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Heritage as an alternative driver for sustainable development and economic recovery in South East Europe

## Interpretation at special places: Mirogoj Cemetery

Darko Babić<sup>a</sup>, Mihaela Bingula<sup>a,\*</sup><sup>a</sup>*Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences - University of Zagreb, Ivana Lučića 3, HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia*

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### Abstract

Cemeteries are one of the most important examples of open-air museums as their headstones, sculptures and architecture reflect social, cultural and historical development of cities. The best known Croatian cemetery is Mirogoj, located in Zagreb. It represents an important part of Zagreb's cultural attractions, regarded as one of the most visited tourist destination. In addition to extremely valuable architecture and monuments it is interesting because many significant people have its final resting place there. However, although well-known and visited place heritage interpretation is non-existing. Thus we, students, dedicated our project to this subject, suggesting themed tours and virtual interpretation centre that would ensure a better understanding and proper presentation to tourists and to the local community. Since cemeteries include rather delicate stories any intervention or interpretation must be carefully planned, balancing respect but provoking interest and curiosity.

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### 1. Introduction

Heritage according to ideas coming from theoreticians of critical heritage studies (a field of study still in its infancy) is a communication and negotiating process which is always adjusted to the needs of the present. As L. Smith argues it is „a constitutive cultural process that identifies those things and places that can be given meaning and value as ‘heritage’, reflecting contemporary cultural and social values, debates and aspirations“(2006:3).

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +385 1 61 20 111  
E-mail address: [mihaela.bingula@gmail.com](mailto:mihaela.bingula@gmail.com).

Cemeteries are burial-grounds, or more precise public grounds devoted toward the interment of the dead. They are one of the most important examples of a specific sort of open-air museums as their headstones; sculptures and architecture (etc.) reflect social, cultural and historical development of cities. Although public, thus open and available and indeed very often pretty attractive for tourists, cemeteries for a local people implies some extra layers of meaning - they are place of mourning, pain, sorrow, respect, remembrance etc. which (seemingly) do not necessary correspondent with usual tourists' expectations. This paper on one hand examines how contemporary idea of heritage fits idea of cemeteries in general while on the other argues why their presentations make sense. As the case study the Mirogoj cemetery, the main city of Zagreb's cemetery will be used as a place which is already established as Zagreb's heritage *brand* and due to this fact needs to be properly interpreted. This is especially important since in the recent years the city of Zagreb is paying more and more attention toward creation of alternative tourist attractions, primarily those connected with culture in order to enrich its offer and attract more tourists. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) data show that total number of cultural tourists rise every year as well that these tourists are seeking new and interesting experiences during their stay in any of chosen destinations. Due to the non-existence of interpretation or any adequate presentation of heritage at the Mirogoj cemetery, it presents a great potential for future actions within this field since Zagreb, as capital of Croatia, is the city where most artists and many other significant persons from Croatian culture and public life (during a significant period of their life) lived and where many of them found their final resting place, buried at the Mirogoj.

## 2. Mirogoj cemetery as *lieux de mémoire*

Cemeteries are places where we honour the deceased, the last resting place where numerous commemorative practices are performed. Remembering and commemorating the past is essential part of the present. Memory and commemoration are inextricably linked within heritage processes. As S. McDowell argues “desire to represent memory through the marking of ‘place’ is a feature of all modern societies” (2010:38) and it is usually affiliated to locations with which people connect, either physically or emotionally. Cemeteries can be observed as realms of memory where the memory is embodied and stored. French historian Pierre Nora, the creator of the concept of realms of memory (*lieux de mémoire*), defined aforementioned as „any significant appearance, material or non-material by its nature, which became through time or human will a symbolic component of the memory heritage in a certain community“ (1996: xvii). Realms of memory are material, symbolic and functional at the same time, they are all in one. Examples are places as archives, museums and cemeteries, or practices as commemorations and rituals and objects as flags and headstones (Nora, 2007:156). Nora argues that memory, in opposition to history, is constantly being redefined and always on the border of remembering and forgetting (Rivera – Orraca, 2009:33). The purpose of the existence of these places is in its base intent to remember and materialize the non-material and they are created within two processes: the historical moments which first disappear from the flow of history and then when they are reinserted there (Nora, 2006:29). The realms of memory are organized and are presenting the past, creating new meanings which communities and groups accept in order to make their present, contemporary life, meaningful. Memories enhance places by giving them special note, here especially the one like Mirogoj cemetery which could serve as the symbol of a national identity and at the local level reflect interests of the local community.

In documents the Mirogoj exists from 1852 when it was an estate of Ljudevit Gaj, one of the central figures of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century Croatian national revival. At the purchased property he once regulated gullies, reclaimed part of vineyard and forest and planted garden (Kosić, 1974:9). After his death the city of Zagreb bought the land and at the spot began with arrangements of the new central cemetery. From 1879 till 1917 architect Herman Bollé famous for numerous other interventions in the city of Zagreb has made neo-renaissance arcades for which the Mirogoj is particularly well-known and distinguishable. The large chapel was the latest in a series of large Mirogoj buildings and many consider it the most beautiful work of H. Bollé (Kosić, 1974:34). In honour of this renowned architect and its creator an access road to the Mirogoj's central entrance (see Figure 1.) bears his name (Alleyway of Herman Bollé). The Cemetery was over time, beside the arcades, complemented with flower alleys, verdure, more chapels and family crypts. Also many monuments, headstones and other works of art of famous Croatian sculptors and artists (e.g. I. Rendić, R. Frangeš – Mihanović, R. Valdec, I. Meštrović) have founded their place at the Mirogoj cemetery. Its high cultural, historical and artistic values are by all means unquestionable.

At the same time the Mirogoj is a monument of tolerance which isn't always a case with cemeteries. It is the mutual cemetery, religiously divided on equal fields with firm prohibition toward any construction of the fences in between. This rule, as per document, was declared only 19 days after the Cemetery was officially opened (Kosić, 1974:16). In the same manner Mirogoj's domes carry equal religious characteristics: the Christian (Catholic) Cross, the Orthodox Cross and the Star of David.



Figure 1. Mirogoj's main entrance - display of Herman Bollé's domes

Mirogoj Cemetery is today managed by one of subsidiaries of the Zagreb Holding Ltd (the city owned enterprise), the City Cemeteries. This subsidiary manages in total 28 cemeteries and its main activity is the maintenance of cemeteries and crematory, provision of funeral services and cutting and shaping cemeteries headstones.<sup>1</sup> Guided by idea the Mirogoj is considered among the most beautiful cemeteries in Europe while still not interpreted we, a group of the final year students<sup>2</sup> lead by the co-author (Mihaela Bingula) and under supervision of the co-author (Darko Babić) decided to focus our seminar work within the Heritage Management Course toward its interpretation. In this sense our aim was to embrace Mirogoj's heritage which would be systematically organized and later adequately interpreted and presented. Further motivation was supported by the fact that Mirogoj became in recent years among the most attractive points for tourists visiting Zagreb, which is indeed not surprising as it represents realms of the memory of the city, an eternal resting place of many notable Croatians and indeed a place of peace and tranquillity shaped in fascinating aesthetic form.

### 3. Experiences of others - Glasnevin Cemetery and Museum

Inspired by some others examples of perfectly interpreted cemeteries our belief is we can offer a distinguish idea how potentials of Mirogoj could be presented. Cemeteries are oasis of peace and tranquillity and sometimes 'crown jewels' of its cities, especially when city leaders know how to use them. Quite often at cemeteries we could find, for example, various themed tours offered, attached museums or interpretation centres, even souvenir shops and sometimes historical scenes recreated, in other ways different tools how heritage could be presented. To illustrate it hereinafter follows short description of just one, prominent around the World and indeed the most famous cemetery in Dublin, Ireland – Glasnevin Cemetery opened in 1832 which today accommodate its own museum.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gradskagroblja.hr/default.aspx?id=8> (11.02.2014.)

<sup>2</sup> from the Study Programme of Museology and Heritage Management at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, the University of Zagreb.

The Glasnevin cemetery was founded by Daniel O'Connell and it is run today by private trust as a not-for-profit organization. Glasnevin Cemetery Museum<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 2.) acts as true guardian and astonishing storyteller of Ireland' turbulent history and culture. This goal is reached through exhibits at the Museum build at the cemetery site (opened in April 2010) and diverse tours organised at the location. Its organised walking tours are divided by themes thus potential visitor could choose among following: Historical; Joycean; Women of Glasnevin Cemetery; Labour; Military; Nature; Artist or Religions of Glasnevin Cemetery. The Museum itself holds a number of exciting and 'state of the art' interactive exhibitions which illustrate the social, historical and political developments of a modern Ireland through the stories of people buried at the Glasnevin Cemetery. This museum in fact works in the form of interpretation centre and its primary purpose is to communicate the importance of diverse, sometimes particular heritage in an enjoyable and educating manner. Museum has a permanent exhibition space which deals with interpretation of funeral rites in different religions (since Glasnevin is famous as the first and the largest non-denominational cemetery in Ireland), interactive screens which show details from the lives of hundreds of famous people buried at the cemetery, a gallery with panoramic view of the cemetery with an emphasis on all important historical monuments and prominent graves at this locality. In addition it offers an entertaining education programme for pupils. As part of this museum visitors could found a small restaurant and a coffee shop as well a souvenir shop. Beside all mentioned Glasnevin is not musealised site, it operates on daily base and serves Dublin residences and their needs and these two functions (for locals and tourists) goes hand in hand.

Strengths and advantages of the above mentioned example reflect importance of the cemetery which is associated with its heritage, and where heritage of certain country is perfectly and harmoniously presented without influencing primary function of the cemetery itself. In some sense it could be said that at the point where the human road ends on this Earth, the story (interpretation) continues which tries to integrate the various aspects important to development of all individuals and indeed development of modern nation state. In Glasnevin it is perfectly conceived in a form of the museum which reflects as many as possible aspects of the past and of the present realised through the exhibition and by the tours organised at the cemetery - an example which could be used as the case study for desirable interpretation of heritage, interpretation of the past for the present generation at the Mirogoj site too.



Figure 2. Glasnevin Cemetery and Museum in Dublin, Ireland

#### 4. Interpretation of and at the Mirogoj

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.glasnevintrust.ie/> (10.02.2014.) & personal visit to location in July 2013 by co-author.

In order to address aforementioned tasks better we firmly consider the stipulated heritage at the Mirogoj should be interpreted and presented to the potential visitors with special care. Heritage interpretation is a term that encompasses different ideas of communicating heritage toward people (visitors), in diverse forms which include but are not limited to: guided tours, live interpretation, interpretation by multimedia etc. The heritage interpretation as a specific field has its foundation in activities performed at the US National Parks and it is slowly but steadily developing from 1950s onward. One of the first theoretician, although always quite practically oriented who made the foundation for further expansion of heritage interpretation as a profession, and who is even today regarded as the founding father of the modern interpretation of heritage is an American novelist Freeman Tilden (West and McKellar, 2010:168). In his classic and everlasting book “Interpreting Our Heritage” published in 1957, the Bible for interpreters as it is often called F. Tilden contemplated basic ideas and principles interconnected with heritage and interpretation, its role and purposes as well as desirable acts and obligations of interpreters. As part of it he proposed the six principles of interpretation which after more than 50 years still remains valid and represents sort of the lesson no. 1 in any training of future heritage interpreters. This clearly demonstrates advance thinking and power of visions of F. Tilden and reconfirms quality and applicability of his six principles of interpretation which are:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or being described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art which combines many arts whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program. (according to: West and McKellar, 2010:168)

In addition, following the settings founded by F. Tilden others have made further contributions along the same line. In this context it is worth to point out the *Ename Charter*<sup>4</sup> developed by Belgium based NGO the Ename Center for Public Archaeology and Heritage Presentation which is a leading international centre of knowledge and expertise for the interpretation of heritage. The Ename Charter was in 2008 officially adopted by the ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites, the UNESCO based international association for conservation, presentation and management of cultural heritage). *The Ename Charter* offers seven basic principles on which any interpretation and presentation of heritage should be based. They are: access and understanding, information sources, attention to setting and context, preservation of authenticity, planning for sustainability, concern for inclusiveness and importance of research, training and evaluation. During any sort of planning of heritage interpretation at any heritage sites one should follow those guidelines. Interpretation, in its ultimate goal, should function and serve as a perfectly balanced and fine-tuned intermediary between heritage itself and potential heritage consumer.

The Mirogoj cemetery due to its location in the Capital and its importance for Croatian history is from our point considered as the most logical choice from where heritage interpretations of cemeteries in Croatia should begin. And indeed not only because of its extraordinary aesthetic values which counts as cultural heritage, or because it is the most busiest and the most visited cemetery in Croatia, but because of many important people who have helped shape Croatian’s past and present and whose final resting place is there. Those intangible parts which include but are not limited to bright ideas, splendid poems and literary texts, revolutionary and progressive political and social ideas, ingenious inventions etc. are around us here and those counts as heritage stronger than their tangible (counter) parts. Due to these facts, the virtual interpretation centre and themed route(s) at the Mirogoj cemetery are proposed, as a part of our student project. The route chosen for the initiation of the project of interpretation of the Mirogoj is “The

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.enamecharter.org/downloads/ICOMOS\\_Interpretation\\_Charter\\_EN\\_10-04-07.pdf](http://www.enamecharter.org/downloads/ICOMOS_Interpretation_Charter_EN_10-04-07.pdf) (12.02.2014.)

Writers Alley” (see Figure 3.). This route, as projected, would include the graves of thirteen famous Croatian writers who are buried at the Mirogoj: Ante Kovačić, Gustav Krklec, Dinko Šimunović, Antun Gustav Matoš, Dimitrije Demeter, Stanko Vraz, Ljudevit Gaj, Petar Preradović, August Šenoa, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, Dragutin Tadijanović, Milutin Cihlar Nehajev i Miroslav Krleža. This route is foremost an example and base for other routes that need to be developed in the future - architectural, historical, sportsmen etc. It is essential to start to develop thematic routes because of their great cultural-tourist, but also educational potentials that can be used by pupils and students and included in their curriculums or study programmes as part of part- time or regular fieldwork.

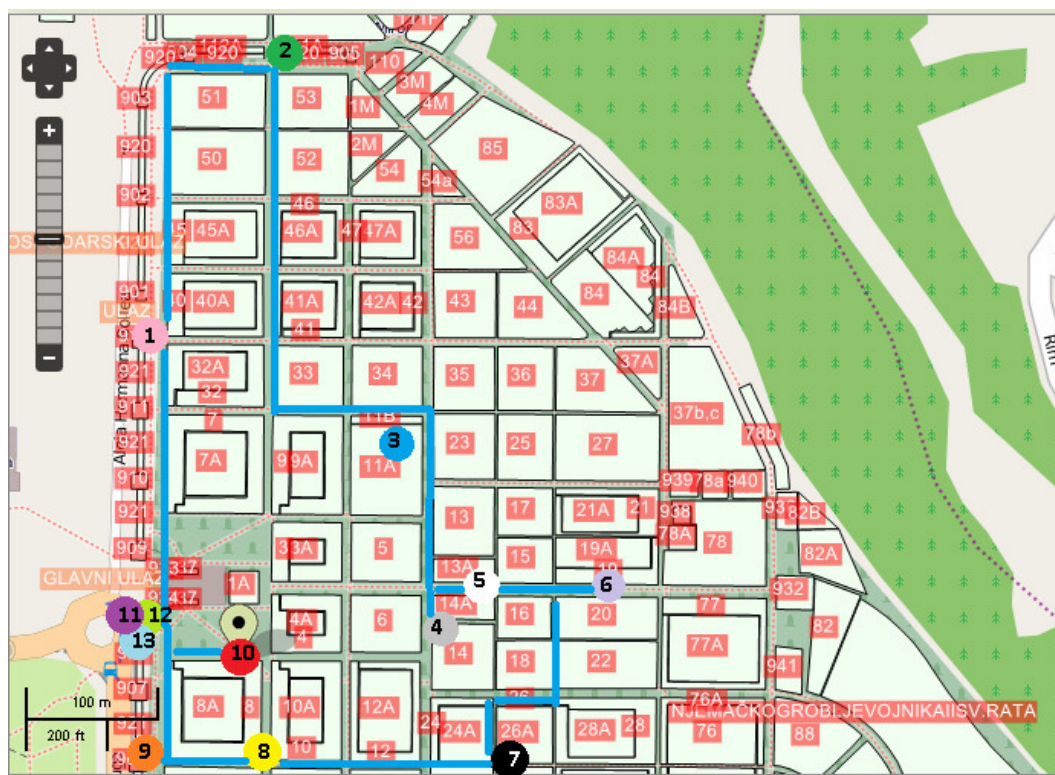


Figure 3. Ground plan of suggested route at the Mirogoj cemetery - “The Writers Alley”

Main idea for further development of “The Writers Alley” is connected with virtual interpretation centre by QR codes, very popular and common tool for heritage interpretation nowadays. By using a two-dimensional QR codes fast access to all relevant information is ensured (which will be incorporated at the virtual interpretation centre) while at the same time they require minimal interventions in a space, thus (the Mirogoj's) landscape, monuments and peaceful atmosphere will remain practically intact. On the WWW it is possible to find numerous examples of diverse use of a QR codes in museums and other public places/institutions around the World which successfully interconnect various locations and their heritage with websites and/or digital repositories loaded with specific relevant information. Visitors at the Mirogoj will, by scanning the QR codes with their mobile devices, be in position to interconnect with the official web-site of the virtual interpretation centre where they will be able to find and download content related to particular aspect of the Cemetery, the Cemetery field, a person and his/her work, headstone or monument etc. depending on the chosen subject.

By completing here proposed route the next step will be development of complimentary routes together with creation of the virtual interpretation centre (in later phase real interpretation centre/museum is planned too, based on e.g. experiences of the Glasnevin Cemetery and Museum). Realising this Croatia would become a step closer to the European contemporary practices in heritage interpretation and would have another powerful tool to approach

toward its own past and present in an adequate way, paying tribute not only to the Mirogoj as an important site and realm of memory in the minds of local residents, but ensuring interested tourists could explore this 'jewel' in its full capacity without disturbing locals habits.

Some criteria that should be taken into consideration during creation of this kind of routes include<sup>5</sup>:

- defining cultural and thematic specificity and uniqueness - here uniqueness is the Mirogoj cemetery itself, as well the fact there are no similar routes at the Mirogoj (or at other Croatian cemeteries);
- necessity to cooperate with similar programmes and organisation in other countries - (e.g. ASCE - Association of Significant Cemeteries of Europe; Glasnevin Cemetery and Museum etc.)
- smart-based intellectual orientation – proposed interpretation would make easier for visitor to orientate;
- technical management - QR codes would facilitate searching and retrieving of information and make virtual interpretation centre accessible;
- marketing - studies and market research should be conducted;
- development of motivation - success of the first theme route would enable creation of others and by that totality of interpretation of tangible and intangible aspects of the Mirogoj Cemetery will be kicked-off;
- long-term planning - creation of interpretation centre/museum at the Mirogoj location, inside cemetery and in front of existing arcades.

Instead of conclusion we could say that creation of the theme route(s) at the Mirogoj cemetery would include and demonstrate its aesthetic, historical, educational and social values. As long as interpretation is concerned the main goal of this project is to make the Mirogoj Cemetery, and we could indeed generalise this by saying the main idea is to make this and other cemeteries, and their heritage more accessible and understandable. To reach it holistic approach toward the subject, inclusiveness and importance of research and evaluation is extremely important and emphasized. Finally by creating successful heritage interpretation at the Cemetery site enrichment of the tourist offer of the city of Zagreb, long-term and sustainable, will be established. And during all these processes, especially in the last one, one thing must be remembered. Since cemeteries include rather delicate layers of feelings and stories any intervention or interpretation must be carefully planned, balancing respect of locals but still provoking interest and curiosity of visitors. It should be handled by existing rules or laws and by moral code so that harmony wouldn't be disturbed. The rest would "depend on our present sense of what is important, and the values represented by what we have borrowed from the past will be only those who are already shared" (Knapp, 2006:89).

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.mint.hr/UserDocsImages/Prirucnik\\_s\\_ISBN\\_3\\_b.pdf](http://www.mint.hr/UserDocsImages/Prirucnik_s_ISBN_3_b.pdf) (13.02.2014.)