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UDK: 725.945 (497.6)
726.825 (497.6)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62215/2744-2365.2024.5.5.141>
Pregledni rad

ENUMERATING MONUMENTS TO THE NOB IN BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA: A BRIEF COMMENT

Apstrakt: Ovaj rad razmatra kontinuirano spominjanje brojke od „14.402“ spomenika Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi (NOB) koji su stvoreni na teritoriji Jugoslavije do 1961. god. Iako ta cifra naizgled potiče od Bergholza (2007), to u stvari, proizilazi iz nesporazuma spomenutih brojeva. Preko korišćenja primjera Bosne i Hercegovine (BiH), ovaj rad objašnjava zašto ova cifra nije primjenjiva na proces fizičkog *stvaranja* spomenika i spomen-obilježja.

Dok su Bergholz (i drugi) dali razvrstavanje ovih 14.402 spomenika po republikama, drugačija vrsta razvrstavanja je kritički zanemarena; odnosno *tipološki*. Broj od 3.574 spomenika u BiH od 14.402 u cijeloj Jugoslaviji dobijen je istraživanjem sprovedenim između 1956. i 1958. Međutim, u početnoj fazi ovog istraživanja zabilježeno je preliminarnih ukupno 3.629 ‘spomenika’, sa tipološkim raščlanjivanjem ovih pokazuje da su samo relativno mali deo ukupne cifre spomenici koji su stvarno *stvoreni*: ukupno samo 1.095 (ili 30,6%) svih ispitanih ‘spomenika’, sa ostatkom kao *mjesta ili objekti od značaja za NOB*. Period istraživanja ukazuje da spomenici nastali 1959. i 1961. godine – dvije ključne jubilarne godine koje same čine 14% spomenika na teritoriji BiH čiji se datumi nastanka/otkrivanja mogu potvrditi – nisu obuhvaćeni.

Drugo istraživanje sprovedeno između 1966. i 1973. godine identifikovalo je ukupno 2.049 stvorenih spomenika. Iako je ova cifra daleko više u skladu sa postojećim podacima, opisano je nekoliko nepraktičnosti u vezi sa korišćenjem ovoga kao pouzdanog broja.

Zatim se prave poređenja između ova dva istraživanja i podataka prikupljenih u bazi podataka *spomenicinob.info* kako bi se pokazalo da je cifra od 14.402 spomenika napravljena širom Jugoslavije, pri čemu se „*skoro tri spomenika ili groblja [stvaraju] svakog dana tokom šesnaest godina*“ često ponavljaju u literaturi, je grubo precenjena kada se govori o ‘stvaranju spomenika’.

Ključne riječi: 14,402 spomenici, Institut za zaštitu spomenika kulture, Smail Tihčić, SBNOR

Abstract: This paper discusses the continued reference to a figure of “14,402” monuments and memorials to the People’s Liberation Struggle (NOB) having been created across the territory of Yugoslavia by 1961 in relation three sources of figures on the numbers of monuments and memorials commemorating the NOB on the territory of Bosnia & Herzegovina. The first is a survey undertaken between 1956 and 1958, the results of which were later reappraised and published along with those of other Yugoslav republics in 1961, where a total of 3,574 monuments and memorials were enumerated upon the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, contributing to the overall figure of 14,402. The second is a survey conducted between 1966 and 1973, with a summary of these results being published in 1981, showing a total of 2,049 monuments and memorials were documented. The third is data currently being compiled in the *spomenicinob.info* database. While at present this database holds details of slightly over 4,000 monuments and memorials to the NOB created during the period 1945–1992,¹ the data used here pertains exclusively to the two aforementioned surveys. Using this data, it is shown that the 3,574 figure from 1961 is a vast overstatement when discussing *monuments created*, and better describes *places of memory* than tangible monuments. Additionally, it is shown that, while the figure of 2,049 published in 1981 is generally supported by field research in the present day, it is still not possible to consider this figure as ‘precise’ due to a number of factors, including accidental omissions, the overlooking

¹ Total = 4,076. Data extracted 22 December 2023.

of new memorials created during the seven-year period in which the survey was undertaken, and the destruction and replacement of memorials as a result of external factors.

The paper concludes that the figure of 14,402 monuments having been made across Yugoslavia by 1961, with “*almost three monuments or cemeteries [being created] every day for sixteen years*” oft repeated in the literature is a gross over-estimate when discussing ‘monument making’.

Keywords: 14,402 monuments, Institute for the Protection of Monuments of Culture, Smail Tihčić, SBNOR

Introduction

In recent years, discussions of memorialization of the People’s Liberation Struggle (NOB) across the territory of (the former) Yugoslavia have increasingly referred to a figure of “14,402” monuments and memorials having been created by 1961. While this figure’s recurrence in literature on the topic seemingly stems back to Bergholz,² it is, in fact, derived from a misunderstanding of the numbers involved. Here, using the example of Bosnia & Herzegovina, I will explain why this figure is not applicable to the process of physical creation of memorials, and also discuss several issues relating to a later – and arguably more relevant – enumeration.

Background

In 1961, a Federal-level document claimed that a total of 14,402 monuments and memorials had been identified across the territory of Yugoslavia to date.³ According to Bergholz, “*By 1961, the fighters, in cooperation with other socio-political organizations, had erected 14,402 monuments and cemeteries, meaning almost three monuments or*

² Bergholz, “Међу родољубима, купусом, свињама и варварима”, 65.

³ Archives of Yugoslavia, Fond 297, inv. I, f-20, *Izveštaj Centralnog odbora o radu Saveza boraca NOR, 1961. godine*, 52, cited in Bergholz, “Међу родољубима, купусом, свињама и варварима”, 65.

cemeteries every day for sixteen years. Not only graves and monuments are included here, but places of mass atrocities and famous battles, as well as memorial plaques, fountains, busts and parks”,⁴ a claim that has been repeated in other literature since.⁵ A breakdown in a footnote accompanying this provided statistics for the individual constituent republics: 3,574 in Bosnia and Herzegovina; 2,940 in Croatia; 275 in Macedonia; 712 in Montenegro; 2,866 in Serbia; and 4,035 Slovenia. However, looking in detail at Bosnia and Herzegovina, this figure alone does not provide the full story, something that Bergholz also hints to in his writing (see emphasis above). While Karge⁶ also addresses issues related to this figure, she approaches it from an angle of ‘places of loss’, stating that “[...] *around 9,000 objects are directly related to preserving the memory of those who died [...]*”, and concluding that – “*when you add the figure of 803 sites and buildings related to ‘crimes of the occupiers’*” – around 10,000 of these 14,402 were connected to those who fell, either as fighters or Victims of Fascist Terror. Much earlier, Dragi Milenković⁷ provided a breakdown of these monuments, stating “[...] *in total, 14,402 monuments and memorial objects have been erected. Of which have been erected 1,204 ossuaries and mausoleums, 5,000 memorial plaques*⁸ [...], *211 memorial fountains [...], 20 memorial buildings, 318 busts [...], 1,130 pyramids, obelisks and figurative-architectural monuments [...], 4 memorial parks, etc.*”⁹ Here, this ‘etc.’ is telling: all typologies mentioned only account for a total of 7,887 monuments and memorials, or 54.8% of those recorded by the survey. So what, then, are the remaining 45.2%?

⁴ Bergholz, “Među rodoljubima, kupusom, sviňama i varvarima”, 65.

⁵ See, for example, Jauković, “To Share or to Keep”, 87. The claim is also commonly repeated in the writings of Ivica Šarac.

⁶ Karge, *Sećanje u kamenu - okamenjeno sećanje?*, 69-70.

⁷ Milenković, *Nesporazumi oko savremenih spomenika kulture*, 3.

⁸ It is stated elsewhere that this figure for memorial plaques is approximate: Bešliagić, “Zaštita spomenika Narodnooslobodilačkog rata”, 12.

⁹ This typological breakdown bears a strong resemblance to one proposed in June 1965 for registering monuments and memorials on the territory of Bosnia & Herzegovina, which consisted of five categories: (i) Memorial plaques; (ii) Memorial fountains; (iii) Memorial cemeteries [possibly all burial sites]; (iv) Memorial buildings/structures; (v) Artistic monuments – busts, sculptures, figural compositions, etc. (“Prijedlog mjera za reviziju spomenika u BiH”, 2). Presumably, this typology was later adapted to create the six categories used in the 1966-73 survey, with buildings being omitted, busts being afforded their own separate category, and burial sites being divided into two categories; (i) ossuaries & collective graves and (ii) cemeteries.

It would seem, in fact, that the number of 3,574 memorials and monuments in Bosnia & Herzegovina does not refer merely to monuments erected after the war, but all sites that were significant *places of memory* relating to it (and also the pre-war activities of the KPJ). In 1954, a department for the identification of monuments related to the NOB was established within the Republic-level Institute for the Protection of Monuments of Culture.¹⁰ Already by 1957, this department had identified 40 monuments to the NOB to be registered under state-level protection,¹¹ 29 of which had been identified in the first year of the department's operation.¹² Simultaneous to this, efforts were made to identify *all* sites of interest related to the NOB. A 'Survey' was conducted by the Institute in cooperation with local SBNOR representatives, initiated in September 1956 and concluded in the first half of 1958, which identified a total of 3,629 'monuments' to the NOB.¹³ These monuments were categorized as follows:

- Workshops & weapons factories created during war – 63
- NOR hospitals – 292
- Illegal printing houses – 42
- Locations of military & political movement meetings – 1,075
- Houses of People's Heroes – 189
- Caves, dugouts and other shelters – 168
- Partisan cemeteries, ossuaries, and graves of Victims of Fascist
- Memorial plaques created after Liberation – 381
- Monuments considered artistic compositions – 296
- Buildings and other places connected to enemy crimes – 315
- Important mobile and immobile monuments relating to the workers' movement and the work of the KPJ prior to the NOR – 39
- All other types of monument – 349

Prolić gave the proviso that this list was preliminary, and could not in any way be considered definitive, as it was largely compiled from the

¹⁰ Bešlagić, "Problematika zaštite spomenika Narodnooslobodilačkog rata", 6.

¹¹ Ibid, 7.

¹² "Rad Zavoda u 1954 godini", 311.

¹³ Prolić, "Završena je Anketa o nepokretnim spomenicima iz NOR-a", 277.

recollections of individuals, and, as a result of municipal reorganization in 1958, duplications of results may have arisen, a fact attested to by the discrepancy between the number of monuments categorized in the breakdown (3,627) and the total number of monuments stated to exist (3,629).

It would appear that work on this ‘preliminary list’ led to the creation of the ‘3,574’ figure presented in 1961; the same number (albeit without a typological breakdown) was presented in 1964 by Bešliagić.¹⁴ However, when looking at the 1959 breakdown provided by Prolić, one can see that only three categories of monuments (or possibly four, if generously including the somewhat enigmatic ‘All other types of monument’ category) involve memorials that were actually *created*. Together, these three categories account for 1,095 ‘monuments’, or just 30.6% of all sites surveyed, with the remainder being places or objects of significance to the People’s Liberation War (and wider Socialist Revolution). In this broader sense, a building or location could be a ‘monument’, even if it was not specifically built as such, but rather was a monument by virtue of the events that had taken place there. Many of these sites of memory, however, would doubtless have been candidates for additional memorialization, through plaques, busts, fountains, etc.

Leaving aside the implications for total numbers of monuments *created* in Yugoslavia as a whole, this figure of 1,095 *monuments created* is far more in-line with that presented in a subsequent enumeration for Bosnia & Herzegovina. When taking into account that the survey was concluded in the first half of 1958, one can see that a key period of monument creation on the territory of Bosnia & Herzegovina is excluded from these statistics: the ‘mass unveilings’ of 1959 (the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the KPJ and SKOJ) and 1961 (the 20th anniversary of the Uprising). From data collected and presented on the website *spomenicinob.info* to date, these two years together account for 14.0% of all monuments and memorials whose dates of creation/unveiling can be confirmed: 145 (1959) and 192 (1961) of a total of 2,415.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bešliagić, “Zaštita spomenika Narodnooslobodilačkog rata”, 12.

¹⁵ Data extracted 22 December 2023. Dates of creation/unveiling confirmed for a total of 2,415 of 3,898 monuments created before 1992.

1966–1973: A Republic-level survey of monuments *created*

To go into further detail at the Republic level, it is worth looking at a second survey. This survey, conducted by the Republic Institute for the Protection of Monuments of Culture between 1966 and 1973, identified a total of 2,049 monuments and memorials. Although this final figure was mentioned in previous publications,¹⁶ it was not until 1981 that a summary of this list was published, where a breakdown by typology was given as follows:¹⁷

- Memorial plaques – 809
- Memorial busts – 207
- Fountains, wells and cisterns – 104
- Artistic monuments – 453
- (Collective) graves and ossuaries – 300
- Cemeteries of Partisans and Victims of Fascist Terror – 176

The issue with stating this as a reliable ‘number’, however, is two-fold. First, certain memorials were omitted from the survey (almost certainly as a result of being genuinely overlooked), and second the surveys were not conducted simultaneously across all municipalities, with a total of 7 years and 5 months between the start of the first municipality visit (Višegrad in May 1966) and the conclusion of the final one (Bileća in October 1973).

The severity of the issue of omissions cannot be adequately evaluated from the information available at present. However, I would like to present one obvious example of an omission here: For Šipovo municipality, Tihčić’s 1981 breakdown shows that a total of 0 (zero) busts were recorded in a survey conducted in November 1968. Contrary to this, however, an episode (*Janje*) of Milan Kovačević’s *Karavan* documentary series filmed in 1966 clearly shows the unveiling of two busts (of People’s Heroes Rade Marijanac and Dušan Rakita) in the Partisans’ cemetery in Strojice. As the filming of this episode pre-dates the survey by some two years, it is obvious that these two busts were somehow overlooked.¹⁸

¹⁶ See, for example, Tihčić, “*Spomenici NOB-e i radničkog pokreta*”, 268.

¹⁷ Tihčić, “Dovršena akcija na poslovima terenske evidencije”, 253.

¹⁸ Kovačević, “Janje”, YouTube. For the information to the date of filming, refer to [00:16-00:20]. For the unveiling of the busts, refer to [20:13-21:12].

The lack of simultaneity of surveys is also an issue for using the 2,049 figure as a definitive ‘number’. The creation and unveiling of memorials was a continuous process, and this is highlighted in the statistics given for Srbac and Zenica municipalities. In Srbac, the survey (conducted on 7 & 8 December 1967) states the number of busts present on the municipality’s territory as 0 (zero). However, had the survey been conducted at a later date, this figure would have been different: in December 1969, three busts were unveiled in front of the town’s Momo Vidović elementary school,¹⁹ where they still stand today. An even more stark example is Zenica, where the municipality survey conducted from 26 to 29 August 1966 recorded (among other memorials) 8 memorial plaques, 1 bust and 0 fountains. However, just three months after this, on 29 November 1966 (Yugoslavia’s *Dan Republike* – Republic Day), six busts were unveiled outside the headquarters of the town’s ironworks.²⁰ In the years that followed, a not-insignificant number of other memorials were added to those already on the territory of the municipality, including a plaque to commemorate the formation of the first People’s Liberation Committee for Zenica in April 1967,²¹ a monument commemorating 198 workers from Zenica’s ironworks who fell during the NOB in October 1967,²² a bust of Sead Škrگو in April 1968,²³ and a bust of NH Omer Maslić,²⁴ the large monument to the Zenica Partisan Detachment on Smetovi, overlooking the town,²⁵ and a memorial fountain in the village of Sviće,²⁶ all in July 1968. In fact, according to data compiled from various sources and presented within the *spomenicinob.info* database, at least 22 monuments and memorials to the NOB and Socialist Revolution were created on the territory of Zenica between the conducting of the survey in August 1966 and the end of 1968; a period of just under two-and-a-half years. It can therefore be seen that these lists already attained a degree of redundancy as accurate

¹⁹ Košutić, *Pamtilo se*, 31.

²⁰ “Otkrivene biste narodnih heroja,” *Naša riječ*, 7 December 1966, 1.

²¹ Muzej Grada Zenice, “Spomen obilježja NOB-u”, 34.

²² Muzej Grada Zenice, “Spomen obilježja NOB-u”, 13.

²³ “Zenica nije zaboravila Seada Škrگو,” *Naša riječ*, 17 April 1968, 3.

²⁴ “Otkrivena bista Omeru Masliću,” *Naša riječ*, 10 July 1968, 1.

²⁵ “Na Smetovima otkriven monumentalni spomenik,” *Naša riječ*, 31 July 1968, 1.

²⁶ Muzej Grada Zenice, “Spomen obilježja NOB-u”, 43.

enumerations of monuments and memorials upon the territories of their respective municipalities within months (possibly even weeks or days in certain cases) of their creation: While Tihčić himself acknowledges this issue,²⁷ he puts the number of monuments overlooked through the non-simultaneity of surveys at “several tens”; almost certainly a vast understatement. Tihčić did, however, seemingly later reappraise this statement, claiming that the total number of monuments and memorials created would have “surpassed 2,500” shortly after the completion of the survey.²⁸ This latter statement is supported by data on the *spomenicinob.info* website: comparing (known) dates of unveiling with the dates of individual municipality surveys, it can be seen that at least 170 monuments and memorials were unveiled between the dates of undertaking of their respective municipalities’ surveys and the completion of the Bileća survey in October 1973. Even when excluding monuments and memorials known to have replaced older ones (3) and those situated inside public institutions (6) – with the latter type seemingly having been (at least occasionally) excluded from (or overlooked by) the 1966–73 survey²⁹ – we are still left with a minimum figure of 161 additional monuments and memorials that would have been recorded had all surveys been undertaken simultaneously in October 1973.

To further compound issues with extracting a definitive number from the 1966–73 survey (or rather *these surveys*), the devastation caused by the earthquake that hit Banja Luka and the surrounding area on 26 & 27 October 1969 means that the figures for a number of municipalities were already obsolete before the surveying of other municipalities had begun. For instance, the Banja Luka survey was completed in July 1967, by which time a total of 43 memorial plaques existed on the territory of the municipality. By the time of a survey conducted by the Institute

²⁷ Tihčić, “Kataloški pregled”, 313.

²⁸ Tihčić, “Spomenici NOB-e i radničkog pokreta”, 268; Tihčić, “Simpozijum”, 245.

²⁹ For example, two busts – of Ivan Krndelj and NH Jakov Dugandžić – are mentioned by Maletić as having existed in Čitluk in 1965. However, only one bust was recorded in the survey of the municipality undertaken in July 1968. From other sources, it has been established that this was the bust of Dugandžić, while Krndelj’s was almost certainly situated inside the town’s elementary school: Maletić (ed.), “Bosna i Hercegovina: Znamenitosti i lepote”, 319.

for the Protection of Monuments of Culture and Nature Banja Luka³⁰ in 1980, this figure stood at 49;³¹ this relatively minor increase suggests that a focus would have been on re-marking *authentic places* lost in the earthquake and post-earthquake reconstruction rather than on commemorating additional places, events and individuals. Likewise, at least two monuments and memorials (one plaque and one monument) on the territory of Čelinac municipality were lost as a result of this earthquake and subsequent demolition and reconstruction.³²

Reassessing the figure

The results of the 1966-73 survey, while they can be in no way taken to be definitive, point to the earlier 3,574 figure for monuments and memorials on the territory of Bosnia & Herzegovina (and, by extension, the number of 14,402 for the whole of Yugoslavia) oft repeated in the literature as being a gross over-estimate when discussing ‘monument making’. The lower-end figure of 1,095 – even when taking into account the two ‘peak years’ of monument creation (1959 and 1961) that occurred shortly after the survey’s conclusion – is far more concordant with the figure of 2,049 reached after the conclusion of the 1966–73 survey. Also in line with these would be a figure provided by Tihčić in April 1969,³³ that “*According to still-incomplete information [...] within the borders of Bosnia & Herzegovina exist close to 2,000 [monuments]*”. Karge also mentions a document from the following month (i.e. May 1969) that claimed that “*1,500 memorial-artistic objects commemorating the NOR had been erected in Bosnia & Herzegovina by 1968*”.³⁴

³⁰ One of four regional Institutes established between 1945 and 1992. Originally, this institute existed from 1969 to 1973, before being re-established 1976. Čelić implies that the original establishment of this regional ‘Centre’ was a short-term measure as an immediate response to the 1969 earthquake: Čelić, “*Zaštita spomenika kulture i prirode*”, 256.

³¹ Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture i prirode Banja Luka, *Stanje i problemi spomenika i spomen obilježja*, 22.

³² For a comparison of monuments and memorials on the territory of Čelinac municipality in 1968 and 1985, see Maksimović, *Kulturno-istorijski spomenici čelinackog kraja*.

³³ Tihčić, “*Neki problemi izgradnje, održavanja i reprezentacije spomenika NOR i revolucije*”, 4.

³⁴ Karge, *Sećanje u kamenu - okamenjeno sećanje?*, 79.

Added to this, it is worth taking into account data compiled on the *spomenicinob.info* database: of the 3,898 monuments and memorials created between 1945 and 1992 recorded on the site to date, dates of creation and unveiling have been ascertained for a total of 2,415. From these dates, it can be seen that 875 monuments had been created by the end of 1958, and 1,759 by end of 1973. Allowing for the incompleteness of the data presented in the database (i.e. dates of unveiling have only been ascertained for 62.0% of documented memorials, and no claims are made about the database's comprehensiveness), the data presented would be supportive of both the lower-end figure from the 1956-58 survey and that from the one conducted in 1966-73, as well as the intermediate estimates presented in both published and archival documents.

Referring back to the Yugoslavia level, and the claim made by Bergholz (and others in his wake) that “*almost three monuments or cemeteries [were created] every day for sixteen years*”, it can be seen from the analysis presented here that this was simply not the case: the “etc.” in the breakdown presented by Dragi Milenković almost certainly refers to immaterial memorials or pre-existing structures not *created* by post-1945 actors, but rather earmarked as ‘memorials’ by virtue of being *carriers of memory*, and, as a result, the process of memorial creation was nowhere near as prolific as is regularly claimed in the literature.

ENUMERATING MONUMENTS TO THE NOB IN BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA: A BRIEF COMMENT

Summary

This paper discusses the continued reference to a figure of “14,402” monuments and memorials to the People’s Liberation War (NOB) having been created across the territory of Yugoslavia by 1961. While the figure seemingly stems back to Bergholz (2007), it is, in fact, derived from a misunderstanding of the numbers involved. Using the example of Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH), this paper explains why this figure is not applicable to the process of physical creation of memorials.

While Bergholz (and others) have provided republic-by-republic breakdowns of this 14,402 figure, a different type of breakdown has

been critically overlooked; i.e. a typological one. The BiH figure of 3,574 monuments included in the Yugoslavia-wide sum of 14,402 was obtained via a survey undertaken between 1956 and 1958. However, in the initial phase of this survey, a preliminary total of 3,629 ‘monuments’ were recorded, with a *typological* breakdown of these showing that only a relatively small proportion of the overall figure were monuments that were actually created: in total, just 1,095 (or 30.6%) of all sites surveyed, with the remainder being *places or objects of significance* to the NOB. The timing of the survey means monuments created in 1959 and 1961 – two key anniversary years that alone account for 14% of monuments on the territory of BiH whose dates of creation/unveiling can be confirmed – were not included.

A second survey conducted between 1966 and 1973 identified a total of 2,049 monuments created. While this figure is far more in-line with extant data, several impracticalities behind using this as a reliable ‘figure’ are described.

Comparisons are then drawn between these two enumerations and data compiled on the *spomenicinob.info* database to show that a figure of 14,402 monuments having been made across Yugoslavia, with “*almost three monuments or cemeteries [being created] every day for sixteen years*” oft repeated in the literature is a gross over-estimate when discussing ‘monument making’.

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