



Memory Lab Workshop in Sarajevo

'Wake up Europe, Sarajevo Calling' – Connecting Local History and International Perspectives

Organizers: History Museum Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo) / crossborder factory (Berlin / Sarajevo) / Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft (Munich)
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□ In the framework of "Memory Lab – Trans-European Exchange Platform on History and Remembrance", the History Museum Bosnia and Herzegovina organized in June 2017 in Sarajevo, in cooperation with "crossborder factory" (Berlin/Sarajevo) and "Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft", the workshop "'Wake up Europe, Sarajevo Calling' – Connecting Local History and International Perspectives". It gathered curators of the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as curators, historians, educators and architects from the Western Balkans and wider Europe. Among the participants were for example representatives of the Buchenwald Memorial, the National Museums of Northern Ireland, the House of European History in Brussels, the Shoah Memorial in Paris, the City Museum of Graz, the National Museum for Contemporary History in Ljubljana, and the Department for Museology and Heritage Management of the University of Zagreb. The participants had been partially chosen

by direct invitation, partially through an Open Call which had been published on the websites of the organizers.

The aim of the workshop was to reflect and to work on the existing exhibition "Besieged Sarajevo" in the History Museum, related to the siege of Sarajevo 1992-1995, in order to elaborate concrete ideas and recommendations for its further development. This workshop is one step within a larger and longer process which is currently in its initial stage, and through which the History Museum wishes to develop and rethink the exhibition "Besieged Sarajevo" which has been inaugurated in 2003. The initiative is also an illustration of the proactive efforts of the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina to take a stand in the cultural landscape of the city and the country, despite the difficulties which arise from the fact that the History Museum is one of the seven cultural state institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina which since the war and the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995 are situated in a political vacuum, without proper funding and with no state-institution being in charge for them.

The two-days-workshop included several steps: After mutual presentation of the participants, presentation of the Museum and individual exploration of the exhibition "Besieged Sarajevo", the group shared and discussed first impressions, reflections and questions regarding the exhibition. On this basis the participants, first in parallel groups and then in plenary, worked on four dimensions of the exhibition – narratives and interpretation; objects; space a lay-out; educational activities – in order to make an inventory analysis regarding these topics and discuss potential changes and developments in the domains. After this, the participants, partially in working groups and partially in plenary, discussed the question what should be the role of the exhibition today, more than 20 years after the end of the siege, and tackled some more specific questions, as how to deal with sensitive questions and how to (re)present the international dimensions of the siege within the exhibition. At the end, the participants gathered their conclusions regarding the further development of the exhibition, shared their personal impressions regarding the workshop, and discussed how the cooperation could be continued in the next steps of the process of redesigning the "Besieged Sarajevo" exhibition.

The main conclusions of the workshop can be summarized as follows:

1) The participants agreed that the current exhibition is very powerful and well thought, because its narrative is about Every-day-life, creativity and survival of citizens of Sarajevo during the siege. This is developed around authentic objects that were donated to the Museum by citizens from Sarajevo, while the exhibition remains distant from ethnicized and politicized narratives and leaves enough space for the visitors for own opinions and interpretations, and also transmits an universal message about human resilience and the "art of survival" in times of war. The participants emphasized that it is important to keep the main concept of the exhibition, even more so as in general interpretations of history and the memories of the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina are on the one hand very ethnicized and on the other hand very divided and antagonistic. This means that the culture of history is dominated by different ethno-national narratives that are antagonistic and mutually exclusive, and that make it also difficult to talk about certain topics within the spaces where these ethno-national narratives are dominating. The History Museum, as all other organisations dealing with history and memory, is situated in the field of tensions, where spaces for other approaches and for dialogue are rare. This makes it for the History Museum even more important to remain and become even more such an open space, but at the same time illustrates also the difficulties to do so.

2) The participants therefore agreed that it is important to preserve the main concept and narrative of the exhibition, and on this basis to think about developments, re-arrangements and additions. Regarding the latter, various ideas and suggestions were articulated and discussed during the workshop, which concerned first the exhibition itself, as for example:

- To combine the exposed authentic objects with testimonies from persons who used them, in order to better understand how these objects were used and what they meant for their users, and in order to stronger connect the exhibited objects to human stories related to the siege.
- To ensure the conservation of the photos, which are besides the objects a central part of the exhibition, but which are sometimes in a bad shape, and to increase their visibility by the rearrangement of their layout.
- To organize a clearer structure of the exhibition and its different sections (cultural life during the siege, living conditions, etc.) through spatial rearrangements and/or creating an itinerary within the exhibition, in order to provide the visitor with more orientation.
- To add explaining elements, as now the descriptions next to the objects and photos are very short. One way to add explanatory elements for the understanding of the siege would be to develop and place a tridimensional map of the city of Sarajevo within the exhibition space through which the geographical situation of the town during the siege could be visualized, and which could become an essential orientation-piece in the space by inter-connecting it with the exposed items, for example through marking the places on the map that appear on photos shown in the exhibition.
- To introduce audiovisual elements which are currently missing, as videos or films, which show every-day-life during the siege and voices of citizens about their experiences during the siege. Possibilities would be to record testimonies from persons who experienced the siege and to show them on video screens, and also to project the documentary film "Miss Sarajevo" from Bill Carter from 1995, which is itself a historical document from the period of the siege and shows the everyday-life and the "creative survival" during the siege.
- To develop the international aspects of the siege within the exhibition, especially regarding four topics: the commitment of civil society actors and municipalities in various European countries which showed solidarity with Sarajevo by collecting and delivering food and other items, organizing protests, helping refugees, etc.; the presence and role of the UN in the town during the siege; stories about inhabitants from Sarajevo who left the town during the siege and their lives in exile in other countries; reactions within Sarajevo to the international community and its attitudes related to the siege. These aspects could for example be developed through testimonies (recording of interviews for example with persons of other countries who got involved in solidarity actions, and with UN-soldiers who were in the town during the siege).
- To develop one section within the exhibition which connects the siege of Sarajevo with other (historical and current) events and situations of violence, suffering, resilience and survival, in order to increase the universal message of the exhibition.

3) Other important ideas and suggestions articulated during the workshop concerned activities around and in connection with the exhibition, as for example:

- To continue to develop education activities in connection with the exhibition and to elaborate additional educational material (for example around comic strips who talk about the siege).
- To stronger connect the exhibition to the other parts of the Museum and with other exhibitions that would resonate with the "Besieged Sarajevo" exhibition – for example with an exhibition about "Common life in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina", which would articulate a historical panorama of social relations and interactions of people living in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the centuries.

- To increase the interactivity with the public and visitors of the exhibitions, for example by regular audience surveys or by the organization of focus groups with inhabitants from Sarajevo, also in order to better understand the needs of the public and to identify and attract additional target groups which for the moment don't go to the museum.
- To connect the exhibition with the urban space of Sarajevo, or formulated differently: to bring the town to the Museum and to bring the Museum into the town – for example by organizing walking tours about the siege which start or end at the Museum, to develop a walking-tour-map / leaflet related to memory sites of the siege in the town, to create an app about siege-related sites in the city that are also connected with the Museum, or to create a "mobile Museum" by developing a suitcase with objects from the Museum with which guides or curators would go to schools or public spaces in town.
- To organize more workshops, panel discussions, etc. around the exhibition, also about sensitive topics which are not so much talked about in relation to the siege, and which would emphasize the "space of dialogue"-dimension of the Museum.
- To take measures which will contribute to support and strengthen the scientific, cultural, moral and political authority and legitimacy of the Museum: It was especially proposed to create a Scientific Research Committee of local and international experts, and also a "Friends of the History Museum"-network. Within the exhibition-space could also be created a "Research corner" with literature and additional material about the siege of Sarajevo for interested visitors.

Regarding the suggestions and ideas elaborated during the workshop, the participants agreed that they should not be realized through one "big move" all in the same moment, but rather step by step, and structured as an open-ended conversation with the local community and the visitors. Proceeding in this way would allow to "test" the new elements regarding the exhibition and would underline the status of the exhibition as an organic and interactive development process, with a clear aim, but also with enough flexibility to act and react in accordance with new insights and priorities. This would also match with the aim of the museum to be an interactive museum "from people to people", a place of shared memories, where the community works together to keep its memories alive, making them at the same time accessible to a larger public.

In the evaluation at the end of the workshop and in the written reflections written after it, the participants expressed that they were highly satisfied with the organization, the program, the quality of the discussions, and the results of the workshop. "The work the History Museum has done in the last 15 years is exceptional. Today, the museum team is asking, with the generosity and humility that seems to characterize it, questions around how 'Connecting Local History and International Perspectives'. This is the right time to highlight the considerable and constant efforts provided by the team of the museum, and to broaden the debate. Two days of rich, exciting exchanges, to which I am very happy to have participated," notes one participant.

And another one comments: "The workshop was very well-structured, and all of the invited participants were very much engaged and interested in the discussion and contributed with their different knowledge and expertise. The overall impression is that the workshop was a success and could greatly help curators in preparing the new exhibition." – All participants expressed their readiness to continue to work with the History Museum within this process in general or regarding certain more specific aspects. An extensive report about the workshop and the reflections of the participants will be published on the Memory Lab-website: www.memorylab-europe.eu