

MEMORY SPACE: MEMORIAL COMPLEX STARO SAJMISTE

Professional paper

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Abstract

This paper will present project for the Memorial complex Staro Sajmiste. The project is proposal for mapping this place of remembrance. Silent remembrance of Belgrade citizens, on the Holocaust which happened in the area of Staro Sajmiste, is a consequence of not facing the past. The concept of this project is based on analysis of the Holocaust, in terms of terminology and phenomenology, using the theoretical platforms which deal with the issue. The power and the violence will be shown as initiators of evil. The memorial complex will be dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust and the crimes committed in the period 1941 - 1944 in this area. The ambition is to confront the Serbian society with the void created after the twilight of civilization. The project proposes the solution for the area of the Staro Sajmiste, including the river band, as a visual signifier where the suffering of a large number of Jews, Roma and Serbs, as well as other nations occurred.

Keywords: *design, Holokaust, power, violence, memorial complex, place of remembrance, Staro sajmist.*

1. Staro sajmist

Belgrade remained silent at the traumatic events that have deeply entered into the collective memory of the inhabitants of this Balkan city. Dim circumvention of the awareness, transporting it to the field of silent memory, and almost forgetting it completely is a consequence of the difficulties facing the past. The difficulties come from the fact that in the area of Belgrade, called Staro Sajmiste, the Holocaust occurred. In the book – Staro Sajmiste, The Place of Remembrance, Forgetfulness and Disputes, Jovan Byford gives a thorough description of the history of the Staro Sajmiste.¹

Sajmiste represented a symbol of technological and industrial progress, as well as a symbol of demonstration of domestic and foreign policies- circles of power. It was announcing a new era that was suddenly and traumatically interrupted by a Second World War. Ambience ensemble, had a function of the exhibition space, remained a symbol of power in the next historical phase even though the function changed. Henri-Pierre Jeudy argues that the symbolism of space is reflexive.²

¹ Jovan Bajford, Staro sajmište – Mesto sećanja, zaborava i sporenja, Beogradski centar za ljudska prava, Beograd, 2011.

² Henri-Pierre Jeudy, „Simbolička funkcija i dizajn“, Kultura i dizajn, Ješa Denegri, ur. (Beograd: SIC, 1985), 139-147.



Figure 1 – Staro sajmist, 1936.

The bombing of Belgrade was not fatal for Sajmiste, the buildings in this area have suffered almost no damage. The area itself became a part of Croatia as a result of administrative divisions of Yugoslavia. In December 1941, Sajmiste was transformed into prison camp. Since the camp was located on the territory of NDH, and under the administration of the local command in Zemun (in German Semlin), the camp was named Judenlager Semlin.

By the end of 1941, the camp has accepted more than 5,000 prisoners, generally Jews from Belgrade and Banat.³

³ Jovan Bajford, Staro sajmište – Mesto sećanja, zaborava i sporenja, Beogradski centar za ljudska prava, Beograd, 2011, 36.

It should be noted that a large number of prisoners died of inhuman conditions, in particular by very cold winter of '41/'42. In the spring of 1942, the occupying authorities have learned that the planned deportation of the Jews was canceled thus the local administration has devised the solution of the Jewish problem. In the summer of 1942, Serbia has been named one of the first territory cleansed of Jews (Judenrein). The Staro Sajmište area marked the launch of a wider plan to extinguish European Jews.⁴ As a direct result of such action, in a period of just about a year and a half, approximately 15,000 Jews were killed in Serbia, 7,000 of whom in Staro Sajmište.



Figure 2 – The prisoners of the Staro Sajmište camp

In 1942, the concentration camp at Staro Sajmište changed its purpose and became Anhaltelager Semiln or detention camp for, largely, Serbian hostages, political prisoners and partisans. Over 31,000 prisoners passed through the camp in the period of almost two years, from 1942 to 1944. The prisoners were mainly Serbs, but furthermore Croats, Bosnians, Greeks, Albanians. Approximately 10,000 detainees were killed in that camp. Only after the Allied bombing of Belgrade in 1944, when the camp Sajmište got hit and destroyed, the camp was disbanded.

2. Trauma: Forceful damage

Phenomenological as well as terminological consideration of the Holocaust forms the basis for the development of the conceptual design of the project, which should aid in the process of healing of the Serbian society. Analysis of the Holocaust and the related terms represent a context in which the project should be considered. Terms that are related to the Holocaust - the power and violence - will be presented as initiators of evil from the theoretical point of view.

Staro sajmište represents the scar, the absence of meaning, the endless emptiness of what was and what can hardly ever be restored. This is, perhaps, the cause of the decades-long complications preventing Serbian society to adequately mark this area in the light the traumatic events that have occurred.

Holocaust (*wide-ranging fire*, in Hebrew HaShoah - disaster, destruction) is the term used to indicate a systematic governmental persecution and genocide of the different ethnic, religious and politically ineligible groups of people during World War II. The theories that tend to explain the Holocaust are very different regarding the narrative of a *universal evil* or *universal human crisis*. One of these theories is the Zygmund Bauman's theory, which is based on the thesis that the Holocaust was a mistake and not a product of modern society.⁵ After the Holocaust, civilization now includes death camps among its material, moral, the spiritual heritage. According to Bauman, one of the theories that are often used when one wants to define the Holocaust is that the Holocaust was the breaking point of European antisemitism. The Holocaust is associated with very similar records from the past that describe a centuries-long legal discrimination, ghettos, pogroms and persecution of the Jews living in Europe. It is alleged that the mass systematic extermination was due to the temporary suspension of civilized human behavior that can be characterized as normal.⁶ This never before seen terror, entered into the collective memory, explained as the denial of progress.

This kind of evil was not possible without violence arising out of power. Hannah Arendt makes a clear distinction between terms such as *power, force, strength, authority and violence*.⁷ Arendt interprets these terms as separate phenomena, and points out that misperception regarding these terms, thus reducing them to a single meaning, arises from the conviction that the most important political question is *of who rules whom*.⁸ Power, force, authority and violence are indeed the terms that indicate the means by which man rules over man. Actually, it's about power over life. Within this context, Arendt defines the meaning of these terms. The term power corresponds to not only the human ability to act, but to

5 Zygmund Bauman, "Sociology after Holocaust", The British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 39 (4), 1988, 469 – 497.

6 Ibid, 475.

7 Hana Arendt, O nasilju, Alexandria Press, Beograd, 2002, 45–71.

8 Ibid, 47.

4 Ibid, 43.

act in compliance. When it is stated that someone is in power, the fact of the matter is that he or she is authorized by others from the group to implement that power. Force is a term that is used in everyday language as a synonym for violence, predominantly when talking about the means of coercion. The term authority corresponds to unquestionably recognition by those who are expected to obey in every sense, without the need for coercion or persuasion. And finally, the term violence is distinguished by its instrumental characteristic. *Violence* is linked to power because the tools of violence are formed and used for amplification of natural power until the moment they replace it. Arendt argues that nothing is more common than the combination of *violence and power - violence and power trigger evil*.

Every behavior and any form of implementation of human life, even evil, does not come by means of biological predispositions, it always leaves possibility of choice; in other words, - power and choice are interchangeable.⁹ Giorgio Agamben defines human life as processes of living that are not predefined by some higher biological force, they represent possibilities above all power.

Michel Foucault defined power as the right over life and death. This right is derived from the *patria potestas*.¹⁰ The 'right over life and death' is, in fact, the right of imposition of the death and allowing life.¹¹ Power is exercised by detracting. Withdrawal of income, seizure of products or services. Every aspect of endangering human life entails the right to terminate the life that puts in harm another, even if the stake is a human life itself. Foucault defines managing of life on two levels. Control over body as a machine and, on another level, observing the body infused with the mechanics of life, the body that is the basis of biological processes of birth, death, health, longevity of life and so on. In other words, the body discipline and regulation of the population represent the unique entity over which power can be implemented. The Nazis built up a system of mechanisms for managing life. Evil is not created due to the number of criminals or because of the public opinion, but for an elaborate and well developed tools for

the implementation of the evil that has increased the power of criminals.

Bauman suggests that the Holocaust should be seen as a failure of civilization which by its nature has a morbid tendencies.¹² The mass killings that occurred in the history teach us to prevent such events. It is therefore necessary to have a strategic approach to subvert of the collective recollection that comes from history. Pierre Nora¹³ dealt with the relationship between history and recollection. Nora was interested in those instances (*lieux de mémoire*¹⁴) where points of recollections are crystallizes in a particular historical moment, where consciousness discontinuities from the past. In these instances, recollection is torn in such a way that it represents a contrast to the sense of historical continuity. According to Nora, history and recollection are concepts that cannot be put in the same plane; they stand in opposition. History is only reconstruction under the influence of the collective recollection. Recollection is absolute, history is relative. He believes that history would like to keep the sites of remembrance, but would prefer to delete the content, or what those sites stand for.

The moment when remembrance occurs is the moment when, due to the time elapsed, there is huge deposit of intimate, personal recollections. History and society are trying to suppress memories by creating archives, organized commemorations, and celebrations so the recollection no longer seems natural. Points of remembrance exist in three sublimated forms - material, symbolic and functional. These three aspects are always in coexistence and act together. In order to function there must be a desire to remember, and that is how they differ from the points of history. Points of remembrance have multiple characteristics that make possible the relief mapping, setting limits and dictate the scope of understanding.

12 Zygmund Bauman, "Sociology after Holocaust", The British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 39 (4), 1988, 469 – 497.

13 Pierre Nora, „Between Memory and History: Les lieux de Mémoire“, Representations (26), Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, 1989, 7–24.

14 *Lieux de mémoire* is the concept which developed Pierre Nora in the period between 1984 and 1992. History is written under the pressure of the collective memory. *Lieux de mémoire* may be subject, monument, archive or geographical findings. The building became *lieux de mémoire* when runs away from oblivion and appears when it is difficult to identify the memory related to a specific location. These are the places where memories crystallize; where there is historical continuity despite the collective memory. The memory can not happen by itself a society.

9 Giorgio Agamben, "Form of life", Radical Thought in Italy – A Potential Politics, Virno, Paolo & Michael Hardt, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 150-155.

10 Mišel Fuko, „Pravo smrti i moć nad životom“, Volja za znanjem – Istorija seksualnosti I, Jelena Stakić, prev. (Loznica: Karpos, 2006), 150-194.

11 Ibid, 152.

3. Design solution

Concept. The memorial complex of Staro Sajmište would be devoted to the Holocaust that had occurred in Belgrade as well as to other later on crimes committed in this area. Conceptual design is based on the affirmation of urban continuity with the goal to protect the remaining buildings in the cultural and historical entirety.¹⁵ The starting point for the development of the concept, based on which the project was developed, is the desire to fully utilize the symbolic function of design and be considered as an open air museum. The memorial complex would contain and kept a collection of objects, in this case architectural structures, and provide the space for exhibitions and research. Facilities would be classified, protected and preserved.

The idea is to use design solution to create a space that would with its symbolism be able to preserve the memory of the Holocaust in Belgrade, and allow visitors to comprehend the Holocaust in general. The paradox occurs. The museum has to preserve and protect the items that are exposed to the ravages of time that they would remain available for future generations. In order to accomplish that, museum must remove objects from regular use, in order to give it back once again to the people, during expositions. In this process, there is a transformation going on that makes objects lose the content.¹⁶ The fundamental paradox of the museum, in terms of a spatial area, lies in the relationship between narrative and structures. Once the objects are withdrawn from use and positioned in the museum, they become exhibits. Jeffrey Karl Ochsner points out that the task of the Holocaust Museum is primarily to display facts about the incident that led to the Holocaust.¹⁷ In other words,

it must clearly and comprehensively expose those objects that convey true narrative and offer physical evidence about the events that occurred to the public. It is crucial for the Museum of the Holocaust that the authenticity is preserved; the difference between the reconstruction and the artifact must be absolute. The design concept of the Memorial complex Staro Sajmište adopts this attitude.

Design. Floorplan of the complex is divided into two zones: a park-museum zone (which includes the long-standing objects) and a zone for newly constructed buildings along the river. The design of the park-museum works on two levels, symbolic and functional. In the floorplan you can see preserved buildings surrounded by water, walkways and ramps, then obelisks and massive triangular forms. At the symbolic level, it represents stylized German uniform. The idea is to represent those who have left a mark. Between uniform patterns the area is simply covered with concrete. The scattered concrete obelisks in the lakes actually represent victims of genocide. On the concrete space between the lakes, massive triangular concrete elements are scattered, repeating alternately in space, giving the impression of broken glass, shattered hopes and so on. The ramps and gangways that are raised off the floor and are provided for visiting the park are important part. With this design the park exudes a dark, dreary and unpleasant atmosphere. The feeling of powerlessness. The elements incorporated into the design suggest the smoke and fire as symbols of the extermination, torture and human suffering. This atmosphere reflects the despair, without a trace of optimism as an attempt of the identification with the detainees. Emotional and instinctive stimulus itself would not have done the job. It is therefore necessary to inform visitors of the Holocaust and subsequent crimes. Because of this, the project envisions a second, spatially smaller part of the complex, which offers hope and informs the visitors. The element of hope occurs at the end of the visit to the park because all the ramps lead to a large plateau in front of the newly built structures. Plateau is spacious and wide with a view of the river so it could give visitors a chance to take a little break before they visit newly built structures located along the river. The plan envisages the construction of five identical objects that should contribute to the unity of the form, and to the monumental/memorial atmosphere. The structures are simple and colossal, made of concrete without fine finishing.

15 Of the old building which has been preserved there are few. Central tower, which is the most visible object in the area – landmark – the management of the fair, the Italian pavilion, the Czechoslovak pavilion, Turkish pavilion, Hungarian Pavilion, entrance building and Spasic foundation. At the area there are a number of illegally constructed buildings that should be demolished.

16 Pierre Nora, „Between Memory and History: Les lieux de Mémoire“, Representations (26), Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, 1989, 7–24.

17 Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, “Understanding the Holocaust through the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Journal of Ar-

chitectural Education, Vol 48 (4), 1995, 240–249.

4. Conclusion

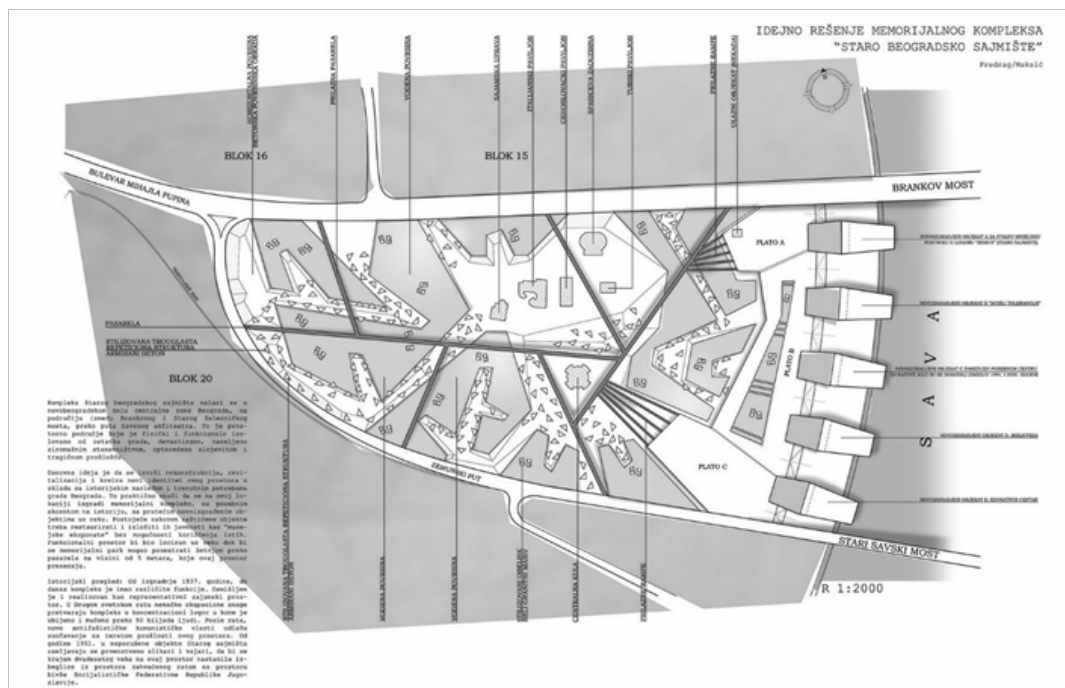
The design concept of the project is built the notion that this place of remembrance should primarily be reserved for a memorial complex dedicated to the Holocaust in Belgrade. There is no reason for restoration of pre-war appearance of Staro Sajmište, because it would, in a certain way, obliterate historical facts. It is unacceptable that this area of suffering,

recollection, and anguish become a cultural elite's gathering place or a part of a larger megalomaniac project. Thus, the idea promoted by this project is to convert Staro Sajmište into a memorial complex dedicated to the Holocaust and all the crimes committed in the period from 1941 to 1944, hence to confront the society with the emptiness formed after the dusk civilization. It would be a place of contemplation and intuitive comprehension of the events that took place at that location.

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Appendix



Appendix A – Floor plan of the conceptual design of the Memorial complex Staro Sajmište.



Appendix B – A perspective view of a park-museum.



Appendix C – Perspective view of the newly constructed pavilions and other design elements.

MESTO SEĆANJA: MEMORIJALNI KOMPLEKS STARO SAJMIŠTE

Sažetak

U ovom radu prikazaću projekat Memorijalnog kompleksa Staro sajmište. Projekat je predlog mapiranja ovog mesta sećanja. Nemo sećanje Beograđana na Holokaust, koji se odigrao na prostoru Starog sajmišta jeste, posledica problema suočavanja sa prošlošću. Projekat se konceptualno zasniva na analizi Holokausta kako terminološki tako i fenomenološki, a sve u svetlu teorijskih platformi koje su se bavile ovom tematikom. Moć i nasilje biće prikazani kao pokretači zla. Memorijalni kompleks biće posvećen Holokaustu i sećanjima na zločine počinjene u periodu 1941. – 1944. godine na ovom prostoru, sa ambicijom suočavanja srbijanskog društva sa prazninom koja je nastala posle sumraka civilizacije. Projekat predviđa rešenje prostorne celine Starog sajmišta, uključujući i priobalni deo, kao vrstu vizuelnog označitelja mesta na kome se desilo stradanje velikog broja Jevreja, Roma, Srba, kao i drugih naroda.

Ključne riječi: dizajn, Holokaust, moć, nasilje, memoerijalni kompleks, mesto sećanja, Staro sajmište.

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