



## National museums in Croatia

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### Summary

The history of national museums in Croatia is marked by disruptions due to changes in the configuration of supra-nations that have ruled the country at various periods in its history. In 1846, the Illyrian movement, a Croatian national revival movement who were inspired by the Enlightenment, founded the first museum to express national ambitions in Zagreb. The discontinuous history and idea behind this national museum is the focus of this report, culminating with an examination of its successor, the Croatian History Museum. This case study demonstrates how a museum, with nation building as a central part of its mission, can maintain the continuity of a nation through the historical continuity of the institution. A key element of this 'national' idea is the age of the nation and its heritage; museums are well suited to display these elements. This case study also examines institutional changes to the interpretation of the national narrative during this period.

The creation of the Museum of the Revolution of the Croatian people during the Yugoslavian period demonstrates that the interpretation of 'national history' served as a nation-building influence in Yugoslavia. The decommissioning and closure of the museum and its reintegration into the Croatian National History Museum are good examples of this reinterpretation. Croatian nation building has moved in this direction by appropriating the adjacent public space following the country's independence after the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. This recent period is most representative of the connection between real nation building that transcends all spheres of society and those representative institutions of national culture - museums. The passage of the multinational state of the Yugoslav federation into a nation-state has had a profound impact on Croatian museums.

The construction of new museums in the last decade shows that the important projects of national museums in Croatia are in the art or archeology museums more so than the history museum. In spite of this period that was characterized by nation building after the independence of the country, a national history museum was not responsible for launching major projects. Finally, the creation of a new National History Museum in Zagreb is in progress, which will present the grand narrative of the new nation-state.

## Summary table, Croatia

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
Archeological Museum of Split	1821	1820	Monarch, Emperor Franz I, Regional Parliament	Parliament	Archeology	Universal values	Prehistory to Early Christianity.	Modern style, central cluster, center of Split.
National Museum Zagreb	1846	1836	Croatian Parliament, Husbandry society, Monarch	Husbandry society, Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (JAZU) Parliament	Numismatics, Botanical Art, Archaeology, Zoology and Mineralogy	Universal values, Enlightenment, Romanticism and National revival	19 <sup>th</sup> - 20 <sup>th</sup> c.	Neo-classical style, central cluster, center of Zagreb.
Croatian Natural History Museum	c1866	1846	Croatian Parliament, Husbandry society, Council of Museums	City of Zagreb	Natural Science	Universal values	Prehistory to Contemporary period.	Neo-classical style, central cluster in center of Zagreb.
<i>Strossmayer</i> Gallery of Old Masters	1884	1868	Regional Parliament, Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts	Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts	Art Old Masters	Universal values	14 <sup>th</sup> – 18 <sup>th</sup> c.	Neo-classical style, central cluster in center of Zagreb.
Museum of Arts and Crafts	1880	1868	Art Society, State. Council of Museums (CM)	Art Society Government	Design, Industry, Textile, furniture	Territorial representation	19 <sup>th</sup> - 20 <sup>th</sup> c.	Neo-classical style, central cluster, center of Zagreb.

Ethnographic Museum Zagreb	1919	1874	Private collections State Council of Museums	Government	Ethnology, Croatian culture, Non-European cultures	Territorial representation and Universal values	19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> c.	Neo-classical style, central cluster, center of Zagreb.
Archeological Museum Zagreb	1945	1866	State Council of Museums	Government state	Archeology	Universal values and Territorial representation	Prehistory to Middle Ages.	Neo-classical style, central cluster in center of Zagreb.
Croatian History Museum	1951	1866	Regional parliament, Council of Museums	Government	Cultural History	National Territorial representation, Ethnic identity	19 <sup>th</sup> - 20 <sup>th</sup> c.	Neo-classical (baroque palace), central cluster in Zagreb old town.
Museum of the Revolution of people of Croatia	c1955	1949	Regional government	Government	History, War, Revolution	Universal values	20 <sup>th</sup> c.	Modern style, central cluster, center of Zagreb.
Archeological Museum Naron	2007	2004	Archeological Museum of Split State (CM)	Government	Archeology	Universal values	1 <sup>st</sup> c. BC to 7 <sup>th</sup> c. AD.	Post-modern style. <i>In situ</i> , village of Vid.
Museum of Krapina Neanderthals	1966	1966 2010	State	Government	Geology Paleontology	Universal values	Prehistory	Post-modern style. Museum <i>in situ</i> , Village of Krapina.
Museum of Contemporary Art	1954 2010	1954 2010	State CM	Government	Art	Universal value, Territorial representation	1950 onwards	Post-modern style. Solitary location in New Zagreb.

## Introduction

The history of national museums in Croatia is deeply marked by its political history, where the country is on the periphery of all the political and cultural power centres. A national museum is a concept as broad as each notion that comprises it. If it is assumed that a museum participates in the creation, preservation and transmission of national identities, then the definition of national identity, the way it is developed and *imagined*, as well as its characteristics, are key elements of its study. The term *national museum* illustrates the national importance attributed to a museum, reflecting a particular cultural and political identity as well as administrative and territorial divisions (national, regional and municipal museums). The current government and laws manage the attribution of national importance. So, from what moment do we consider a museum to be national – a term, which, by definition, means an institution that collects, studies and displays collections recognized to be of national interest? Which national interest or which identity does the museum reflect in different historical contexts? Which nation does it promote in multinational countries?

This complexity is specific to national museums in countries such as Croatia, where the process of establishing cultural institutions is influenced, and often hampered, by the reigning authority. The national public museum in Croatia was founded relatively lately. Museums, by their connection with a territory or a region, strengthen regional identity, making them suspicious in empires or federations where the central power tries to control local, national identity. Indeed, the central authorities, in this case Vienna, Budapest or Belgrade, had to approve the creation of regional cultural institutions. For example, Emperor Franz Joseph I encouraged the founding in 1820 of the first public museum in Croatia, the Archaeological Museum of Split, created to collect remains of the ancient Roman Empire. Taking into consideration the time it took for leaders in Vienna to make a decision (30 years), the creation of a Croatian national museum (*narodni muzej*) can be considered blocked.

Museums are, in principle, collections of objects; traces of the past carefully protected, studied and documented, on a scientific basis. On the other hand, their position as a creator and promoter of national heritage combined with high operating costs makes them dependent on political powers. Generally, the discourse in national museums is supported by scientific research, documents and artefacts that serve as tangible proof. Indeed, museums rarely present false documents or objects, except in extreme cases of power abuse, in time of crisis (conflicts) or under totalitarian regimes. However, through the selection of certain documents or objects, and their implementation and interpretation, they can serve ideological narratives or, sometimes, support opposing ideas. Indeed, what is selected and exhibited in a national museum becomes the official representation of national culture. Those in power, through targeted discourse, influence perceptions of national history and its components. Generally, museums serve to demonstrate evidence: documents and original objects, which support a discourse on history and national heritage as well as on its characteristics and its constitutive elements.

The most convincing demonstration of this hypothesis is the changing discourse in Yugoslav national museums after 1991. Becoming solely Croatian, Slovenian, Bosnian and Serbian national museums, these same institutions suddenly changed their narratives. Once the Yugoslav idea was

discarded (the unification of Southern Slavs), it was replaced by a national discourse specific to its nation-state. Museums had to reconsider their missions and replace their discourse. Institutions have been redeployed and adapted to the new national situation. The impact of disturbances such as the fall of empires and political regimes, followed by territorial, demographic, social and cultural reconfigurations, change and redefine national components. Chronological divisions that consider these periods of political unrest are required when studying national museums, as they are products of these changes. In the case of Croatia, the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or the division of Yugoslavia changed the idea of the Croatian nation. Opposition to the Empire (of the Habsburg's and, after 1878, of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) in the middle of the nineteenth century defined The Croatian nation. The proposal of a Croatian nation reinforced the idea of a common culture and the brotherhood of the Southern Slavs, carried out in Yugoslavia. After 1990, there was a detachment from this same idea by strengthening attachments to the Habsburg Empire and European identities. How are these reconciliations and dissociations reflected in the narratives of national museums and exhibitions? The replacement of museum narrative in the 1990s demonstrates this change.

After a brief overview of the cultural policy in Croatia and the origins of museums and the foundation of the first national museum in the mid nineteenth century in Zagreb, this study of museums in the twentieth century is divided into three parts: the interwar period (1918-1941), history museums during the Yugoslavia period (1945-1990), and Croatian national museums between 1990 and 2000, ending with new national museums built after the year 2000.

## **National museums and cultural policy in Croatia**

Almost all museums in Croatia belong to public authorities and are under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture. There are some exceptions, such as the ecclesiastical collections and a few special institutions, for instance the Mestrovic galleries, administered by the Meštrović Foundation, and the Strossmayer Gallery within the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences (HAZU). Since 2003, some private museums have also opened, such as the Museum of Broken Relationships in 2010.

Museum activities, according to the Museums Act (1998), concern collecting, preservation and the study of civilizations, as well as cultural and natural resources. This law also demands networking "to apply a unified or universal professional approach in the practice of the museum's activities." Museums must be connected to the system of Croatian museums. The concept of a central advisory museum (*matični muzej*) characterizes the network of Croatian national museums. Museums considered central advisory institutions have authority over other museums. The Museum Act defines the mission of the central museum (*matična djelatnost*) and assigns the following tasks: monitoring and scientific assistance, the implementation of professional training and management of museum policies and finally, work in the network of museums. The Minister of Culture, on the recommendation of the Council for Museums, attributed the central advisory museum with its status, mission and tasks. The trend toward centralization has dominated in the first decade of independence in Croatia.

After 2000, some decentralization tendencies have appeared within new, specialized museums, like the Archaeological Museum Naronia built *in situ*, the Museum of Krapina Neanderthals (the museum of evolution), or the projects undertaken in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Rijeka, counterbalancing the concentration of museum activities and governance in the capital.

## **Building national museums**

### **The first museums in Croatia 1750 - 1850**

Several publications focus on the history of museums in Croatia (Humski, 1986) and (Maroević 1993, Vujić 2007). The first, *Pregled povijesti muzeja u Hrvatskoj 19 i 20 Stoljeće (do 1945) s bibliografijom*, is foremost a bibliographical work. *Izvori muzeja u Hrvatskoj* (The origins of museums in Croatia) by Žarka Vujić traces the origins of the collections, history of collecting, and the foundation of museums according to the perspective of historical museology. Linking the phenomena of collecting with the idea of a museum and the development of professions and museology gives the most accurate and comprehensive portrait of this phenomenon. Several articles in journals, such as *Muzeologija* and *Informatica museologica* or *Vijesti i konzervatora muzealaca*, published since the 1950s, with their thematic issues on various types of museums, also trace the history of these institutions in Croatia. Exhibition catalogues, such as "*150 years of the national museum*", are the main sources used in this draft report. First, some facts about precursors of public museums in Croatia are presented. Even if, from a methodological point of view, they are not national museums, nor museums themselves, acknowledging their existence and learning about them allows for a better understanding of the later foundation of these institutions.

The chronological divisions proposed by Eunamus start in 1750, coinciding with the foundation of the first *lapidariums*, in Dubrovnik and Split. This collection of stone fragments from the city of Naronia, the Ancient Roman colony, located at the mouth of the River *Naron* (Neretva) or Salona is not a museum, but it reflects the first archaeological collections that represent the base of institutions that emerged later on. In fact, as in other European countries, private collections were established early; some of them from the Renaissance period: like gardens (Arboretum, botanical garden in Trsteno near Dubrovnik fifteenth century), interest in geology, epigraphs and numismatics, collections of natural history specimens, mineralogical collections and antiquities from the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Since the sixteenth century, foreign travelers and local scholars have been interested in the rich archaeological remains on the Adriatic coast, such as the Palace of Diocletian or the arena of Pula, which has been known in Europe since the eighteenth century. Several private collections were established during this period, such as the museum of Ivo Aletin in Dubrovnik or the cabinet of the world by the Danieli family in Zadar. Religious communities founded *lapidariums*, like the ones mentioned above in Dubrovnik and in Split in 1750 (*Museum of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Split*), with the monuments of Salona.

For centuries, Croatia was under the domination of its neighbouring countries (e.g., Austria, Italy, and Hungary). One of the consequences is that many objects and monuments were taken to Italy or to Austria. Throughout the nineteenth century, objects of importance were sent to the royal cabinet

of Vienna and Budapest (Humski, 1986: 8). Italian abbe and natural historian Alberto Fortis, in *Viaggio in Dalmazia* in 1774, was already writing about epitaphs from Narona that were sent to Italian museums. In fact, trade in antiquities has existed for centuries and many stone fragments were dispersed around Europe. For example, in the mid 1990s, numerous headless sculptures were discovered in archaeological excavations in Narona. One was of Livia, wife of Emperor Augustus - but the sculpture's head was in Oxford. In fact, in 1878, British archaeologist and curator sir Arthur Ewans had acquired the head of Livia for the Ashmolean Museum. In 2004, antique sculpture parts were reunited and returned to Croatia (on loan in the Archaeological Museum of Split). The collection of classical antiquities in Dalmatia was encouraged by the Court of Vienna, which sought the best samples for its museums. As mentioned in Vujić (Vujić, 2007: 152), it is difficult to judge these practices according to the contemporary perspective. The presence of museums and a consciousness of safeguarding cultural heritage, which are today widespread, were at that time only germinating. The destruction of monuments of antiquity, used by the local population as construction material, is not unique to Croatia. The complexity of the bibliography of the objects in collections is specific to each locality, and only their comprehensive study can provide information on practices widespread in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

While other European national museums appeared in the eighteenth century, we cannot consider Croatia to have had a national museum until the mid-nineteenth century. Furthermore, Croatia, until 1848, was not united - it was divided into three zones: Dalmatia, Slavonia and Military border (*vojna Krajina*). The middle of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of nations, marked in Croatia by the public and official use of the Croatian language in state institutions. The foundation of institutions that collect, study and communicate knowledge and objects related to the nation accompanied this process. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, several museums were created in Central Europe (Budapest 1802, Prague 1818, Ljubljana 1821), but Croatia was still divided, its institutions came later on. The first museums were founded in Split in 1820; Zadar, the centre of Dalmatia, in 1830 and in Zagreb, the centre of Croatia and Slavonia, in 1846.

The Archaeological Museum in Split was founded by decree of the Dalmatian government in Zadar after a visit of Emperor Franz I to Dalmatia in 1818 and A. Steinbuchel the director of the Imperial Museum in Vienna. The museum collected artefacts of the ancient Romans in Dalmatia, an epigraphic collection (collection of Latin inscriptions), and coins. The first museum building was erected next to the walls of the Diocletian palace. The present building was built in 1914. Frano Bulić, a Catholic priest, archaeologist and conservator was Director of the museum since 1886. One of the major actors in the development of archaeology and of the museum, he also initiated the construction of the new building.

The Provincial Museum in Zadar was founded on the initiative of the Austrian Lieutenant in Dalmatia, who encouraged the collecting of flora, fauna and objects related to life in the region, in addition to the classical antiquities (Humski, 1986: 39). Even though it was conceived as the Austrian province of Dalmatia's regional museum, it did not receive the approval of Vienna (Maroević, 1999; 200), which was given to the Archaeological Museum of Split. These first museums raise the question of the definition of national museums in the multinational states of the nineteenth century,

and in the period of nation building in Europe. In fact, to the central powers, due to their local perspective, these museums were more part of the Empire as regional or provincial museums than they were national museums.

### **Towards a national museum**

The nineteenth century was marked by the fight for the use of the Croatian language and the mobilization of intellectuals against germanisation and the magyarisation policy. The Illyrian renewal movement (1830-1848), inspired by the Enlightenment, German romanticism and panslavism, introduced a national consciousness. This movement advocates for a modern nation based on the idea of unification of the Southern Slavs, perceived, at the time, as the descendants of the Illyrian people. Societies like the Husbandry societies of Croatia and Slavonia, and the Central Illyrian Cultural and Publishing society were created at this time. In 1836, Ljudevit Gaj and other members of the movement proposed the creation of the National Museum (Narodni muzej) in order to strengthen Croatian cultural identity and to collect artefacts that supported it. This museum was gradually filled with collections from supporter's donations and members of the movement. The Museum, opened to the public in 1846, was part of a broader plan aimed at protecting and promoting the Croatian language and culture. The museum shared its space with the Husbandry Society (Gospodarsko Drustvo), the Reading Room (library), and the Casino, in a palace called the National Hall (*Narodni dom*). The National Hall became the centre of cultural and political life at the time. This universal museum consisted of diverse objects: numismatics, botanicals, shells and minerals, insects and plants, antiques and curiosities, and like every self-respecting European museum in the nineteenth century, an Egyptian mummy. Mijat Sabljarić, a pensioned major and member of the Husbandry society, was one of the first administrators and donors of the collection. Later on, the collections were developed into disciplines: archaeology, botany, numismatics and the natural sciences. The Museum was not recognized by the government in Vienna until 1866, when, on the initiative of Bishop J.J. Strossmayer, Emperor Franz Joseph I ratified the *Status and Organization of National Museum*. The Museum became officially recognized as a national institution under the auspices of the Croatian Parliament. The Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (JAZU), founded the same year, administrated the museum. Josip Juraj Strossmayer, bishop and one of the most important Croatian intellectuals at the time, also initiated, based on his collection, the foundation of the Art gallery (1886) with JAZU (Strossmayer's Old Masters gallery today presents paintings from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries). Under the JAZU (1867-1878), the National Museum (developed with donations) expanded its collection and adopted a more scientific approach. The first curator of the museum was Šime Ljubić, trained in history and archaeology in Vienna. He enlarged and classified collections, edited the first publication by the museum, and corresponded with experts in the field of archaeology. Šime Ljubić tried to transform the museum from an "educational institution for raising national self-consciousness" (Luetić, 2001) into an institution that applied the most scientific approaches of that time. The museum's space quickly became inadequate for the growing collection. However, even after the formal recognition from Vienna, the National Museum never had its own building and its history remains an unfinished project.

The development of sciences in the late nineteenth century led to the specialization of collections and, consequently, of European museums. From 1887 on, the National Museum can be divided into three departments: archaeology, zoology, and mineralogy. That same year, the museum ceased to be administered by JAZU, and came under the administration of the Government and the Department of Religion and Education. (*Zemaljska vlada-odjel za bogoslovlje i nastavu*). The three main collections, under the direction of specialized curators, continued to be developed. The National Museum, and thus the idea of a universal museum, was dismantled and ceased to exist officially in 1939. Its three departments were formed into separate museums: the Museum of Natural Sciences, the Museum of Archaeology (formed in 1945 and given its own building), and the History Museum of Croatia, formed in 1951.

In 1946, the Museum of Serbs in Croatia was founded, with a collection of ancient manuscripts, icons, church fabrics and other objects from Serb monasteries and churches. "Its purpose is to study and use the exhibits to demonstrate the political, economic and cultural development of Serbs in Croatia" (Bauer, Nemeth, 1957; 106). The Museum of Serbs in Croatia became an independent institution in 1953, and in 1962 it was integrated into the History Museum. This museum raised the question of majorities and minorities in national museums in various periods of time, and the homogenization of historical narratives according to the definition of the nation and its components.

In fact, several museums in Zagreb were formed or inherited collections from the National Museum. The universal museum, based on the model of similar European institutions at the time, remained an unfinished project due to lack of consensus and resources, but also by lack of a clear concept of the nation itself, and thus the institution that it is supposed to embody. According to Ivo Maroević "...The National Museum in Zagreb had a political significance, its establishment did not please the Viennese court, because it meant the development of the national self-consciousness of Croatian people [...] In an important time in history, it played the role of a national museum, but soon after it was granted its rules, it was divided into individual sections, which organizationally and spatially were dispersed over time into specific museums. Thus Croatia [...] remained the only country in this part of Europe that has not kept its National Museum as a central national museum institution." (Maroević, 1999 : 201).

The saga of the first national museum also serves as a contemporary national mythology. The long struggle for the nation is embodied by the national museum, including the first initiative of the Croatian Parliament dating from 1836, but it was only approved 30 years later by Vienna (1866). Indeed, in 1996, the three museums (the Archaeological Museum, The Croatian Natural Science Museum, and the Croatian History Museum) celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Museum. The exhibition and symposium entitled "Museum 1846-1996" accompanied the commemoration. The history of the National Museum, marked by difficulties and failures, makes it an unachieved project that was once again attempted by the Museum of National History in Zagreb, starting in 2007. The production of historical continuities, in the absence of a universal national museum, as had been created in the nineteenth century in other European countries, presented a challenge for the actors in this initiative.

Another national museum, founded in the late nineteenth century, saves and interprets national culture. The Museum of Arts and Crafts was an initiative of the Association of arts and its president, Izidor Kršnjavi. This “collection of specimens for master craftsman and artists” was founded in 1880 in Zagreb. The school of arts and crafts quickly joined this objective. Today, it is a national museum of artistic production and material culture in Croatia. According to the Museum’s website, “The Museum of Arts and Crafts has the significance being the most important national museum documenting the material culture of life in the castles and palaces, depicting the practical, everyday lives of Croatian nobility and the bourgeoisie, in the countryside and the city, over many centuries of our history. With its rich holdings, in which there are a considerable number of foreign items, the museum transcends the national sphere and makes a significant contribution to the study of European heritage.” In fact, the traditional culture of everyday life is shared between two national museums: the Ethnographic Museum, that interprets and exhibits folk costumes, popular art, handicrafts and rural culture, and the Arts and Crafts Museum which emphasises bourgeoisie and the upper class Croatian society.

### **The National Museum of the interwar period 1918-1941**

Important changes marked the museum scene in Croatia in the two decades of the interwar period. These changes are influenced both by museum trends in Europe and the local context, strongly marked by the reconfiguration of the country following World War I and the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The unification of South Slavs occurred following the Treaty of Versailles in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. At the same time, Italy took possession of the territories on the Adriatic coast and several islands. The monarchy of Yugoslavia started in 1929. The creation of the first Yugoslavia (1918-1941) drew from this complex political context, which has an impact on existing museums and the creation of new institutions. Museums in a changing political environment are built within the dialogue of opposition and integration.

From a perspective of the national museum, the most significant event of this period is the Cultural and Historical Exhibition presented in Zagreb, in 1925, in celebration of 1000 years of the Croatian Kingdom. According to several authors, this exhibition was created with the background ambition of creating a museum of national history by bringing together objects dispersed throughout various institutions. It is perceived as the continuation of the national museum idea of 1846, which presented its history and heritage as a way to learn more about the country. The central exhibition of this event was held in the Pavilion of Arts, which played an important role on the cultural scene during the interwar period. The celebration of the 1000<sup>th</sup> year of the Croatian Kingdom also initiated the creation of museums in Šibenik, Varaždin and Slavonska Požega (Humski, 1986: 8). These museums had a cultural and educational role: teaching history and regional heritage in order to strengthen the national consciousness. However, the constitution and the representation of national heritage experienced difficulties in a multinational political context aggravated by the domination of the majority nation in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Lukić, 1998: 35).

### **National history museums in Socialist Yugoslavia 1945-1990**

While a part of Yugoslavia, Croatia's capital had two national history museums: the Museum of the Revolution of the People of Croatia and the Museum of History, inheritor of the first National Museum of 1846. Museums of revolution have always formed a separate category in museum typology. Along with the monuments of the revolution, the memorials and institutions of the history of the revolution form a network supporting the narratives of the socialist revolution, nested within the theme of resistance to fascism. Redeployment, review, reorganization and even the closure or incorporation of other collections and museums of history were all publicly voiced prior to the fall of socialism and the break-up of Yugoslavia. In fact, in the 1980s, their relevance, based on the form in which they had been presented, was openly questioned. Therefore, the process of change had already begun, but further events hastened this peaceful transformation.

The latest issue of *Informatica museologica*, published by the Museum Documentation Centre of Yugoslavia (MDC), in the seminar section entitled "New museums and the new displays", organized in 1989, criticizes museums of the people's revolution and the labour movement (*Narodne revolucije i radničkog pokreta*). Critics point out that there are many of these museums, all under control of the Communist Party, with exhibitions carried out under their control, both in terms of design and in interpretation. The presentation of a selective national history, the importance given to World War II and the socialist revolution in detriment to other historical periods, was more and more highly criticized. The discourse of these museums is misappropriated, Gregory (1996: 29) suggests that "Message may continue to be projected to a changed society, which has quite different policies and goals from those of the society." Indeed, the narrative loses its meaning when not adapted to its context.

In the case of the Museum of the Revolution of the people of Croatia, in addition to presenting a selective national history according to the powers of the time, it occupied a building politicized by various regimes. Located downtown and designed by sculptor Ivan Meštrović as a monument to the glory of Yugoslavia's King in 1938, it was originally a Salon of Fine Art (*Dom likovnih umjetnosti*) (1938-1941), then a mosque (1941-1945), the Museum of the Liberation (1949-1955), the Museum of the Revolution and, finally, the Museum of the Revolution of the people of Croatia (1960 -1991). Since 1991, several projects, among them a *Great Croats Museum* and a Museum of the Army, were considered for this coveted place. Finally, it became the Croatian Association of Artists (*Hrvatsko društvo likovnih umjetnika-HDLU*). The issues that lead to its particular fate during the recent wars in Croatia reflect the complexity of the relationship between politics, ideology, war, arts, architecture and museums.

### **The national museums in Croatia after 1991**

In the 1990s, war forced the closure, transition and redeployment of museums. All institutions and museums needed to adapt to new realities: national independence and political, economical and cultural transition. These complex environments brought out questions of national history and heritage. Museums of the Revolution lost their relevance and have been transformed, dismantled or destroyed. For example, several Slovenian museums have been transformed. In 1994, in Ljubljana,

the Museum of Revolution became the Museum of Contemporary History and in Celje, the Museum of Recent History. Dismantlement implies the transfer of collections to another museum, mostly the history museum, and the closure of the original museum. This was the case for the Croatian Museum of Revolution; its collections were transferred to the History Museum. Destruction mostly affected museums in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while in 1994 the Museum of Revolution in Sarajevo became the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most of the Revolution Museums in Yugoslavia were founded in the 1950s, particularly those located in the region (*Zavičajni muzeji*), were divided into two parts: one on the history of the socialist revolution, the labour movement and World War II, and one on local heritage. In several cases, the ‘memorial’ collections were simply dismantled and transformed into regional museums.

In Slovenia, the revision of World War II and the Socialist period was conducted with an approach of continuity rather than rupture, in a more critical perspective. Thus, the permanent exhibition "The Slovenes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century", opened in 1996 at the National Museum of Contemporary History, presents the political, economical and cultural history of the nation. This exhibition sparked the conception of another exhibition titled "The Dark Side of the Moon" at the same institution. The latter focuses on what the first failed to present, namely totalitarianism in Slovenia between 1945 and 1990. In the second part of the 1990s, Slovenian history museums offered different points of view of the recent past.

However, there is a lack of review of critical artefacts and documents related to this period in contemporary history in Croatia. The Croatian History Museum, a museum that has repatriated the collections of the former Museum of the Revolution, instead offers the interpretation of more distant periods to build the grand narrative of the nation. An example of this can be found in exhibitions on heroes, symbols and the founding events of the Croatian nation, like the exhibition on Ban Jelačić, an emblematic character of the nation in the nineteenth century (The memories of the ban-the Jelačić legacy”, a historical exhibition, November 2009 - October 2011; “Josip Jelačić and the struggle for the Austria as the association of free nations”, and a section of exhibition “1848 in Croatia”, December 1998-may 1999). The museum, as a product of modernity, is a space of historical grand narratives and heritage, where the main hero is usually a nation, or, in the case of nation states, an ethnic group. The keyword is selection: the historical period, objects and characters are selected to create the image of the nation that the museum wants to present of the nation.

## **Conclusion**

The relationship between the national past and national museums in Croatia is ambiguous. National history is very important to the political public discourse, but on the other hand, museums of contemporary art and of archaeology are being built. In fact, even if a nation’s history takes up a great deal of public space, the Croatian History Museum in Zagreb, successor of the first National Museum, is still in an inadequate building, lacking space and unfinished. Only recently (2007), has the government approved the project of relocation and redeployment of the museum to an old industrial tobacco factory, recognized as an industrial heritage site. This project is currently underway.

There is dichotomy in processing museum material, and in the selection and interpretation of the past. On one hand, there is the oldest history: new museums are built about the ancient past, for example the Museum of Krapina Neanderthals aims to educate about prehistoric life. (Krapina is the Palaeolithic site discovered at the end of nineteenth century) or Naronia Archaeological Museum in Vid, inaugurated in 2007. On the other hand, we have the future, personified by the Museum of Contemporary Art (MSU) in Zagreb. Recent history, however, like that of the twentieth century, is somewhere in between. It is still under the influence of the current political ideology and social climate, hence causing controversy. The least controversy is related to the archaeological collections of antiquity and, even more so, to prehistoric times.

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MSU), opened in 2010, is the most important national museum project in Croatia since the creation of the new state. The successful implementation of MSU did not go smoothly; it was affected by political competition as confirmed by various sources and articles from the period preceding and following the construction of the museum (newspapers, 2008-2010). The creation of national museums funded by the government is an occasion and a place for political promotion. If you leave out the political disagreements, this can be explained by a number of historical, cultural and professional factors. Historical: the first museum of Modern Art was founded in Zagreb in 1954. Although it is in an inadequate building (a residential house in the upper town), the museum's professional work, collecting during its tenure, and new artistic practice on the national (Croatian and Yugoslavian) and international levels, has led to it becoming an indispensable institution of contemporary art in this area. In fact, the contemporary art museum in Yugoslavia was built in Beograd (founded in 1958 opened in 1965). Its mission was to cover the contemporary art of the country. The tradition and collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, and its national and international recognition enabled its continuity, and contributed to its final realization. In other countries created by the division of Yugoslavia: Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Serbia, there are projects for such national museums: *Museum ars aevi* in Sarajevo and a project of Contemporary Art Museum redeployment and reconstruction in Belgrade.

Despite the differences between each nation-state formed in the 1990s, there are similarities in the museum field. Interest in museums of contemporary art is a symptom of new trends and changes in society. At the same time, we can see a paradox, because actual artistic works on the present and recent past are a reaction to problems in society, revealing the actual situation. In some ways, recent history is more present in contemporary art museums than in history museums. Recent artistic practices and interdisciplinary approaches, along with the new aesthetics, suggest individual views of the past, but also propose pluralistic narratives on the collective (national) past.

The evolution of national museums follows the political, cultural, territorial, demographical and technological changes of the society they evolve within. Institutions change names, move to new buildings, lose artefacts and acquire new objects for their collections. They sometimes lose themselves in successive ruptures or redeployments, as was the case with the first national museum in Croatia. History is selective, and the history of museums confirms it. Comparative studies, such as this one, allow for the tracking, comparing and better understanding of the changing puzzle that is European museum history.

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