

The Musealisation of the Scientific Research at the "Donja Gradina Memorial Area"

The Public Institution "Donja Gradina Memorial Area" has been situated at the territory of the Republic of Srpska//Bosnia and Herzegovina and is a part of the immovable cultural property of exceptional importance for the Republic of Srpska.¹ The Memorial Site Donja Gradina² in the Republic of Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) keeps lasting memories of the victims of the Ustasha's crime of genocide, which was happening during the Second World War, and this was the biggest execution site of the Jasenovac Concentration Camp.

The history of the Independent State of Croatia, with the emphasis on the legal provisions of the State, which had the goal of creating an ethnically homogenous state, or, in other words, which lead to the complete extermination of the Serbs, Jews and Roma; the foundation of the Jasenovac Concentration Camp; as well as the crimes and misdeeds committed at the Camp itself and its biggest execution site – Donja Gradina –, have all been the subject of a scientific research and well documented through our publications and exhibitions. Each of those thematic units has been interdisciplinary approached, visual and textual resources have been combined, the official reports have been compared with the reports given by the witnesses, and with the comparative analysis the visitors get a complete historiographic review. Connecting the scientific research and technological innovations such as holographic projections or interactive slides has been following the needs of the modern-days visitors, as well as publishing of our exhibitions at our web-platforms. The exhibitions catalogues have been written according to strict rules of research papers and thus every single factographic piece of information or statement can be checked. The significance of the visits to the memorial centres as well as "Donja Gradina Memorial Area" is as following: those are authentic sites where certain historical events happened and therefore highly important for historical research, presentations of the particular events and teaching the visitors; those are the sites where commemorations are held, and all those facts guide a visitor to deeper contemplations about the historical event which the visited memorial has been dedicated to.

The Independent State of Croatia was established on 10 April 1941,³ seven days before the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Army. The German Army entered Zagreb on 10 April 1941 and Slavko Kvaternik proclaimed the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, on behalf of Ante Pavelić. The Independent State of Croatia encompassed the territory of Croatia (excluding parts of Dalmatia, which, through Treaties of Rome on 18 May, were handed to Italy by the Ustashe), Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sylvania. Around 6.5 million inhabitants lived on that territory: 4 000 000 Croats, 1 925 000 Serbs, 40 000 Jews, 150 000 Germans, 75 000 Hungarians, 30 000 Slovenes, 65 000 Czechs and Slovaks.⁴

During World War II, from 10 April 1941 to 15 May 1945, the territory of Kozara and Potkozarje administratively belonged to the Independent State of Croatia. The northwestern territory of Bosnia fell under the German occupation zone and Germans left full freedom to the Ustashe authorities in terms of internal organization of state.⁵

* Museum advisor. The Public Institution "Donja Gradina Memorial Area". The Republic of Srpska.

1 *Zakon o Spomen-području Donja Gradina* 1996.

2 Official site: www.jusp-donjagradina.org (last access: 4 August 2025).

3 Official site: <https://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=9404> (last access: 20 August 2025).

4 Jelić-Butić 1977: 106.

5 Official site: <https://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=9404> (last access: 20 August 2025), Zatezalo 2007: 345.



Territory of the Independent State of Croatia

The policy of the Ustashes was the creation of a pure Croatian territory where only a pure Croatian nation would live. The result was extermination of Serbs, Jews, Roma and anti-fascists, regardless of their religion, race or nation.⁶ The crime was announced and legislated with racist laws passed immediately after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia. On 17 April 1941 "Stipulation on Defence of Croatian People's Honour" was announced and imposed martial law that made decisions summarily. The stipulation provided the Ustashe with unlimited authority to pass terror in the name of defence of the Independent State of Croatia.⁷ These laws prohibited the Cyrillic alphabet, abolished Orthodox religious schools, changed several geographical names with prefix "Serbian", Serbs and Jews were dismissed from service, they were arrested, taken to camps, their properties were robbed and them killed. Enacting provisions of law created an apparition of lawfulness concerning purifying "Croatian territories" and creating a pure state of Croatia.

There was a broad anti-Serb propaganda the leaders of which were the lead Ustashe officials. State officials and Catholic priests gave speeches calling for terror and crimes before the assembled people. In this way, hatred towards Serbs, Jews and Roma was fuelled so an atmosphere of hatred reigned in the Independent State of Croatia. This is evident from the following examples:



Insignia for Jews, JUSP Donja Gradina ZF-20037/02

6 Zemaljska komisija... 1946: 6.

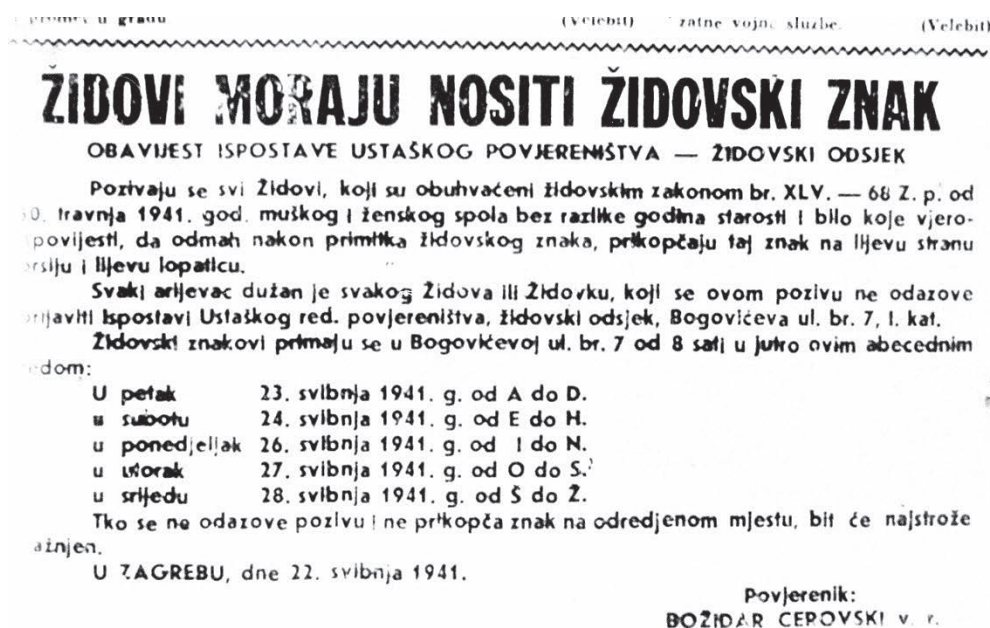
7 Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941: 15.



In some towns of the Independent State of Croatia Serbs wore a red or white band with a P letter which indicated they were Orthodox or inscription "SRBIN-SERBE", MŽG 629/2016



Stipulation on Defence of the People and the Country, published in "Croatian People's Journal" on 18 April 1941, JUSP Donja Gradina ZF-10383/09



Jews had to wear insignia, JUSP Donja Gradina ZF-10383/13

ZAKONSKA ODREDBA o zabrani ćirilice.

§ 1.

Na području Nezavisne Države Hrvatske zabranjuje se uporaba ćirilice.

§ 2.

Ova zakonska odredba stupa na snagu danom proglašenja u »Narodnim Novinama«, a provedenje povjerava se ministarstvu unutarnjih poslova.*

U Zagrebu 25. travnja 1941.

Poglavnik:

Dr. Ante Pavelić, v. r.

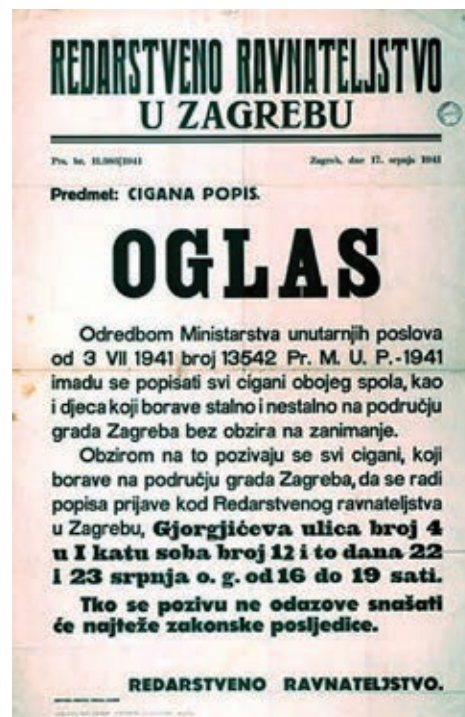
Broj XXV-33-Z. p.-1941.

Predsjednik

zakonodavnog povjereništva
pri Poglavniku:

Dr. Milovan Žanić, v. r.

*Stipulation on the Cyrillic script prohibition,
25 April 1941, JUSP Donja Gradina ZF-06222/05*



*Announcement for census of Romani
in Zagreb, JUSP Donja Gradina ZF-06222/13*

Mile Budak, the Minister of Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs, stated in 1941:

"We will kill one part of Serbs, displace the other part, and convert to Catholicism the rest, thus recasting them to Croats!"⁸

This became the official slogan of the Independent State of Croatia. Mladen Lorković, PhD in Law, the Foreign Minister of the Independent State of Croatia, on 27 July 1941, spoke as follows:

"Croatian people must be cleansed from all elements that represent misfortune for them, that are alien and strange, the elements that dissolve the people's sound strength, that have endangered them for decades and centuries. It is our Serbs and our Jews."⁹

Aleksandar Seitz, professor, spoke in Dugo Selo as follows:

"...Serbs and Jews cannot exist, nor will they exist, as there are the Croatian Army and Croatian Ustashe who can guarantee you that."¹⁰

The statements of Ustashe officials are an important form of documenting Ustashe propaganda and genocidal intent. When preparing the exhibition, they can be used as a document or in the form of audio-visual content and thus complete an important segment of historiographical facts about the Independent State of Croatia. Short video formats are very popular for this purpose. These statements of Ustashe officials still cause disbelief and discomfort today, but also lead to deeper thinking about ideologies like this one. Musealization of historical research is a significant way in which we convey historical facts to a large number of visitors in a certain period of time.

Shortly after forming the authorities, crimes against Serbs, Jews and Romani people started on the whole territory of the Independent State of Croatia. Aiming to organize an ethnically cleansed state, the camps were established. First camps were established in Kerestinec and Koprivnica, Tenja camp near Osijek, Djakovo and Loborgrad.¹¹ At the request of Italians, Ustashe had to remove

8 Đurić Mišina 2019: 46–47.

9 Zatezalo 2007: 65.

10 Ibid.

11 Peršen 1990: 41.

camps from the Italian zone of influence. Lonja field, which belonged to the German influence zone, was selected for a future camp. The proximity of the rivers Sava¹² turned out to be ideal location for the new camp which prevented escape from the camp as well as any attempts to attack it. There was a railway connection of the area with almost all parts of the Independent State of Croatia.¹³ The railway line ran into the camp for one of the lines branched off at the Railway Station in Jasenovac running into the concentration camp. Many will be deported to the concentration camp precisely by trains.¹⁴ On 25 November 1941, Ante Pavelić issued the Law, which was also signed by his Minister of Justice and Religious Affairs, Dr. Mirko Puk. This law speaks of sending unwanted and dangerous persons to forced labour in concentration camps.¹⁵ Going to the Jasenovac camp meant being handed over to the mercy of the Ustashe.¹⁶ Every Ustashe was entitled to judge any prisoner at any time.

The Concentration Camp Jasenovac was formed in August 1941, at the settlement called Jasenovac,¹⁷ at the exact site where before the Second World War had existed the Turnovering Cooperative, a company owned by the Serbian orthodox family Bačić, which had consisted of several industrial plants such as a brickyard, a chain factory, a tannery, a saw-mill.¹⁸ The properties of the Bačić family were confiscated upon the Decision passed by the Presidents of the Government of the Independent State of Croatia,¹⁹ and at that area of 125 hectares was built the Camp III (Three) – The Brickyard, which was the central concentration camp of the Jasenovac concentration camps complex (which was consisting of five concentration camps).²⁰ The Brickyard was the largest and the longest-lasting camp in the camps' complex. Exhausting continuous work without a day of rest was the most powerful tool of mass destruction of the Serbs, Jews and Romani people.²¹ Jasenovac concentration camp system spread from Croatia and Bosanska Kostajnica on the left and right banks of the river Una to Stara and Bosanska Gradiška on the left and right banks of the river Sava. This is the length of total 60 km. Collection sites of the concentration camp Jasenovac were located on the left and right banks of these rivers, approximately 2 km on either side.²² This means that the narrowest and most horrifying action of the Jasenovac concentration camp covered the area of a total of 240 km².

"The aim of establishing the camp was the liquidation of Serb nation as a whole in the Independent State of Croatia, as well as Jews, Gypsies and all those who opposed the existence of the Ustashe state!", said Ljubo Miloš, one of the commanders in the Jasenovac camp, at a hearing held on 9 April 1948.²³

German Captain Arthur Hefner, a transport officer, said the following about this camp:

"The concept of the Jasenovac Camp should actually be understood as several camps which are several kilometres apart, grouped around Jasenovac. Regardless of the propaganda, this is one of the most horrible of camps, which can only be compared to Dante's Inferno!"²⁴

12 Official site: <https://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=9404> (last access: 20 August 2025).

13 Zemaljska komisija... 1946: 6.

14 The first concentration camp prisoners arrived in freight cars to the railway station in Jasenovac on 20 and 21 August 1941.

15 The main point of this law is: *"Unwanted persons, dangerous to public order and safety, or who could endanger the peace and tranquillity of the Croatian nation or the achievements of the liberation struggle of the Croatian Ustashe movement, can be sent to forced stay at concentration camps. The Ustashe Supervisory Service is authorized to establish these camps in certain places of the Independent State of Croatia."*

16 Zemaljska komisija... 1946: 8.

17 Jasenovac is a village located on the left bank of the Sava River.

18 Zemaljska komisija... 1946: 6.

19 Peršen 1990: 140–141.

20 Official site: <https://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=9404> (last access: 20 August 2025).

21 Tuleković–Motl 2020: 30.

22 <https://www.jusp-donjagradina.org/> (last access: 4 August 2025).

23 Lukić 2000: 30.

24 Miletić 1986: 525.

An interactive map of the camp, made according to the camp prisoners' drawings (which were made during 1942) is available at our web site²⁵ and has been used during historical lessons for the visitors in Donja Gradina. The map shows the appearance of the camp and the layout of the facilities within the camp walls as brickworks,²⁶ leather-works,²⁷ hardware factory,²⁸ tunnel,²⁹ barracks,²⁹ electric power station,³⁰ guard towers,³¹ entrance to the camp³² as well as pier on the Sava river³³ which leads towards Donja Gradina and a crane for the river boat loading/unloading.³⁴ This is a way to connect scientific research and technological innovations, in order to achieve a better presentation of the Memorial and an easier understanding of the positions of Jasenovac and Donja Gradina and the dimensions of the Jasenovac Concentration Camp.³⁵ The geographical position of the Jasenovac concentration camps complex has been presented as a video-animation and can be seen at our YouTube channel.³⁶



Camp III – The Brickyard recording from February 1945, JUSP Donja Gradina ZF-06222/29

Donja Gradina was included into the Jasenovac camps' system in January 1942.³⁷ This village, located across from Camp III – Brickyard, on the right bank of the Sava River, became the largest place

25 <https://www.jusp-donjagradina.org/> (last access: 4 August 2025).

26 Within the leather-works compound there was a workshop for manufacturing brushes, a chemical laboratory and a barber's shop. The number of prisoners in leather-works ranged between 120 and 170. Most of them were Jews.

27 Around 250 prisoners, mainly qualified metal workers, manufactured various items: chains used to tie up prisoners and various types of cold weapons used by Ustashes for liquidations.

28 First detainees of the Brickyard camp spent winter nights there until the barracks for their accommodation were built. They slept on the floors.

29 Six new barracks for prisoners were built in February 1942: they were 40 metres long and 10 metres wide with wooden sleeping boxes.

30 This station supplied the concentration camp and Jasenovac with electric power. Power was produced from timber provided and transported to the camp by prisoners from the forest group.

31 Seven guard towers were built on the wall wherefrom it was easy to control the entire concentration camp area including its immediate and distant surroundings.

32 South Gate was demolished after wall construction.

33 The Sava River is a natural barrier between Jasenovac and the village of Donja Gradina.

34 Also, a part of Jasenovac scaffold.

35 Jasenovac concentration camp spread from Croatian and Bosnian Kostajnica on the left and right banks of the river Una to Stara and Bosanska Gradiška on the left and right banks of the river Sava. This is the length of total 60 km.

36 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Wk8qXfjd5Y&t=9s> (last access: 4 August 2025).

37 Tuleković–Motl 2020: 40.

of execution in Jasenovac. The territory of the village is surrounded on three sides by rivers Una and Sava and the only land access to the south, towards Prosara and Kozara, was guarded by system of bunkers and trenches. Until the beginning of the Second World War the village itself had been settled by the Serbian Orthodox people,³⁸ who, after the establishing of the Independent State of Croatia and being exposed to the first Ustashes' attacks, partly escaped the area or were killed. Most of the houses were set on fire and the village was completely destroyed. The village Orthodox Church, built in 1894, was pulled down, too.³⁹ The village area was left wasted, and since it was naturally well protected by the rivers Sava and Una and thus impassable ground, the Ustashes chose it as a mass liquidation site. Donja Gradina was turned into the largest liquidation centre of the Jasenovac Concentration Camp.

The narrow "Donja Gradina Memorial Area" stretches 117 hectares, with the wider protected area stretching on 808 hectares. There are 105 mass graves in nine graves filed, the area of which is 10 132 m². Another 22 graves were discovered at a later stage.⁴⁰



Donja Gradina Memorial Area, grave field "Topole"

Sado Koen Davko, ex camp prisoner stated:

"Gradina is a village of horrors. On the opposite side of Jasenovac across the Sava River is the village of Gradina, where they carried out mass killings. About 200 people together with the gravediggers were almost always busy digging holes and burying innocent victims. I emphasize »innocent« because other victims, who under any, even the most nonsensical verdict were killed, weren't transported to Gradina. All those who Ustashe ISC deemed unnecessary or »harmful« to their intended rule were killed there."⁴¹

The mass graves, by their position and dimension, prove that the liquidations were done systematically. There is data according to which out of 700 000 victims of the Jasenovac camps, 366 000 were killed at the scaffold of the Donja Gradina central plateau.

38 The data collected at the Third Austro-Hungarian Census, carried out on the 22nd of April, 1895.

39 Tuleković 2015: 20.

40 Tuleković-Motl 2020: 56.

41 Lukić 2000: 182.

During our preparations of the publications and exhibitions, we tend to focus on the everyday individual lives of the Serbs, Jews and Roma before the beginning of the Second World War, and also during the war, in the Independent State of Croatia, we also analyse the memories of the survivors (audio and video materials), we study the personal characteristics and deeds of the Ustashes criminals through their biographies, we analyse the documents of the perpetrators *“who did their jobs”*, we compare the reports and eyewitnesses’ statements, in order to get a complex picture of historical events (a comparative analysis). Consequently, this is an interdisciplinary approach which requires certain time and knowledge to study historical documents, literature, to listen to the memories of the survivors, and to analyse all these resources. We combine visual and textual sources, have long interviews with the survivors whose number is unfortunately getting less and less, and because of their age and health conditions we need relatively a lot of time to collect some valuable data. But when we include survivors and their memories into a particular work, we do that gives the work certain authenticity, credibility and strength, or, in other words, their testimonies illustrate best all the previously analysed and shown facts. That is the connection that gives emotionality and it’s the essence of real research of this topic.

Collecting the materials is a central mission of our Institution, as well as making possible for the visitors and the public to have insights in the materials. We digitalize all the collected materials to make the relevant information available all over the world, via our web site, YouTube channel and X – social network. A synthesis of different materials/resources and technologies makes possible for a visitor to acknowledge abundant and priceless information. The visits to our exhibitions give the visitors a special experience which elevates human compassion and personal dedication, not only to this topic, but to moral values and moral practice in general.

Collecting verbal testimonies of the Jasenovac Camp prisoners is the second most important method when we talk about the researching of the Ustashes crime of genocide. In addition to historical documents and photographs, the word of the survivors is the link that completes the mosaic of suffering. We have intensively been working on collecting the memories of the survivors from the Jasenovac concentration camp, in cooperation with the teams from the Memorial Museum from Washington, since 2007, in several occasions, and those testimonies have been made available at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum⁴² and also in *“A Book of Memories”*⁴³:

*“On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the breakout of the last group of inmates from Jasenovac, this material deserved to be published, considering that this is perhaps the last moment to record the witnesses of the Jasenovac hell. Their words will forever remain a reminder to generations to come.”*⁴⁴

We have written a lot of pages of history together so far, and it is a special honour to have the trust of the survivors from the Camp, and, at the same time, we have a huge obligation towards them, the witnesses of the Ustashes crime of genocide, to investigate and document further our painful past. Dobrila Kukolj, President of the Banja Luka’s City Association of Former World War II Concentration Camp Prisoners and Their Descendants, wrote:

“Today when I think about it, I always wonder WHY? Why did a whole generation of good, honest and nice people disappear? Why were innocent children who could not defend themselves and unborn children killed? I have no answer...”

*My wish is that there will never be a war anywhere again, that this evil will never happen again and that people will live freely next to each other. Those who do not want it, let them be punished with merciless punishment!”*⁴⁵

These words of the witness of the Jasenovac hell permeate every person and make them think.

42 <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=kozarska+dubica&searchfield=allfields> (last access: 4 August 2025).

43 Tuleković (ed.) 2021.

44 Ibid., 5.

45 Tuleković 2022: 6.

In the next part of this text there will be presented our two exhibitions:

- *The Concentration Camp Jasenovac 1941–1945* – the authors: Tanja Tuleković, a museum advisor, and Dejan Motl, a senior curator, 2020.
- *On some undocumented victims of the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia* – the author: Miloš M. Damjanović, PhD, 2024.

THE CONCENTRATION CAMP JASENOVAC 1941–1945

The multimedia exhibition “*The Concentration Camp Jasenovac 1941–1945*”, by the authors Tanja Tuleković and Dejan Motl, is a result of the continuous research work of those two curators and connecting the scientific research and technological innovations such as holographic projections or interactive slides. The exhibition has been made in a partnership with the Ministries of Defence and Culture and Information of the Republic of Srbija and The Public Institution “Donja Gradina Memorial Area”, from the Republic of Srpska, with the main goal to present the historical events and educate people in several cities and towns in the Republic of Srbija and the Republic of Srpska. A virtual tour of the exhibition is available at site of Memorial Donja Gradina.⁴⁶

The exhibition consists of: documentary materials, video materials and carefully selected artefacts and it gives a detailed review of historical facts about the establishing of the Independent State of Croatia, with an emphasis on the legal provisions which had a goal of creating the ethnically homogenous state, as well as a view of the Ustashes propaganda materials and the statements of the Ustashes officials directed against the Serbs, Jews and Roma. A special attention has been given to the establishing of the first camps which preceded the most monstrous camp of the Second World War years – the Jasenovac Concentration Camp –, and the establishing of this camp and its largest execution site Donja Gradina has been emphasised in this exhibition. The fates of the children in the Camp, lives of the Camp prisoners, devastating the traces of the committed crimes, the breakout of the Camp prisoners, the work of the State Commission for the Investigation of the Crimes, some later investigations, the search of the families for their murdered or missing members, the remembrance of the victims of the Ustashes crime of genocide and the international post-war legal provisions concerning the definition of crime of genocide have all been individually presented for the visitors to perceive a complete historiographical review. The material is acceptable to the everyday visitors and can be used for further education and research. That is why it is important that teachers and students visit the exhibition. In this way, they can choose which chapter of this sad history they want to deal with or who they want to study in more detail.

It is very important at the very beginning to understand the causes and consequences of the formation of the Independent State of Croatia. That is why at the beginning we give a timeline of the most important historical events. Establishment of the Independent State of Croatia is documented by historical maps and documents, photos and population statistics. Provisions of law are listed chronologically and the most important ones have been singled out. By reading the legal provisions, visitor already gets an insight into the intention of the state apparatus to legalize the ethnic cleansing of its territory. The conversion of Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia is also in symbiosis with the intention of creating an ethnically pure territory. Mass conversions reached during the period of autumn and winter 1941–1942 and the total number of converted Serbs was around 240 000.⁴⁷

Ljubica Živanović said on 15 February 1946:

*“Father Andjelko told me he couldn't do anything to help my daughters because they didn't convert to Catholicism. He added that we would join the children if we didn't convert to Catholicism...”*⁴⁸

Friar Diooniz Juričev said.

46 <https://www.jusp-donjagradina.org/galerija-vojske-srbije> (last access: 4 August 2025).

47 Jelić-Butić 1977: 175.

48 Horvat-Štambuk 2006: 57.

"No one except Croats cannot live in this country, as this is a Croatian land, and those who will not convert, we know what to do about them..."⁴⁹

Establishment of the first camps in the Independent State of Croatia is presented with documents, photos and animations to give an insight into the geographical distribution as well as the establishment of the Concentration camp Jasenovac. The camp consisted of five parts, and Camp III – Brickyard was considered the central one. The hard physical work to which the camp inmates were subjected, especially during the construction of the Sava embankment, is shown with archival video material. Liquidations in the camp are documented with photographs of dedicated weapons and tools as well as the statements of Ustashe and German officers and the statements of camp inmates. Authentic artefacts, tools and weapons attract a lot of attention from visitors.



Anka Ilišević, JUSP Donja Gradina ZF-11232/01-1

Special attention was paid to the largest killing area of the camp, Donja Gradina, with photos from before the Second World War. Suffering of Roma is presented historiographically with photographs and facts with notes that most Roma who were assigned to the group of gravediggers in Donja Gradina were killed until the end of June 1942.⁵⁰ Suffering of Serbs from Kozara in aim of "cleansing of villages", in June–July 1942, is shown with many photographs of innocent women, old men and children driven from their homes. Around 23 800 children of the age of up to 14 from the Kozara area were taken to the camps Stara Gradiška, Mlaka, Jablanac, Ciglana and Sajmište.⁵¹ The fear in their eyes speaks of the brutality of the Ustashe. In Stara Gradiška children were forcibly separated from mothers. Older ones would immediately be taken to Donja Gradina and killed.

The fate of the Kozara⁵² children is contained in the example of the little girl Anka Ilišević. Anka Ilišević was born in 1938 in the village of Vrbaška, municipality of Bosanska Gradiška, to father Milovan and mother Zorka. After the pogrom on Kozara in 1942, she and her father were taken in a column across the Sava bridge to Stara Gradiška. The Ustashe snatched her from her father's arms, and she shouted: *"Don't let me go, uncle!"* After that, Anka was never seen again. The only evidence of its existence is a photograph that was provided to us by the grandson of Anka's father, Mladen Ilišević.

In this case, Anka Ilišević's photograph is an object that transfers its characteristics, destiny and ideas from primary life to a museological context. The visitor focuses on the innocent girl and thinks about her fate and the evil Ustashe ideology that extinguished an innocent life and the joy in her eyes. This photography is a proof of existence and a proof of the destruction of human life.

49 Ibid., 59.

50 Tuleković–Motl 2020: 43.

51 Lukić 200: 42.

52 Kozara is a mountain in the northwestern part of Republic of Srpska. The Kozara Offensive was initiated on 10 June 1942 by penetration of strong forces from Banja Luka to Prijedor and from Bosanski Novi to Ljubija. The plan to carry out the offensive was made by the staff of German, Italian, and Ustashe Home Guard units, based on the agreement made in Opatija on 3 March 1942. In addition to the plan to destroy the armed forces on Kozara, the "cleansing" of the entire area of civil population was anticipated as well (Collection of documents: 104–108).

The evidence of Ustashe's crime of genocide committed against the Serbs, the Jews and the Romani peoples under the Independent State of Croatia, specifically in the Jasenovac concentration camp including Donja Gradina as its main execution field, is, among other historical elements, enshrined in the individual destinies, the ordeals of individuals and families, whose lineages have been extinguished forever. The Bosanac family from Bosanska Dubica, two spouses, both teachers, together with their four children were taken away, into the camp, where they were shortly afterwards all executed. Their tragic faith, along with the photographs and data that was preserved, prompts all forthcoming generations to utilize academic approach and add a scientific narrative to the individual destinies of those who perished. A video of the hologram projection about the suffering of the Bosanac family, prepared for this exhibition, is available on the YouTube channel of our institution.⁵³

As dr. Chava Baruch argued in a lecture in 2013:

"It is of essence to answer these three questions: what, how, and why these things happened? The killings and the death are only the end of these stories. They are not initial events. Using person-oriented narratives, we have to see these processes in their entirety, starting with the lives of the people in question well before the war, in their own words. Alas, when the war came, all those lives were uprooted."⁵⁴



Bosanac family were killed in Concentration camp Jasenovac, JUSP Donja Gradina ZF-10388/194

It is very important to bring the local human destinies closer to the visitors, and thus they get an insight into the fate of the national choir as well as events at the regional and global level. Most important thing is: who they were and how they lived to understand their lost. In that case, a biographical approach, personal stories, authentic places and a timeline are important. In this way, we develop reflection and the understanding of historical events shifts from statistics to personal history and destinies. Very important is to reach as many people as possible.

Through the photographs and artefacts which dated from 1941 to 1945 or from an earlier period, the victims of the Ustashe's crime – genocide and its biggest concentration camp Jasenovac finally get back their faces and get humanised. The material artefacts are at the same time a historical proof of the sufferings and the existence of the genocide and Holocaust which was done over a part of the State's inhabitants because of their different race or religion.

Through the documents from the Independent State of Croatia exhibition proves the existence of such intentions against Serbs, which were actually putting into effect the politics that one third of the Serbian population had to be murdered, one

53 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pC6BSU2oq4> (last access: 4 August 2025).

54 Baruch 2013.

third to be converted to Roman Catholics and one third to be deported. The colonization should have led to the changes in the ethnical structure of this region.

The personal destinies of the victims of the Ustashe ideology are a very striking way of documenting the truth about the genocidal intent of the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945). In this sense, it is very important to collect photographs of the victims of the Ustashe crime of genocide in order to compile a mosaic of the suffering of the innocent civilian population, Serbs, Jews and Roma. Researches in the field revealed a large number of individual family stories providing a detailed insight into the suffering of their members. Such accounts play a vital role in piecing together the mosaic of suffering endured by the civilian population of Kozara and Potkozarje at the hands of the Ustashe. The photograph led to a reconnection with a past exposing to the tragic fate of civilian population. The photos send a powerful message to visitors who will begin to think about the causes and consequences of the evil ideologies from the Second World War and help to recognize similar ideologies that the world is exposed to today. The aim of the exhibition is not only the presentation of historical facts but also the education of visitors. Confronting the past leads to reflection on the present and prevention of similar events that led to historically unprecedented suffering.

Besides the scientific research, the exhibition creates a personal relation in the visitors, empathy, which comes with listening to the oral testimonies⁵⁵ of the survivors from the Jasenovac concentration camp, which is very important for a thorough understanding of the events. Video is resource with informations about life from a birth until the day video is recorded and it is a great instrument for understanding history. These fragments of memory coalesce into a common story of a place or group of people. The collection of archival-memoir material with its valuable documents bears witness to the suffering. In the face of revisionism, video testimonies of survivors embody proof of its unique reality. Video collections will serve generations to come. In this sense, it is important to collect and present these and similar materials and that is a historical reminder and proof that the Ustashe crime of genocide was committed against Serbs, Jews and Roma.

Dužanka Petraković from the village Draksenić told us:

"In January 1942, the Ustashe crossed the river Sava and came to Donja Gradina. My father said: »Ustashe are here!« and grabbed my youngest sister Ljubica, and two grandmothers, Petra and Milka, while my mother grabbed my hand and we started to run away. My grandfather did not want to run away: »I will be in my house!«. My grandfather, Mika Ugrenović, was in America until the war. He returned to Draksenić before the war. We ran away, and he was caught and slaughtered. We were there at the church and when we looked back the Ustashe were already there at the crossroads. The snow was a meter deep! We fled to Gunjevci near Misirača. That's where we were, then we came home. When we returned, my mother and father found my grandfather slaughtered in the hedge. We only recognized him by his ring... that's how much the Ustashes disfigured him. My grandfather was buried near the church. After that, my father joined the Partisans. He was killed in Kozara. We went to Gunjevci again and stayed there until the offensive."⁵⁶

Rajko Grbavac from the village Draksenić told us:

"None of my relatives survived the war. Neither did my uncle... my uncle was killed in Jasenovac, his sons in Zemun... they didn't return, none of my relatives... Gojko, Mirko, Rajko, Milinko, last name of the most of them was Grbavac, sons of my uncle, Vujčić brothers, were killed also... Those Ustashe... they didn't recognize anyone, they beat everyone around!"⁵⁷

Not every tragedy is the same, so the variety of the testimonies which we present to the visitors leave deep traces and make the visitors think about the events really deeply. Testimonies of survivors play an important role in education. What is important is that personal approach: the name, the face, the personal story, their fate, they were tortured and murdered not because of what they did, but because of what they were, and that is called genocide. Convention on the

55 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4PslxKFeL8&t=22s> (last access: 4 August 2025).

56 Tuleković 2022: 80.

57 Ibid., 82.

Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in Article II says:

"In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. killing members of the group;
- b. causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."⁵⁸

Painful post-war search of families for their missing kin: this exhibition presents several emotionally charged post-war ads published in daily press, in which parents search for their children, youth search for their parents, grandmothers search for their grandchildren, and brothers and sisters look for each other. The tragic fate of the missing kin is condensed in a few short sentences and published in newspaper ad columns. These ads were usually published in papers with national coverage, such as *"Borba"*, *"Politika"* and *"Arena"*. Special sections of ads were meant for these cases, titled: "Missing!"

The painful postwar search for the children was very painful included touching newspaper ads such as this:

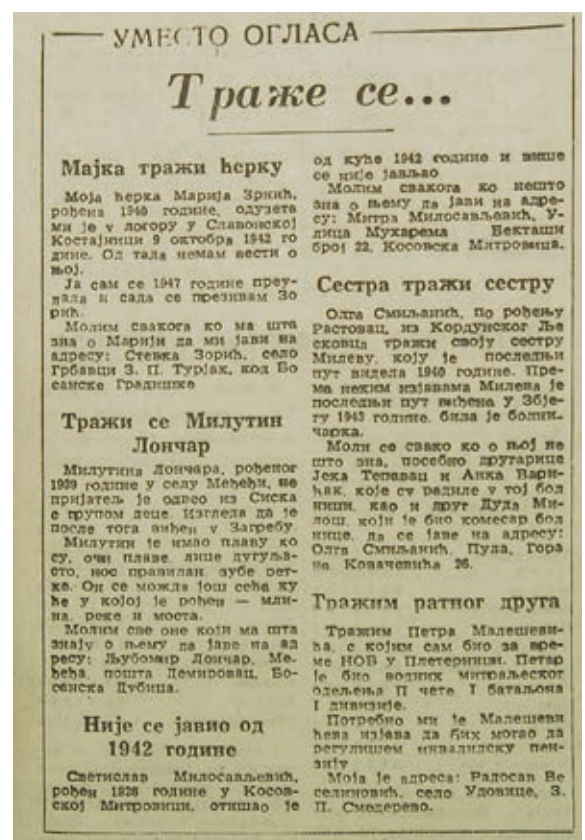
„Milutin Lončar, born in 1939 in the village of Medjedja, taken in 1942 with a group of children from the camp Sisak to Zagreb. Milutin had blond hair, blue eyes, elongated face and wide-set teeth. He may remember our house-mill, the river and the bridge where he used to play. If anyone knows anything about him, please inform us on the following address: Ljubomir Loncar, Medjedja near Bosanska Dubica.”

This ad was published in *Borba*, on 19 September 1960.

In the Independent State of Croatia Ustashe (Croatian Nazis) implemented genocide against the Serbs, Jews and Roma in the most literal sense of the word. People experienced terrible torture.

"Many lost their lives tortured in the most horrific ways: slaughtering, harrowing, cutting individual body parts, burning. Many were taken to Jasenovac concentration camp and never returned. Many lost their loved ones. Many families were exterminated. Many houses were burned. A lot of children died. There are still many broken hearts and souls."⁵⁹

With its concept, the exhibition gave a cross-section of the most significant historical events needed to see a historical context with a lot of documentary material that supported all of the above. It is a good example for future researchers. The catalogue of the exhibition is available at "Donja Gradina Memorial Area".⁶⁰



JUSP Donja Gradina ZF-06222/60

⁵⁸ The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, or the Genocide Convention, is an international treaty that criminalizes genocide and obligates state parties to pursue the enforcement of its prohibition signed 9 December 1948.

⁵⁹ Tuleković 2017.

⁶⁰ <https://www.jusp-donjagradina.org/katalog-koncentracioni-logor-jasenovac--1941-1945/> (last access: 4 August 2025).

VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST IN THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA

The exhibition *“On some undocumented victims of the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia”* by the author Miloš M. Damjanović has been organized in 2023, in cooperation with the Public Institution “Donja Gradina Memorial Area”. Before the exhibition has been made, the historiographic text with the same title had been published in the scientific journal *“Topola”*, published by the Public Institution “Donja Gradina Memorial Area”. After the qualities and the significance of the text had been recognized, there came the need to organize the exhibition with the same title, whose presentation started at the “Donja Gradina Memorial Area” on 27 January 2024, at the International Remembrance Day to the Victims of the Holocaust, and later the presentation of the exhibition was continued at the Jewish Cultural Centre “Arie Livne” of Banja Luka, followed by several more exhibition halls in the Republic of Srpska and the Republic of Srbija as well as at the Jewish Cultural Centre Doboj.

As author explained: The Holocaust, which was continually and mercilessly being conducted at the territory of the Independent State of Croatia the whole time during its existence, took away the lives of more than 30 000 Yugoslav Jews. Nevertheless, we still don't know the identities of many victims. The exhibition *“On some undocumented victims of the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia”* presents some basic identity information and biographical data of 30 Jews who had lived at the territory of the Independent State of Croatia and whose war fate has not been known so far. Out of this number, for 25 persons, it is reliably known that they were alive by the date of the accession of the Ustashes authorities in Zagreb, since they were listed by the Ustashes and stigmatised by special cards for Jews, which were used in the preparations for the exhibition to identify those people. One of those 30 persons was in Beograd at the moment of the occupation, and what actually happened to 4 persons – we are not sure. Since there are no data of them during and after the war, there is a possibility that they were murdered in the Holocaust. Revealing their identities can be useful to the future researchers.

“Hemer Andrija, born on January 22, 1919 in Vinkovci, residing in Zagreb at Martičeva ulica 51. He was registered by the Ustashe Police Commission in Zagreb – Jewish Section on July 3, 1941, which issued him a Jewish identity card number 861. Further fate unknown.”⁶¹

“Engel Jakob, born on August 27, 1911 in Bjelovar, residing in Zagreb at Srebrnjak 41. He was registered by the Ustashe Police Commission in Zagreb – Jewish Section on May 21, 1941, which issued him a Jewish identity card number 1275. Further fate unknown”⁶²

“Elzner Anula, born on March 16, 1915 in Rijeka, residing in Zagreb at Spebrnjak 104. She was registered by the Ustashe Police Commission in Zagreb – Jewish Section on May 15, 1941, which issued her a Jewish identity card number 1709. Further fate unknown.”⁶³

“Lang Abraham/Albert/Avram, born on October 6, 1894 in Markušica, in Srem, to father Filip and mother Franciska. His home-town was Vukovar. He was a professional musician – fiddle/violin virtuoso, a violin master and a member of the National Theatre. He was a violinist of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra. In the city under Nazi occupation, Lang was registered at the city authorities for the last time on 19 June 1941, at landlord Katica Hajm at ulica Kralja Petra 54/IV. Albert Lang supported the Zionist movement, financially assisting the actions of the Union of Zionists of Yugoslavia. Thus, in April 1940, he donated 47 dinars for the needs of the Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael Fund, then 40 dinars in September, and an additional 31 dinars in October. Lang contributed money to the KKL fund in earlier years as well, so in September 1939 he contributed an undisclosed amount for the purpose of redemption. The further fate of Lang after June 1941 is unknown to us.”⁶⁴

61 Damjanović 2023: 8

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 17

64 Ibid., 18–20.



This exhibition is important for documenting historical facts, determining the number of victims of the Ustashe crime of genocide and the Holocaust. The collected material represents a significant fund for compiling a mosaic of the suffering of Jews in the Independent State of Croatia. By looking at personal biographies, the visitor sympathizes with the victim and directs his attention to the character, which causes empathy. Personal data leads the visitor to reflect on the life of these people before the beginning of the Second World War and their terrible fate, as well as on the very consequences of the Ustashe ideology. In this context, it is necessary to think about how many victims the Jewish people gave and how many more Jews would inhabit the subject areas if it were not for this evil Ustashe ideology. The visitor understands the need for further research and the importance of musealization of scientific research in this field.

INSTEAD OF THE CONCLUSION

The committed Ustashe crimes of genocide and the Holocaust at the Independent State of Croatia from 1941 to 1945 were ways of creating the ethnically homogenous Independent State of Croatia. Today, 83 years after the Independent State of Croatia was established and the genocide over the Serbs, Jews and Roma was done, we face a historical revisionism, which as its main goal has minimizing the real number of the victims of the Ustashe crime of genocide. Moreover, the genocide denials, as well as glorifications of the Ustashe regime are, unfortunately, very often seen. By some pseudo-scientific research and texts, the Ustashe crime of genocide has been attempted to become relativized. However, through serious historical researches and documenting through publications and exhibitions, it is possible to prove the Ustashe crime of genocide committed at the Independent State of Croatia, since the researches and the fact that their results are checkable, are a guarantee of the truth and a contribution to the fight against the revisionism. With documents, photographs and memories of the wartime we want to remind of the suffering of Serbs, Jews and Roma in the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945). These informations contribute to the synthesis of the suffering of the people under Ustashe regime, which is a significant contribution to researching the Ustashe crime of genocide in the Independent State of Croatia.

Transferring historical material from the primary context to the museological context is the way we bring historical events and processes closer to visitors. Scientific research should be accessible to everyone, and the exhibition is the way we present new knowledge in the field we deal with.

Restoring the dignity of all victims of the Independent State of Croatia and giving them a voice is central feature of our exhibitions. In this way, we honour the victims, remember them and teach future generations about them. It is important to learn about the past so that it does not repeat itself in the future. In this sense, musealization of scientific research has very good effects.

Continuous museological work is a process that improves over time, and thanks to the new technologies, museums adapt to the modern visitor. Interactive maps, hologram projections, animations, digitalizations and similar tools are attractive for the presentation of scientific research and attract more attention from visitors. In this way, the visitor focuses more on the topic itself and becomes a researcher. Research develops into an interest in this topic and in this way, we fulfil the task of educating new generations. This is a very important role of musealization of scientific research.

In this context, the contribution of musealization of scientific research is significant, first of all for the promotional purposes of a certain topic and then for educational and scientific purposes. Materials documenting the topic in question are coming to light and opening a new chapter of scientific research. Stories from the past open the doors of the museum, providing insight into the most hidden secrets of the past. Modern technologies are used to interest the younger population in researching history.

The interest of visitors is recorded by the number of visitors to exhibitions and certain websites. The final stage of this process is the reactions of the audience, contact with them as well as possible future cooperation on research. It is very important that the exhibitions are mobile because that way they reach a large number of visitors. If it is a permanent exhibition, modern technology and websites are the way in which the exhibition can be presented worldwide. Interaction with visitors is very important, as is teamwork when preparing the exhibition. Musealization from the sphere of a closed museological context moves into active and modern life and gives a new dimension to scientific research.

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