

LEM Working Group: STUDY VISIT TO SARAJEVO



From 6-7 October 2016 some members from Germany, Portugal and Italy of the NEMO Working Group LEM (The Learning Museum) visited the Balkan Museum Network in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H).

On Thursday and Friday, Aida Vežić, Regional Museum Coordinator of the Foundation Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) Bosnia and Herzegovina and Secretary General of the Balkan Museum Network (BMN), organised a fascinating and intensive programme for the participants, who not only learned about the Bosnian museum and cultural landscape, but a lot about post-war problems still affecting everyday life of all people and the work of museum professionals.

The programme started on **Thursday 6 October** with a visit to the Office of the **Foundation Cultural Heritage without Borders and the Balkan Museum Network**, where Aida introduced her colleagues to their work, the museums landscape and the complex (cultural) situation in B&H.

The Balkan Museums Network exists to celebrate, preserve and share the complex common heritage of the Balkans and to create, through cooperation, a strong, collective voice for Balkan heritage and the museum profession. It was established in 2006 in (Uppsala, Sweden) and launched as independent Network in 2014 (Tirana, Albania). Today it covers 7 Balkan Countries and is registered as Association / NGO with 43 museums + 2 NGOs + 23 individuals as members.

Aida explained how to deal with a situation where, during and after the war in the 90's, around 75% of all Cultural Heritage was systematically damaged and around 1000 monuments were mined and completely destroyed. She illustrated the problems of the Country's division in 3 administrative Units (as the result of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995). As a consequence, there is no Ministry of Culture on the state level (culture is managed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs). From the total number of cultural institutions, museums make up 10%. A big motivation for (cross border-) projects in the Balkans are peace building and reconciliation. Annual meeting of museum professionals and members of the Balkan Museum Network is the ['Meet, See, Do' Conference](#).

In 2015 the UNESCO published the "Culture for Development Indicators" for B&H to help understand the situation and to finally have some real data:

http://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/digital-library/cdis/CDIS%20Analytical%20Brief%20-%20Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina_0.pdf and

http://fr.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/cdis/cdis_technical_report_bosnia_and_herzegovina_0_1.pdf.

In the afternoon, the group visited the **National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina**.

The Museum was founded in 1888, as the oldest cultural and scientific institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the establishment of the Museum Society of

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Bosnia and Herzegovina, on October 5, 1884, the society established the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina on February 1, 1888. Since its establishment, the National Museum has been a complex institution.

Its 124-year history demonstrates the contribution the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina has made to the overall cultural and scientific development of this country.

The National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina preserves, scientifically processes, and publicly presents almost 4 million artifacts. The cultural and natural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina is presented via the numerous museum exhibits of all departments to a domestic and international audience.

www.zemajskimuzej.ba

The situation of the museum nowadays was quite shocking for the foreign colleagues. The main problem is the non-existence of a regular financing scheme that causes all other problems to occur, such as the deterioration of the building and no heating in the cold winter months, which seems to be the least problem for the institution and its staff. Huge financial problems and desolate conditions dating back to war time make the everyday museum work impossible.

In 2012 the Museum made already the headlines, when it was forced to close down its doors for the public. Back then NEMO criticized already the closing of National Museum in Bosnia Herzegovina:

www.ne-mo.org/news/article/nc/1/browse/12/nemo/nemo-criticizes-closing-of-national-museum-in-bosnia-herzegovina/376.html.

The National Museum of BiH only reopened in September 2015 (<http://chwb.org/bih/news/the-temple-of-culture-lives-again/>), as a result of the "volunteering" of staff (who worked without pay for years!) and an awareness raising media campaign "I am Museum" led by NGO AKcija. Both the NGO and the museum have won the [Europa Nostra Award in 2016](#) in the category "Dedicated Service": Employees and activists of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. The NEMO group visited all 4 museum departments (archaeology, ethnology, natural science and library). Some agreements were made regarding the exchange of publications and periodicals.

Besides the visit to the National Museum of BiH and talk with its director Dr Mirsad Sijaric, many other places were visited during guided **city walk** on Thursday afternoon, most notably: the Jewish Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (part of the Museum of Sarajevo), the Museum of the Old Orthodox Church in Sarajevo, the Svrzo's House (part of the Museum of Sarajevo), as example of the lifestyle of an urban Muslim family in the late 18th and 19th century and the Gazi Husrev-Bey's Mosque.

On **Friday 7 October**, the groups started the day with a visit to the **History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina**. The Museum was founded in 1945, as the National Liberation Museum in Sarajevo. Since it was established, the museum relocated several times. From 1945 to 1950, it was located in two rooms of the Department of Ethnology of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and from 1950 to 1963 it was accommodated in the Sarajevo City

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Hall. Since 1963, it has been located in its own museum building. Since its establishment, the museum has changed its name several times, as a result of changes in the concept of the scope of its work. It was founded, as was previously mentioned, in November 1945, as the National Liberation Museum (1945-1950), which focused only on the period of the National Liberation and the Revolution from 1941 to 1945. In 1950, after the conference of museum professionals held in Belgrade, where it was decided that the museum would change its name, it became the Museum of the National Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1950-1967) and expanded its field of interest to the history of the labor movement and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, incorporated as an introduction to the history of the National Liberation Struggle. Despite the fact that the museum's collection activities were limited by the period and theme, it often stepped outside that limited framework. Thanks to the initiative of its experts, certain objects that documented the social realities were collected, even if they fell outside the narrow categories.

From 1967 to 1993, it was called the Revolution Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The proposal to change its name was brought to the Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in November 1990. The proposal was adopted at the Assembly of the Executive Council of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a suggestion not to make it a special decision of Parliament, but to establish a new name within the framework of the Law on Museum Activities. This law for financing society's needs and interests in the field of culture was in the legislative process. Article 30 of this law, even in 1990, mentions "the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina;" and since 1993 it has officially held this name. Consequently, it expanded its scope of work to the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, from the arrival of Slavs to the Balkan Peninsula to the history of modern and independent Bosnia and Herzegovina. www.muzej.ba

The group met with the museum director Dr. Elma Hasimbegovic who guided them through the permanent exhibition of the History Museum of BiH "Sarajevo under siege". Members of the group were impressed by exhibition's method of interpreting contested and difficult history (the 1992-95 war) as it focused on the innovation and survival skills during every day calamities. The museum was even colder than the National Museum of BiH as it is in the same political situation: it lacks governmental support and financing, as it is also one of seven cultural institutions on the state level of BiH. The group also had the honor to visit the temporary exhibition on "Decent Work and Unions" and see proposals for saving the building which is listed as national monument of BiH.

The group had a very good discussion with the highly motivated and young director of the Museum, concluding that concrete ways of bilateral cooperation could be found and that European partners can do more for their colleagues from Sarajevo.

The LEM Working Group concluded that this was an intensive study visit and learning experience. Thank you to all our colleagues from Sarajevo!