

THE SPIRIT OF THE PLACE NAMED KUMROVEC

Article about importance of a place of memory in the context of revalorization of cultural heritage

Marija Kuli_i, assistant
Department for Arts and Restoration, University of Dubrovnik, Croatia
email: mkulisic@unidu.hr

Abstract: The paper will try to represent the spirit of the place named Kumrovec which happened to be both, an open-air museum of croatian traditional architecture and place where Josip Broz Tito, the president of ex Yugoslavia was born. Because of many political changes that happened recently, the place was changed from the most visited to almost forgotten. The case study that was done in 2004., as an international project between Faculty of Philosophy University of Zagreb, Croatia and University of Bergen, Norway showed that spirit of the place can be switched and meanings multiply but it can't be dead by request. People and the place itself keep it alive or more precisely phenomenon of collective memory, its tangible and intangible parts. The place stands for reality that is recognized in collective mind, what gives possibility for individuals to feel part of the group and identify themselves. On the other hand users form the place and its spirit depending on their beliefs and values.

1. Introduction

This text deals with the term “place of memory” and the presented example of ethno-village Kumrovec, an open-air museum mentioned in the text below, and different phenomena concerning this place represent a mixture shaped by active participation of various groups of “users” in which memories and reminiscences, history and myths are intermingled.

In the first part of the text I tried to define the term “place of memory” more closely by explaining the term “memory culture” as well, which represents our attitude towards the past formed and developed through such places.

Afterwards is presented the example of ethno-village Kumrovec which on one hand represents an open-air museum and on the other hand a birth place of Josip Broz Tito, a marshal and a statesman who put his mark onto the whole second half of the twentieth century in the Balkans. Through the data gathered by field research of the celebration of Day of Youth, former official celebration of Tito's birthday, it was tried to present and analyze the specific spirit of Kumrovec without which it would be difficult to understand the multilayered meanings and capacity of place memories. Research conducted in May 2004 within a larger international project named Political Places In Change in which professors and students of the Department for ethnology and cultural anthropology, from the Faculty Of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb together with researchers from Norway from the Department for cultural studies and art history of University of Bergen took part.

In the last chapter it was tried to analyze the presented data and include them into some theoretical theses which should clear up the role of "users" in the process of forming a place of memory.

2. A place of memory

At the very beginning the context in which we are in should be cleared up when discussing a place of memory. There is something which J. Assman calls memory culture and which is primarily based on our relationship to the past and according to him the past itself is created when we establish a relationship with it. In order to make it true two conditions must be met: a) the past must not vanish completely, there must be some evidence of it, b) that evidence must possess a quality of being different when compared with the "today" or to put it different we are conscious of a change only if older forms are preserved (Assman 2000). Furthermore, according to the same author in the memory culture there are two kinds of memories: communicational and cultural memories. Communicational memories comprise recent history and memories of one whole generation while cultural memories have firm roots in the past and are connected to the remaining symbolic figures. It is not a river that takes an individual from the outside but the world of objects that people create from their inner self. In that case an area, certain places, even landscapes can serve as media of cultural memories. (Assman 2000).

If a place can serve as a medium for cultural memories it is important to define that term, too. According to P. Nora (1984) a place represents a multidimensional spot in which memory is stored and crystallized and where traces of continuity are felt. According to the same author it is a recent phenomenon which comes into existence because memory surroundings are no longer there.

We can also state that a place, among other things, represents a space in which memories and reminiscences, collective and individual, history and myths are intermingled. It seems that a space is the main repository while discovering multilayered meanings and interrelations among all of the above stated categories. Modern memory is primarily archival, relying on precise traces, very clear material remains, concrete recordings and vivid pictures (Nora 1984) so it is not surprising that a place which was a strictly concretized term is a subject which demands additional research and explanations of numerous relations imposed by the syntagm "place of memory".

For all the above stated reasons it may be good to start with defining and understanding the meaning of tridimensionality of a place of memory mentioned by P. Nora. Places of memory are at the same time material, symbolic and functional and they differ only in degrees of these three meanings which always coexist. (Nora 1984).

A material place like Kumrovec becomes a memory place only if it adopts symbolic aspects like commemorations, in this case celebration of the Day of Youth, and gets a functional aspect like being a monument to Josip Broz. Apart from that it is important that there is a will for remembering because without that goal places of memory would be nothing more than plain historical places (Nora 1984).

The less a memory is experienced from the inside the more there is need for visible media and tangible reminders of the existence which is alive only through them. The great Cicero once said that there is great strength of memories in places and it is not

without reason that memorizing techniques are based on them. Memories have a great need for places, they tend to be linked to a certain spot (Assmann 2000). In order to understand this we will try to analyze it more deeply by means of an example.

2.1 THE EXAMPLE OF KUMROVEC

A village named Kumrovec situated not far from Zagreb is an example of a place showing complete tridimensionality. It contains material, functional and symbolic meanings of space. We speak about village atmosphere with double function – it is at the same time an open-air museum and the birth place of Josip Broz Tito, the leader of antifascist movement in the Second World War and the president of former Yugoslavia. It has been a museum since 1952, when the idea was born, coming into existence as a means of celebrating life achievements of the man who created social and political system of that time and with that goal in mind his birth house was turned into a museum. At first the object functions as an independent institution named Memorial Museum Of Josip Broz Tito but later in 1973 an idea of establishing an ethno-park is born which resulted in buying off of other objects of traditional architecture. It was taken care of revitalisation of the village so for the residents whose houses were bought off new ones were built nearby and the village exists and lives until today. The place was used for celebrations of the Day of Youth, which was a national holiday at that time organized on the date of Tito's birthday. Celebrations lasted for many days and thousands of people, primarily the young, took part in them. A lot of sports and youth events took place during celebration days as well as occasional openings, speeches etc.. A few years later the project grows in proportions now comprising Memorial park Kumrovec which included two additionally built architectural objects: Memorial house and Political school. Objects contain congress and sports halls, an amphitheatre, a library, a movie auditorium, a picture library, a film library and a pool which served for organizing various events and until 1981 the Political school was a part of the Memorial park. During the nineties the buildings served as a shelter for refugees which resulted in considerable devastation. When looking at various things that this place had to offer we can gain some insight into the spectrum of meanings and multilayered memories linked to it from the very beginnings. After the Croatian War of Independence from the nineties in the previous century until today the place has become a symbol of the detested political system, in this case communist state, which apart from social and political order symbolizes key values of that time. It should be stressed that since the very beginnings the museum was meant to be a means of promotion of socialist ideas and state and that it served for reconstruction of “heroic history”. The founding of the museum was supported by something which Hobsbawm calls *inventing traditions* which always tend to establish continuity with corresponding “heroic past” (Hobsbawm 1982). Here the terminological shift from Memorial museum to Memorial park must be pointed out and clearly explained. According to J. Young (1993) memorials remind us of someone’s death or of tragic events and provide a place for mourning while “monuments” basically celebrate victories and heroic individuals. A memorial can be a day, a conference or space but not necessarily a monument. A monument on the other hand is a kind of a memorial and it is traditionally defined as seemingly solid continuity which remains insensitive to time and

space while memorials are fragile, changeable and depend on others to be able to live (Young 1993).

Today's Kumrovec seems to have taken the meaning of a memorial reminding us not only of the death of an individual but of the whole political and social system which marked the second half of the twentieth century. Life of Kumrovec depends on others or even better it depends on different users, from residents to visitors, who give it meanings but also on the authorities which make decisions about its future so it may prove useful to state some of the results of the research conducted in Kumrovec when celebrations of the Day of Youth (May 25th) took place – in 2004 these celebrations took place on Saturday, May 22. Research was conducted within a larger international project named Political Places In Change in which professors and students of the Department for ethnology and cultural anthropology, from the Faculty Of Philosophy in Zagreb together with researchers from Norway from the University of Bergen took part. We must say that the celebrations were not organized in the nineties and immediately after the Croatian War of Independence. Only a small number of visitors came at that time to Kumrovec but in 2000 when social democratic party, a direct descendant of the communist party, won the elections number of visitors increases. Memories and the space reconstructed Kumrovec memorial at the beginning of a new millennium and completed functional and symbolic aspect of the place primarily through the celebration of the Day of Youth as a survivor of commemorating ceremony through which, according to P. Connerton (1989), the community recollects its identity.

Controversy of Kumrovec arises from the fact that the authorities are very well aware of the function of such commemorative places whose sole purpose is to create a feeling of common values and ideals as well as creation of collective memory as a foundation for a united polis (Young 1993). However, recent celebrations in Kumrovec are not, at least not for now, in service of creation of official state identity and represent an event of marginal importance. A place of memory discussed in this article is primarily the rest, the final form in which commemorative conscience within history survives and, as P. Nora (1984) explains it, it occurs because rituals have vanished from our society.

But what really happens in Kumrovec, what kind of people come to the annual celebrations and what are they trying to remember? How do residents of Kumrovec look at it? What is the opinion of younger generations towards it?

Some of the answers to these questions should be helpful while trying to understand the spirit of Kumrovec which is indispensable constructive element of a place of memory.

2.2 THE SPIRIT OF KUMROVEC

From the moment when the former Yugoslavia fell apart in the nineties ethno-village Kumrovec functioned as an open-air museum while Tito's birth house was presented as one in line of traditional objects which reconstruct traditional way of living of people from that area. Many objects were removed from the permanent exhibition of Tito's house like for the example the map which on one side shows Tito's war operations during the World War II and on the other side Tito's paths of peace. Sculptures from the park surrounding the villa Kumrovec were also removed in order not to provoke painful memories of some groups of people. Namely, during the time of changes, in the nineties, the already mentioned objects Memorial House and Political school suffered great

devastation by people for whom these objects and material remains of that time symbolized the whole detested political system so museum workers put away some of the remaining objects of cultural value into the museum depot.

According to the statements of the residents of Kumrovec during a year the ethno-village is visited by numerous guests above all by Slovene tourists. Celebration of the Day of Youth, former official celebration of Tito's birthday, takes place once a year and for the rest of the year the place is open to visitors of all kinds. People of Kumrovec see the celebration as an opportunity to sell their products which ensures them occasional income and as a part of tourist offer of Kumrovec.

The celebration of the Day of Youth 2004 was organized by the Society of Josip Broz Tito whose primary goal is to draw attention to the life and work of Josip Broz Tito. Members of the society as well as other visitors of the place are primarily former "partisans" from all areas of ex-Yugoslavia, the older generation who fought alongside Tito and for Tito's ideals and which spent their young days during the time when socialism flourished. They brought with them their children dressed like pioneers into blue caps and red neckerchiefs, the symbols which in some people caused nostalgia and in other ironic smiles. But there was one gentleman who did not fight with Tito and who spent his life in America but who was a member of Communist Party and Tito's worshipper. Those people who go to Kumrovec try to remind themselves of their youth and of the way of life which is forgotten and in some ways devaluated.

Besides them there were a few groups of younger generations. There were some members of the social democratic youth who were there for political reasons to prove their descendance from that political heritage but there were also some young people who were there just out of respect for that ideology. There were also some younger adolescents who tried to express their spirit of rebellion by using communist symbols although their knowledge of the ideology was very superficial. That day Kumrovec was visited by some members of sub cultural groups like punks who use communist symbols to express their negative attitude towards the fascism and in the end there were also some people who visited Kumrovec on that day just because they thought it would be fun.

The place is visited by school excursions during the whole year so some of them happened to be there during the celebration. All the students were born after the disintegration of former Yugoslavia so their knowledge about Tito and Kumrovec originates primarily from books, teachers and tales of their parents. The attitude of children at the age from 10 to 12 towards the place is directly influenced by the opinion of their parents and later to some degree of their teachers.

They don't carry the burden of history and they are indifferent to the fact that they happened to be in Kumrovec during a celebration because to them it was just one more parade. On the other hand students of the Kumrovec primary school 'Josip Broz' were not so indifferent because their school principal was worried that their taking part in celebration by exhibiting their own products and souvenirs would be interpreted as sympathizing with the former state order.

The myth of Tito which is present not only in the states arising out of former Yugoslavia but much wider throughout the world gives additional strength to Kumrovec. Symbols appearing at the celebration and objects displayed in his house are memory triggers which partly owe their strength to the myth of Tito. The objects from the past which can be bought in Kumrovec apart from souvenirs of a more modern production

become also a kind of memory triggers. There can be found military uniforms from the World War II, old photos and postcards, badges, old firearms, caps named 'titovka', red neckerchiefs, Tito's bust in various forms, techniques and materials, old books etc. They become objects of heritage because they communicate messages from the past in the present and preserve them for the future. (Maroevi_ 1993).



Figure 1. A young pioneer, Kumrovec, May 2004 (photo by K.Bežjak)

2.3 KUMROVEC AS A PLACE OF MEMORY

The phenomenon of Kumrovec is a perfect example of Nora's (1984) thesis that a place of memory arises from the game of history and reminiscences. The celebrations open a door into the past and through reminiscences and material evidence revives it in the present as a place where we can experience history in an authentic manner.

We can say that reminiscences shape our connections with the past and the way in which we remember things define us in the present. (Huysen 1995). That context adds additional weight to the value of places of memory because, as Young (1993) says, by sharing the illusion that memorial monuments will always be there to remind us of our past we turn our back to them and turn to them only then when it is suitable to us.

Things happening in Kumrovec can be defined as transitions between "cultural" and "communicational" memories. Namely, Kumrovec comprises aspect of venerating the memory of Josip Broz Tito which is a phenomenon that through death marks the difference between the past and today and on one hand represents "the communicational" because it is a general human form and "the cultural" in the measure in which it builds its mark bearers, rituals and institutions (Assmann 2000). It has already been mentioned that in Kumrovec there were mostly members of older generations whose life and youth are mostly almost forgotten and pushed to the margin. Through that element of connecting by venerating Tito's death the community defines its identity and confirms the basic reasons for existing of a certain place of memory. According to Nora P. (1984) the purpose of a place of memory is to stop time, to block the progress of forgetting, to fix a certain state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial so that a maximum amount of sense would be gathered in a minimal number of signs. It was precisely that what Tito's fellow partisans tried to do with the celebration of the Day of Youth in Kumrovec in 2004. However, according to J.R. Gillis (1996) old holidays and monuments have lost some of their commemorative strength and influence in making and maintaining of one vision of the past but they remain useful as times and places where groups with very different memories and experiences concerning certain events can come together, communicate and negotiate their differences among them.

Existence of the myth of Kumrovec contributes to creating a place of memory and through it creating of collective memory which according to some authors shows signs of both history and myth. It shows characteristics of a myth because the community shares tales and general way of thinking in which they can find their own identification and the characteristics of history because allegations are always somehow connected to the current events (Poole 2008).

By creating collective memory spaces monuments and memorials spread an illusion of collective memory and provide places where people can gather in order to create common past and by sharing experiences form communities to which the very activity of common remembering will become collective memory. When it becomes a ritual common remembering becomes an event for itself which should be shared and remembered (Young 1993). This makes clear that the relationship between a place of memory and collective memory is very strong and in today's society it can become decisive in survival of both the places and of the memory itself.

3. Instead of Conclusion

Today a lot of scientific works deal with subjects of collective memory and places of memory as a part of historical sciences although discussions have been broadened to an interdisciplinary area called studies of memory. Heritage and institutions which should take care of that heritage seem to have a decisive role in the process. Starting from the fact that memories need memory triggers in order to survive and those triggers are above all cultural heritage objects, we see that memories need to be linked to a certain space which can be a monument, a memorial, a museum, an archive etc. in order to become and remain a part of our cultural heritage. This gives additional values to studies dealing with concrete examples of cultural heritage and its role in the process of remembering and in creating collective memories. It could lead to revalorization of some cultural heritage places and to putting them into the context of the modern world which in the long term may result in increased interest in preservation and maintenance of cultural heritage. We can apply to the whole cultural heritage the rule which P. Nora (1984) applies to a place of memory which says that it lives and survives only thanks to its ability to transform and to remain meaningful always thriving with new and unpredictable branches.

REFERENCES

- Assmann, Jan. 2000. *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*. München: Beck.
- Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How society remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gillis, John R. 1996. *Commemoration: The Politics of National Identity*. Princetone: Princetone University Press.
- Hobsbawn, Eric. 1982. Introduction: Inventing Tradition. In: E. Hobsbawn and T.Ranger (eds). *The Invention of Tradition*. Canto.
- Huysen, Andreas. 1995. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Maroevi_, Ivo. 1993. *Uvod u muzeologiju*. Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, Zavod za informacijske studije Odsjeka za informacijske znanosti.
- Nora, Pierre. 1984. "Entre mémoire et histoire: la problématique des lieux". In: Nora Pierre (org). *Les lieux de mémoire*. Vol 1 La République. Paris: Gallimard: xvii-xlii.
- N._krbi_ Alempijevi_ and K. Mathiesen Hjemdahl (eds). 2006. *O Titu kao mitu: proslava Dana mladosti u Kumrovcu*. Collection of papers. Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet: Srednja Europa.
- Poole, Ross. 2008. Memory, history and the claims of the past. In: *Memory Studies 2008:1*, SAGE Journals:149-166.
- Young, James. 1993. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press.