, it would have to be in accordance with the guidelines of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism Council, in order to prevent their commercialization and vulgarization.

IV. CONCLUSION

Establishment of the Site of Conscience in the Brčko District BiH, one much divided community, will be a challenge. Through its emotional and educational function, it will connect all transitional justice mechanisms, which will then provide fertile ground for individual and collective healing, democratization, human rights, peace building and sustainable development. Such thorough and vigorous activities are necessary to prevent the further development of stereotypes and distance between ethnic communities. While selecting them, one should be very careful in order to prevent manipulation.

Key to the success and sustainability of the Sites of Conscience, as the concepts that promote positive coexistence while not allowing the legacy of the past to be denied or forgotten, lies in knowing the truth. It is certainly difficult, time consuming and complex process, but essentially irreplaceable, if we want to create a space of encounter in which we promote the idea that even negative legacy belongs to all of us.

ENDNOTES

- [1] Creating and setting up the Site of Conscience in Brčko District is part of the project "Access to Justice: Dealing with the past and building confidence for the future", managed by the UNDP

BiH. It consists of two key components related to transitional justice and increasing public confidence in the institutions responsible for the rule of law in BiH. The aim of the project is to increase availability of legal institutions and agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina for standard users of court services and to systematically face the remaining challenges related to the victims of the 1992-95 conflict.

- [2] The aim of the field research was to explore existing monuments and memorials in BiH, but also to get relevant information about memorialization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For that purpose many people were interviewed.
- [3] The consultative processes were organized on few occasions, in Brčko District, during february 2013.
- [4] Among others: *Pojam memorijalizacije i novi pristup memorijalizacijskoj praksi u Bosni i Hercegovini* by international consultant Dragan M. Popović.
- [5] Milica Božić Marojević, as international consultant, has adjusted recommendations to the local and TJ context, but also insisted on the aspects of the profession, in order to accomplish all tasks.
- [6] More about that phenomenon on <http://www.infobrcko.com/brcko/historija.html> Web. 10.02.2013.
- [7] For more info "History and Mandate of the OHR North/Brcko". http://www.ohr.int/ohr-offices/brcko/history/default.asp?content_id=5531. Web. 10.02.2013.
- [8] More about temporary list you can find on the web site of Commission for Preserving National Monuments, kons.gov.ba
- [9] If it is a show, and there are paintings of the cathedral and the Orthodox Church, but no mosques – you wont display any of them, in order to prevent manipulation of interpretation. (just for the record)
- [10] Literature for further reading: More about that Liz Sevckenko, *Sites of Conscience: new approaches to conflicted memory*, UNESCO, Museum International, No. 245–246 Vol. 62, No. 1–2, 2010, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-0033.2010.01720.x/pdf>; Louis Bickford, *Radovi na sjećanju/Radovi sjećanja*, Forum za tranzicionu pravdu, Fond za humanitarno pravo, 2008. http://www.hc-rdc.org/images/stories/tranzici ona_pravda/ Forum2.pdf
- [11] Details to be found in Dragan M. Popović's mentioned document.
- [12] International consultants Milica Božić Marojević and Dragan M. Popović, based on their experience and expertise, but also rec

comendations from the locals, gave to the participants of the third consultations 10 suggestions that can be implemented in the framework of truth-telling and memorialization in Brčko District. The proposals were harmonized with the concept of transitional justice, and the Bosnian context.

- [13] Three of them were held during February 2013, with different focus groups.
- [14] Additional info http://vermontbrcko.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=104:klizalite-u-brckom&catid=38:vijesti&Itemid=55

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