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Marching on Memory: Heritage of the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship in Ljubljana

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The paper presents the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship, a memorial trail in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and through the elements of memory, materiality, and movement on the trail explores how certain memorials were created and curated in Slovenia under socialism, and how they are maintained and promoted as heritage in contemporary times. By combining theory on memorials in heritage studies with active engagement with the trail, the paper addresses our relationship with heritage as a multi-layered and dynamic process.
▪ **Keywords**: heritage, memorial, Second World War, socialism, Slovenia

Članek z elementi spomina, materialnosti in gibanja predstavi spominsko pot, Pot spominov in tovarištva, v Ljubljani, in s tem razgrinja pogled na to, kako so se v času socializma v Sloveniji ustvarjali spominski prostori in kako se ti prostori danes še ohranjajo in uveljavljajo kot dediščina. S kombinacijo teorije o spomenikih in aktivnega udejstvovanja na poti obravnava tudi naš odnos do dediščine kot večplastnega in dinamičnega procesa.
▪ **Ključne besede**: dediščina, spomenik, druga svetovna vojna, socializem, Slovenija

Introduction

The Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship (Sln. Pot Spominov in Tovarištva, PST) is a 33 kilometres long memorial trail that fully encircles the city of Ljubljana. Primarily it is a space dedicated to the memory of the traumatic experience of Ljubljana's occupation in the Second World War, when the city was completely enclosed by a barbed wire fence. Today, the trail is an important part of both the tangible and intangible heritage of the city, as it is also a place of a yearly commemorative march that celebrates the city's liberation in May 1945.

Besides possessing a strong memorial value, the trail has over the years developed to become a widely used public surface and one of the bigger recreational and green areas of the city. As such, the trail is a good case study of how to create, manage, and adapt heritage spaces in urban settings, while its story also offers an insight into the planning, management, and designation of heritage spaces in post-war socialist Slovenia and Yugoslavia.

The paper presents the case study of this memorial landscape as a part of the city's heritage and connects it to similar discussions in heritage studies. Its research focus is to present it through the elements of memory, materiality, and movement. Through this analysis, I plan to observe and discuss the ways in which the memory of traumatic

experiences can be physically preserved and constructed in an urban setting, how the trail itself was developed as a part of the city's heritage, and how heritage spaces can be perceived outside of their designated contexts.

The major questions of my research inquire how the memory of the Second World War was preserved and managed as heritage in a socialist Slovenian society, and how it has transitioned to contemporary times where individual memories of the events were replaced with more "curated" narratives of past events. Secondly, I also plan to look at the trail through the lenses of past–present, materiality–intangibility, and urban development–green spaces, and see whether heritage spaces can be successfully observed through all these three perspectives, and what such observation can tell us about the preservation of memories that impacted larger areas as heritage. Finally, my plan was also to observe how the trail manifests itself as part of the city outside of the official heritage narratives, and what we can learn from this when discussing heritage in contemporary contexts.

For this, I will firstly address the origins of the trail and place it into the wider narratives of war memorials. Secondly, I will address the trail in the context of the city's and the country's socialist heritage and discuss how the heritage and experience of Yugoslav/Slovenian socialism influenced its creation and designation as a monument. Finally, on the example of the trail, I plan to reflect on the positioning of heritage in contemporary settings, especially on its relationship to urban landscape, natural environment, and movement.

Methodology and sources

The following paper is based on the research for my unpublished Master's thesis on the same subject at the Sustainable Heritage Management programme at the Aarhus University in 2020. The methods and sources used for it were very diverse and cover a wide array of different approaches and elements, although they are firmly footed in the sphere of heritage studies.

In relation to the historical background of the Second World War in Ljubljana, I relied primarily on Kranjc (2015), who researched the Slovenian experience of the war from an outsider's perspective, and on Kos (2006), an invaluable resource on the trail itself. I also interviewed Nuša Kerševan (2020), a former mayor of Ljubljana, who had a major role during the time of the creation of the trail, Božo Repe (2020), a Slovenian historian of the Second World War in Slovenia, and Blaž Vurnik (2020), a chief curator for contemporary history at the City Museum of Ljubljana. The number of interviews for the research was limited because of the logistical difficulties and travel limitations during the time of the global pandemic, as I was then situated in Denmark.

Walking as a form of ethnographic method[1] also played a significant role in my research and helped me construct a broader picture of heritage on the trail, especially since walking or otherwise moving through the landscape allows for a detailed understanding of spaces (Wylie, 2002). I walked the trail several times before, alone and with company, engaging with its materiality through movement. Not being able to participate in the yearly commemorative event for the purpose of this research, I asked a group of volunteers to walk the trail instead, to answer a questionnaire and to send me photographic images of what they perceived as heritage on the trail.

Furthermore, a major body of literature in my research was connected to the role and theory of memory in heritage, where I can especially emphasize Nora's (1989) concept of *lieux de memoire* or places of memory, the works of Winter (1995, 2006), Harrison (2013), and Lowenthal (1998, 2015), as well as Connerton's (1989, 2008) integral work on remembering and forgetting in societies. MacDonald's (2012) piece on presencing Europe's past also helped me understand the trail as a reconstruction of the past as heritage in the present.

In order to fully grasp the topic in question, important sources were connected to the impact of conflict on cultural heritage (Sørensen, Viejo-Rose, 2015), commemoration of war in the contemporary setting (Sumartojo, 2016), and the use of memory in commemorative places (Drozdzewski et al., 2016a). Furthermore, Abousnnouga and Machin's (2013) work helped me understand how monuments communicate ideas, values, and identities they represent, while the volume by Carter et al. (2020) offered good insight into the articulation and change of heritage narratives in public spaces. An indispensable resource on the role and impact of revolutionary monuments in socialist Yugoslavia was also the publication on revolutionary memorials, edited by Horvatinčić and Žerovc (2023).

Finally, selected literature also helped me explore the relationship between landscapes and memory (De Nardi, Drozdzewski, 2019), the relationship between tangible and intangible manifestations of heritage and commemorative atmospheres (Sumartojo, 2016), and narratives of understanding heritage within the context of sustainability (Baker, 2006); all of which were important topics while addressing my research subject from a critical and reflective perspective. It is also important to note that my case study focuses on the management of a heritage landscape with a high emphasis on sustainability.

[1] In the social sciences and humanities, walking is not a new phenomenon and has been revisited in the context of the mobility turn, non-representational theories, and anthropology and sociology of the body and the senses (see Pink, 2007; Edensor, 2010; Ingold, 2011; Shepherd et al. 2018; Rogelja Caf, Ledinek Lozej, 2023).

Occupation and the barbed wire fence

Before starting the journey on the trail, we have to briefly touch upon its origin. Clues to the fact that the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship is first and foremost a monument to the Slovenian experience of the Second World War can already be found in the trail's title, in the words 'remembrance' and 'comradeship'. The word comradeship, for example, embodies the ideals of the organised antifascist resistance of the Slovenian Partisans (Sln. Osvobodilna Fronta, OF) against the occupiers in the Second World War in Slovenia.[2] Remembrance, on the other hand, signifies the way in which the post-war socialist Slovenian society intended to preserve these values for the present and future generations.

Resistance, spearheaded by the Communist Party of Slovenia, Christian Socialists, and the members of the gymnastic association Sokol was formed on 27 April 1941 after Slovenia, then a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was occupied and trisected between Germany, Hungary, and Italy in April 1941, with all three occupiers looking to erase any sign of Slovenian culture, nationhood and belonging in these annexed territories.

Ljubljana became the seat of the Italian occupation authorities, but it was also the centre of the Slovenian resistance movement. In order to sever the communication links between the leadership of the resistance in Ljubljana and combat units in the

Figure 1. Pillbox on the trail. Photo: Darko Gregorač, 2020.

[2] What was special about the OF was that it relied especially on the young and particularly women, who were attracted by the message of female emancipation – which was fulfilled after the war (Kranjc, 2015: 72).

countryside, the Italian occupiers decided to completely encircle the city with a ring of barbed wire fence, fortified pillboxes and barricades (Repe, 2020) and closed the ring on 23 February 1942.[3] This and other repressive measures in the city, including imprisonment, deportations, and execution of hostages, did not manage to break the resistance and the spirit of the subjugated populace.

In the end, the encirclement lasted for 1,170 days until 9 May 1945, when the detachments of the Yugoslav Army, together with Slovenian Partisan forces, finally entered and liberated the city. The fence as a physical object was subsequently cleared immediately after the war,[4] but its existence left a large physical and psychological scar on the city and its inhabitants, which became the foundation for the later commemoration of these events.

Memory and heritage

At this point, the trail can be connected to the wider field of literature on the role and impact of memory, which is one of its integral components as an object of heritage. Memory is a powerful force encountered via experiences, emotions, places, and things. It provides us with identity narratives and positions us as individuals, communities, and nations (Drozdzewski et al., 2016b: 447–448). It can be used in political, social, and cultural contexts and for various reasons; such as to remember, to forget, to control, and to keep. Because memory "highlights ancestral traits and values that are in accord with our own" (Lowenthal, 1998: 139), it has the ability to connect the past with the present. Furthermore, for Harrison (2013: 167–168), the presence of memory is one of the crucial concerns in Western societies and one of the key cultural and political phenomena of the late 20th century modernity.

Nora (1989: 18–19) also introduces the term *lieux de memoire*, or places of memory, that are simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. These places are not everyday environments of memory, or *milieux de memoire*, but have material, symbolic, and functional value, and are created through a play of memory and history. As *lieux de memoire*, sites associated with key historical events, such as is the case with the trail, become heritage constructions of the past in the present day (Reeves, 2018: 67).

Recollection is integral in the process of heritage formation, as it recovers consciousness of former events and confirms that we actually have a past that is vital to

[3] Ljubljana was the only current capital in occupied Europe to be completely enclosed within a barbed wire fence.

[4] It was cleared by the detachments of the newly established Yugoslav National Army, while farmers cleared their fields of mines with specially modified ploughs (Repe, 2020).

Figure 2. Image from the trail. Photo: Jure Burnik, 2020.

our being, which in turn hypnotises the present, making the circle complete (Lowenthal, 2015: 303–308). Our interpretations of the past can legitimise a present social order (Connerton, 1989: 1–4). In the example of the trail, the idea for the specific type of remembrance through active commemoration was born from the experience of the war, as a form of a reminder of what had happened and should not be repeated. As such, the trail has the power to connect the people of the present to familial histories and the history of the nation.

According to Ricouer (cited in Drozdzewski et al., 2016b: 453), the reproduction of memory is especially challenged at the intersection of private and collective memories of events, where private or autobiographical memory reflects the more privatized sense of the past and tends to fade with time. Assmann (1995: 127) notices that everyday memory of traumatic events persists for only three to four generations, which is about seventy-five to a hundred years. Collective memory, on the other hand, is a socially constructed notion that has the potential to forge identities and construct the past from the position of the present. For such engagement with the past, MacDonald (2012: 233) introduces the term of past presencing, which is concerned with "the ways in which people variously draw on, negotiate, reconstruct, and perform the past in their ongoing lives". In the case of the trail, private memories have successfully entered the public arena through an organized act of remembrance (i.e. yearly commemoration) and were given support by the political authorities of the time as a visible cultural monument, and a part of the officially recognised heritage of the city.

Shaping the trail as a memorial

Furthermore, the process of creating and designating the trail as a memorial[5] reflected wider narratives of rebuilding and developing a better, in the Slovenian case socialist society after the war. In that spirit, more than seven hundred self-governing organisations and communities signed the Contract of the Building and Maintenance of the Trail in 1977,[6] while 150,000 Ljubljana residents, 60,000 youth volunteers from Slovenia and the whole of Yugoslavia, as well as Yugoslav National Army detachments in Ljubljana participated in the construction of the trail with manual labour and voluntary contributions since 1974 (Kos, 2006: 36). Activities connected to the creation of the trail counted on the support of the local community, and relied on collective effort and cooperation, in a sense reflecting the ideals and *modus operandi* of the Slovenian Partisans, as well as the political climate in Yugoslavia at the time when the country adapted the self-management model to all public and social activities after the constitutional changes of 1974 (Kolešnik, 2023: 84).[7]

On the 40th anniversary of the liberation in May 1985, the ring was completed and the trail was officially designated as a "cultural memorial to the National Liberation Struggle (NOB), a memorial to the construction of a socialist society, and a memorial of curated nature" (MK SZDL, 1985: 2). The trail was officially protected as a memorial of common significance with a decree in 1988. At this point in time, at the onset of the end of the socialist regimes in Europe, remembering the NOB was still a prevalent narrative in the Slovenian society, however, a shift was happening. On the one hand this was a time when interest for the trail was renewed, because the people who had experienced the war were getting older and were starting to collect their memories with a wish to preserve them for the future as a part of the common experience of

[5] I refer to the term 'memorial' when addressing and discussing the trail as an object dedicated to commemoration, while 'monument' is used when focusing on its physical functions and aspects (Shanahan, Shanahan, 2017: 112).

[6] Chronologically, the timeline of the trail is as follows:
1957 – first commemorative march takes place along the trail;
1959 – first memorial pillars are erected along the original trajectory of the barbed wire fence;
1973 – first tree is planted;
1974 – first volunteers start work on sections of the trail;
1977 – Contract of the Building and Maintenance of the Trail, serving as a basis for the construction of the whole trail, is signed;
1985 – ring is completed and the trail is designated as a cultural memorial to the National Liberation Struggle (NOB), a memorial to the construction of a socialist society, and a memorial of curated nature;
1988 – the trail is protected as a memorial of common significance;
1992 – the Green Ring Association is founded;
2016 – the commemorative march is listed under the Registry of Intangible Heritage of Slovenia.

[7] Primarily connected to the economic sphere and the sphere of material production, socialist self-management was a system in socialist Yugoslavia where the workers participated in the decision-making processes within their factories and other public organisations. The system was distinct from other Soviet-style socialist systems and was designed by a Yugoslav statesman of Slovenian origin, Edvard Kardelj.

Figure 3. Trail marker. Photo: Jure Burnik, 2020.

the nation.[8] On the other hand, the trail's designation as a memorial connected to antifascist resistance also led to its difficult period after the regime change in Slovenia in the early 1990s, when the new city authorities attacked the symbolism and message of the trail and wanted to completely erase it from the memory as a part of the "tainted" socialist past. Such changes are usually consciously selected by a certain group of people that want to contribute to the transformation of collective memory and remembrance and find it advantageous to call for the punishment of the political and coercive authorities of the fallen regimes (Hoelscher, 2011: 289).

In the early 1990s, the new city authorities stopped the funding for the maintenance of the trail and even cut down the ceremonial wooden masts, leaving them to rot along the trail (Kerševan, 2020). Since 1991, some other Partisan monuments in Slovenia, and even more so in other parts of Yugoslavia, have been completely neglected, while the ideas of the antifascist fight, such as equality and comradeship, were also put aside in the prevalent political discourses in the region.

These attacks on the symbols and the trail itself led to the formation of the volunteer-based Green Ring Association, whose founding members were connected to the resistance movement and to the creation of the trail. Such groups that actively engage in remembrance as "memory activists" (Winter, 2006: 136–140), are not connected by kinship but by experience. The association nowadays has fewer members than at

[8] In the 1990s the same people started to donate their personal memorial belongings to history museums (Vurnik, 2020).

its peak, but still cooperates well with the municipality and maintains the trail, repairs monuments damaged by vandalism, and plants trees along the route of the trail.

Trail as a war memorial

With the trail, the city has received a memorial landscape constituting of a ritualized reminder of a notable traumatic event, as well as of the general suffering and sacrifice related to it. The meaning of memorialisation on the trail is not the glorification of individual heroes or actions, but centres on the collective experience. Besides that, the trail was also created with the prospect of post-war reconciliation in mind, so it also bears a message of peace. The relevance of its remembrance value is perpetually confirmed by an annual ceremony, which contributes to collective memory by promoting a shared experience of the values and emotions encountered during the war (Osborne, 2018: 214–218).

War memorials in general proclaim an array of commemorative messages about war, including the fact that people die in wars. These memorials have been integral to the histories of European architecture and public sculpture, and have since carried powerful aesthetical and political messages. They are also physical manifestations of collective representations, aspirations and destinies, and carry a different, more personal meaning for the generation that passed through the trauma of the war (Winter, 1995: 79). According to Rowlands (2001: 144), war memorials should allow for the resolution of suffering within the community and validate personal sacrifices that should not be forgotten. They should also "show an acceptance that violence took place in a context where it is claimed that something was gained instead, and thus transform a sense of collective loss into an object of devotion and passion". Lastly, they should "ensure that the dead are deified as part of that devotional logic and have become embodied in the idea of the collective which needs to recognize the debt and willingness to reciprocate" (ibid.).

The most characteristic aspects of many monuments, especially to the First World War, is often the tomb of the unknown soldier, which aimed to pay respect, in a physical and individualized form, to the enormous numbers of fallen soldiers whose bodies were left unrecognizable or that had disappeared without a trace. The tomb of the unknown soldier symbolized all the war casualties of a given nation and expressed recognition of their valorous deeds, while also enabling survivors to mourn individual anonymous soldiers in a physical location (Jezernik, Fikfak, 2018: 15). The closest manifestation of memory that the trail has to this notion is the Monument to the Executed Hostages in a part of the trail close to the main Ljubljana cemetery, the Žale.

War memorials are also a way in which discourse about war is disseminated to the public, as they embody certain sets of values and ideals that societies want to preserve

Figure 4. Hostage. Photo: Darko Gregorač, 2020.

for the future (Abousnnouga, Machin, 2013: 1–3). For Barthes, three major carriers of connotations are architectural styles, material objects, and poses; while Panofsky mentions familiarity, iconography, and linking of objects with specific themes and symbolic values. Social relations in monuments are best communicated through elevation, angle of interaction, size, gaze of the statues, and the impression of distance or proximity, while the choice of materials, shape and surface also plays a role (ibid.: 35–51). The trail itself was designed as a monument that is easily accessible and relies on the interaction with the public. It is a solid object, yet still organic and welcoming, which is enhanced by the choice of a macadam-paved walking surface.

Trail as a chain of memorials

Here we shall move to materiality on the trail, which is especially important with heritage sites such as the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship, as it generally affects people's direct encounter with a place, and provides means for the recollection of memory. Monuments and memorials, especially those that are large, concrete, and strategically placed, are constructed and located with the intention of communicating specific representations of the past and binding them to the material form of the present, by which they become places of politics and contestation (De Nardi, Drozdzewski, 2019: 433–434).

Construction of memorials is a well-established cultural practice where memorials can function as memory markers of deeds, have specific political and ideological messages,

Figure 5. Octagonal memorial pillar. Photo: Jure Burnik, 2020.

and mark celebration or mourning (Sørensen et al., 2019: 1–6). It is important to note that the design for the trail was first made by local students of architecture, and later followed by a national competition for the completion of the trail. This was common for Yugoslav monuments, which were mostly all created by Yugoslav sculptors, architects and designers, many of whom have experienced the war themselves and were also active participants of the National Liberation Movement.

The monuments thus made were positioned on a thin line between art and propaganda, between negotiated past and utopian future. The Yugoslav state had a monopoly over monument production, which was so prominent that almost three monuments, memorials or sculptures per day were erected for the first sixteen years after the Second World War (Baillie, 2019: 183–189). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Partisan veterans' associations reports revealed that there was virtually no place in the country without at least one commemorative plaque in honour of somebody from the war (Karge, 2023: 94). The war experience of the Partisan movement also influenced the shape of the monuments, as especially those that were centrally initiated as "important historical sites along the route of the Supreme Staff and the Central Committee during the war" (Karge, 2023: 103–104), became monumental sculptures. The trail, on the other hand, is still an impressive reminder of the city's past, but its strength does not lie in dominant presence but in persistence, embodied in a way that marks the city without giving off an impression of an overt monument.

Although the trail does not have a central piece or cenotaph, it nevertheless boasts some highly recognizable physical elements. The most iconic are the octagonal memorial pillars,

designed by the architect Vlasto Kopač. The first of these pillars were erected in 1959, and there are currently 102 of them distributed rather evenly along the trail at the approximate sites of the former pillboxes. They all have a distinctive feature in common, which is an engraved symbol of the barbed wire fence and the years 1942–1945, that clearly connect them to the memory of the Second World War. However, looking closely, one can see two other details that enhance their value as heritage and preserve them as monuments, not only to the events of the Second World War but also to the era in which they were built in.

The first is that they are all made of concrete and not of a more precious material, such as the "cold, heavy, and smooth marble" (Abousnnouga, Machin, 2013: 133) often used as a building material for monuments. This was probably a conscious material choice, as it embodies the ideas of progress, industrialisation and modernisation in the post-war years, all of which were important narratives of the socialist society in Slovenia and Yugoslavia at the time. The second, and probably an even more telling detail, is that each one is inscribed with the name of a different working collective or company that sponsored its placement. With this, the pillars offer unique insight into a part of Slovenian history under socialism, as many of these state-owned companies and collectives were once the pride of the developing socialist industry in the country, and almost none made it through the transition in the early 1990s – an experience not unknown to many former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The indication of their existence on the pillars is now often the only physical reminder that they ever existed in the nation's history.

Besides those, there are many other, sometimes hidden remnants of the war along the trail, such as remnants of pillboxes, some of which have been renovated, newly erected ceremonial masts, and the five-pointed stars in the letter o of *pot* (Eng. trail) in the official trail and blaze markers.

Trail as a green ring

Visual memorial elements constitute an important part of the trail as a memorial landscape and possess a clear emotional component in the commemoration of war and resistance, however, the trail was designed as more than just that and was incorporated in the city's urbanist plans, having been built by section since the mid-seventies until it was finally completed as a "green ring" in 1985.[9] In the elaborate for the competition of the trail's final design, the trail itself was presented as a framework to "conduct unique city values through the use of architecture as a cultural signifier of society in

[9] The choice of the colour green clearly indicates the ambitions to create the backbone for the new development of green, garden, and recreational areas in the city (MK SZDL, 1984: 1).

Figure 6. Trail in the city. Photo: Jernej Gregorač, 2024.

space" (Odbor za Izgradnjo PST, 1984: 1). Because the route of the trail corresponds to the natural radial and concentric expansion of the city, they suggested it would be the generator of its future shape and development. It would also become a point where the urban meets the rural, and at the same time "a borderline and the city's integral seam". The outcome of this competition was successful, especially in regards to the creation of natural elements along the trail in the urban areas and their preservation in the natural environment (ibid.: 2–4). It is important to note that the goal here was not to preserve nature as it once was, but to purposefully curate it in a way that conveys a message that the horrors of the barbed wire were replaced with a greener, brighter future.

The trail traverses all the major neighbourhoods of the city, and its circular shape enables it to connect the residential and industrial districts to meadows, forest and agricultural surfaces, emphasising the richness of built and natural environments of the city. As such, the true value of the trail lies in the form of a prospective memory, an unfolding and ongoing relationship between the past, the present, and the future (Harvey, Wilkinson, 2019: 179).

During the building of the trail, a strong emphasis was especially on the preservation of the natural environment – curating and maintaining the trail in a way that enables the safekeeping of the newly established natural environment. This was also indicated in the Ljubljana City Council's strategic spatial plan in 2010, which emphasizes the trail in the city's "upgrade of existing urban areas, supplementing of existing infrastructure,

and encouragement of sustainable use of space and maintenance of green surfaces" (MOL, 2010: 11382). The trail now contains the longest tree avenues in the city, with more than seven thousand trees planted alongside it. The Green Ring Association manages the planting of trees in collaboration with a professional dendrologist, who carefully selects the types of trees and takes care that they are planted with enough space between them so that they can fully develop. Some trees are planted by prominent individuals, ambassadors and heads of states, and are set in a special area called the Friendship Park (Sln. Park Prijateljstva), however, anyone can plant a tree for a donation. The focus of the creation and management of the trail has since its very beginning been an eco-centric one, as it focused on the community level, on maintenance of the local and communal wellbeing, and on harmonious use of resources (Baker, 2006: 28), which indicates a strong emphasis on sustainability as part of managing the trail as heritage.

The trail is also a good example of how heritage can be used as a tool for involving and empowering communities and recognising social value (Clark, 2008: 82–92). Cultural heritage often relies on active local communities, both amateurs such as the Green Ring Association on the example of the trail, and professionals working with authorities on a daily basis in the conservation, maintenance, and interpretation of historic structures and cultural landscapes (Barthel-Bouchier, 2013: 190).

Community involvement and participation are essential for the promotion of sustainable development, as they foster democratic engagement, ecological practices, and the advocating of certain values. However, this can also bring along specific setbacks, such as who decides who gets to set the agenda, or the promotion of narrow interests (Baker, 2006: 41–45). The Ljubljana city authorities were fortunately open for suggestions from groups engaged in preserving the memory of the war. This shows that although certain state-sponsored narratives were integral for the build-up of official ideology, some socialist regimes were open for the motions from below, and were also willing to listen to and include the participants in all stages of the process, from planning to construction.

Besides community engagement, successfully managing cultural heritage on an example such as the trail also includes respect of the natural environment, conservation of the material forms, safeguarding of the intangible heritage, and the promotion of creative practices that make places meaningful to local communities over time. Such acknowledgement of interactions between culture and nature, people and the environment, and between tangible and intangible manifestations of heritage is in general relevant in the development of the concept of cultural landscapes for the World Heritage listing (Vahtikari, 2017: 47). It is also important not to neglect inclusivity in the face of pressures from economic development that has accompanied rapid urbanisation (Hosagrahar, 2018: 69–71).

Figure 7. Planting of a new tree. Photo: Jernej Gregorač, 2024.

Movement as engagement with the trail

Movement is still the most common way to experience the trail, and it is precisely movement that is celebrated on the trail as a triumph over the limitations of the barbed wire fence during the occupation. In order to break with the trauma of these events that took place in the city during the Second World War, the creators wished to promote the trail as an open and accessible space, and conceptualized it in such a way.

Practical experience embodied through walking is also indistinguishable from the cultural and symbolical meanings behind it (Wylie, 2002: 443), while the affect achieved through walking denotes the shifting moods, colour or intensity of places and situations. Walking through a memorial landscape in particular also has connotations to religious practices and dimensions, especially through the element of searching for something intangible. While secular walking is imagined as playful and efficient, pilgrimages often try to make the journey harder, demanding suffering and even sacrifice (Solnit, 2002: 45–58). Such movement has a profound symbolic value, as the intangible notion of memory materializes itself through this practice (ibid.: 72–76).

The manifestation of remembrance on the trail today is an organized commemorative march, colloquially known as the March Along the Barbed Wire Fence (Sln. Pohod – Pot ob Žici), that symbolically connects the past with the present and takes

place every Saturday closest to the 9th of May to celebrate the liberation of the city in 1945.[10] Yearly commemorations, such as this one, often "draw together national identity, collective and individual memory, grief and mourning, regular ritual, and material, aesthetic representations of war and death" (Sumartojo, 2016: 541). Collective portrayals of memory often seek to collectivise individual memories into an imagined community of the nation to the extent that the portrayal of the national pasts in monuments and memorials has become synonymous with the symbolic transmission of national identity. In this regard, commemorations have become mnemonic techniques for localising collective memory and making the national narrative visible in the public space (Drozdzewski, 2016a: 19–20).

The march is today promoted as a commemorative, recreational, and sporting event and has been listed under the Registry of Intangible Heritage of Slovenia in 2016 as "a march along the route of a historical monument that connects the city's experience of the Second World War to modern challenges, such as healthy lifestyle and recreation. This well-visited annual event helps maintain the memory and form the identity of the city" (MK RS, 2016: 3). The annual march also "encourages the people to an active and healthy way of life, socializing on the trail, and care for the environment in which they live in" (MK RS, 2016: 1).

The central commemoration has evolved during the years and was in the beginning shaped by the ideals, narratives and realities of the Yugoslav socialism. At its outset the march was a true test of comradeship and endurance. The participants in the first march in 1957, an event sponsored by the Second World War Veterans' Association, had to carry twelve kilograms of equipment per person, including a Mauser rifle, and were grouped in teams. In 1958 the participants also had to shoot at a target, while, like in a biathlon, points were deducted for each missed shot.

In this aspect, the event has changed over the years but is still divided into the actual march that is open to everyone and to an accompanying run, which has a more competitive and athletic note.[11] By this, it is both a commemorative as well as a sporting event, with more than 30,000 people participating annually. It takes place over three days, as kindergarteners open it on a first Thursday in May, schoolchildren march on a Friday, while the central march and run take place on a Saturday. Each participant receives a commemorative pin, while those who manage to walk the full circle receive a commemorative medal.[12]

Even outside of the official ceremony, movement is the best indicator on how the trail is not relying solely on the memorial component and has adapted to contemporary times. It is considered a popular destination for runners and hikers, a recreational space,

[10] This date is nowadays also celebrated as Europe Day.

[11] To reflect the cooperative spirit of the Slovenian Partisans, the participants run in groups of three and the results count when the final member of the group crosses the finish line.

[12] I currently have six, being no stranger to the trail personally.

Figure 8. Commemorative medal. Photo: Jure Burnik, 2020.

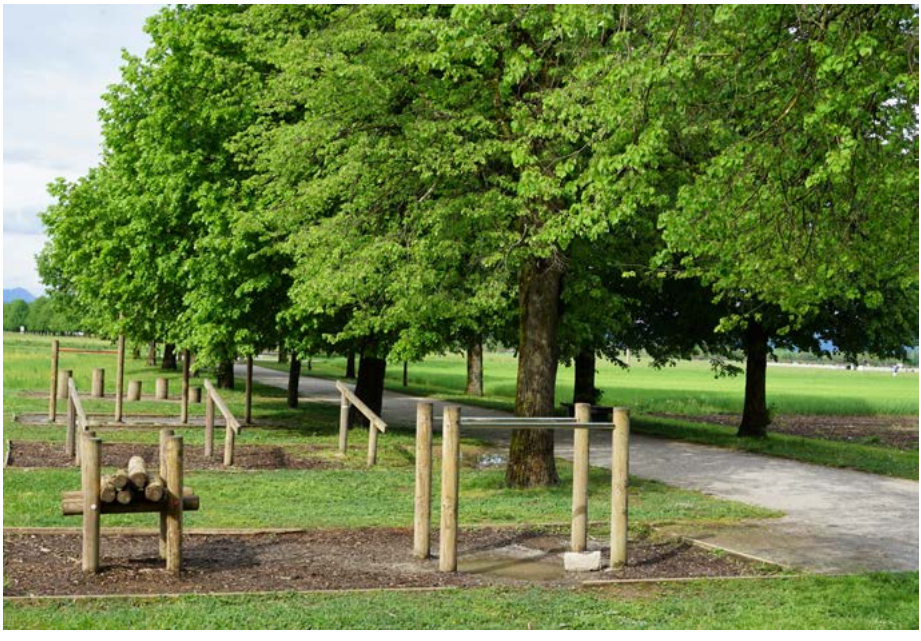

Figure 9. Exercise area on the trail. Photo: Jure Burnik, 2020.

and a transit route for cyclists. In practical terms this means that it encompasses carefully placed exercise spots, picnic tables, benches and water fountains, while it is also accompanied by bicycle lanes alongside it. It is a democratic space in the sense that it allows everybody to choose their own tempo and level of engagement with heritage.

During the research, I wanted to see how local people perceive the trail and what it means to them. The results were interesting in a sense that the older participants seemed to have a stronger emotional connection to the heritage experience of the trail outside exclusively officially recognised heritage narratives of the trail. For them, the connection was also manifested through stronger feelings of nostalgia and the impact of personal or familial memories of the Second World War, and generally through broader knowledge on the topic. On the other hand, the younger participants emphasized the recreational and socialising aspects of the trail, but some of them also expressed the wish that there would be more informational content on the history of the space. All of the participants agreed that the trail is an important part of the heritage of the city, and especially during the recent global pandemic was a space associated with the freedom of movement. With this in mind, we can see that even though the commemoration is integral to the official narrative of the trail, its real power lies in the incorporation of movement as a part of the city's history, fabric, and the living environment.

Conclusion

Through the elements of memory, materiality, and movement on the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship in Ljubljana we can explore how a place of heritage and memory can be created, and how it can be maintained in a contemporary setting and in a way that reflects the generational, political, and environmental changes. It is not solely an officially recognised monument in the city, but is at the same time the city's largest heritage surface, its connective vein and a "green ring". Not used exclusively for the commemorative purpose listed under the Registry of Intangible Heritage of Slovenia, it is yet a silent and unobtrusive, though persistent reminder of the past, a multi-layered heritage phenomenon.

The trail has its origins in the preservation of the memory and the experience of the Second World War in Ljubljana, but has later been adapted to new challenges within the city and the society. The way in which the trail was designed by the people who experienced the war and were connected to the resistance movement shows that the intention here was not only to glorify and memorise a tragic event of the past, but to channel this traumatic experience and actively defy it. The symbol of the barbed wire fence, this general element of limitation of movement, has been transformed into a place that perpetually celebrates and promotes movement and symbolically breaks the constraints of the barbed wire fence.

Furthermore, the trail is also a monument of the socialist past in Slovenia, to the way how historical narratives were manifested in that period, what this society valued back then, and how it took on the task of presenting it as heritage. In that sense, it embodies a powerful memory that is used as a literal journey into a specific cultural history of a place (MacDonald, 2012: 245). I have also not encountered such a level of engagement with the natural environment, albeit curated, in any other war memorial site during my research, which is a good indicator that the trail as a heritage site has been well devised in this regard. The construction and management of the trail can be considered an example of good practice of how the authorities can cooperate with associations from the community and rely on cooperative actions and volunteer work. Of course, some doubts might be connected to the intentions and ideological narrative behind the construction of such monuments during the socialist period in Yugoslavia, but we also have to bear in mind that the official documents connected to its creation clearly state that the trail is also a monument of "curated nature" (MK SZDL, 1985: 2), and that the expansion of potential of memory to forge identities in this manner has its roots in the rise of the nineteenth century nationalism (Sutcliffe et al., 2018: 8).

Finally, because of its multiple tangible and intangible heritage layers, the trail is a good example of heritage as a process, a meaning, and a relationship. It also presents us with possibilities of how heritage spaces can become generators of added contents in the changing city environments. It is a space of the people and for the people to celebrate the city's past, as well as a place for newer generations to create their own memories, engage with the history of the city through everyday activities outside of the "official" commemorative occasions, and to effectively march on the memory of the city.

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Hoja s spomini: dediščina na Poti spominov in tovarištva v Ljubljani

V članku avtor z izhodišča dediščinskih študij predstavi spominsko pot, Pot spominov in tovarištva (PST), v Ljubljani. V spomin na to, da je bila Ljubljana v drugi svetovni vojni obdana z bodečo žico, je pot spomenik, ki popolnoma obkroža mesto. Je del tako snovne kot nesnovne dediščine mesta, saj po njej poteka pohod v spomin na vojne dogodke, danes pa je zaradi urejenosti postala tudi del mesta, ki ga prebivalci dnevno uporabljajo tudi v namene, ki niso neposredno povezani z ohranjanjem tega spomina.

Izhodišča raziskave so spomin, materialnost in gibanje, povezani z dediščino, ki jo pot predstavlja za mesto, in vprašanja, kako so se v času socializma v Sloveniji ustvarjale dediščinske površine v prostoru in spominskem tkivu lokalnih skupnosti ter kako se z dodajanjem novih vsebin takšni prostori lahko ohranijo tudi, ko zbledijo osebni spomini na dogodke, ki jih spomeniki zaznamujejo.

Podlaga za raziskavo je bila literatura o spominu in dediščini, vojnih spomenikih, nesnovnih komemoracijah spominskih dogodkov v javnem prostoru ter o neposrednem izkustvu dediščine oz. gibanju po njej. Po zasnovi je pot spomenik, ki povezuje snovno z nesnovno dediščino, zato omogoča raziskave obeh področij.

Po kratkem zgodovinskem orisu druge svetovne vojne v Ljubljani, avtor najprej postavi pot kot spomenik v širši kontekst teorij o vlogi spomina v dediščini. V nadaljevanju sledi predstavitev procesa dediščinjenja poti, ki je v grobem potekalo od leta 1957, ko je bil na poti izveden prvi dogodek v spomin na čas, ko je mesto bilo obdano z bodečo žico, do leta 2016, ko je bil pohod ob žici vpisan v slovenski register nesnovne kulturne dediščine. Pomembna prelomnica pri tem je tudi leto 1985, ko je pot kot sklenjena celota popolnoma obkrožila Ljubljano ter postala priznana kot spomenik.

Naslednji poglavji se dotikata materialnosti poti oz. poti kot fizičnega spomenika, ki je celota več spomenikov – spomenik na vojno, spomenik družbi in spomenik socialistični Sloveniji v socialistični Jugoslaviji. Pri tem se avtor opre predvsem na literaturo o vojnih spomenikih, s posebnim poudarkom na jugoslovanskih, med katere se uvršča tudi ljubljanska pot.

Pot pa je več kot zgolj fizični spomenik. Že ob nastajanju je bila zarisana v urbanistične načrte mesta. Zaradi dreves, ki so jih od 70. let prejšnjega stoletja načrtno sadili ob njej, se je uveljavila tudi kot »zeleni obroč«, ki prebivalcem nudi dostopno zeleno površino in predvsem na posebej pogozdovanih delih tudi neposredni stik z naravo. Kot taka je tudi zgled ustvarjanja trajnostno usmerjene kulturne dediščine.

V zadnjem poglavju avtor analizira pot kot del dediščine mesta še z vidika elementa gibanja in je pozoren predvsem na vsakoletni majski pohod, ki praznuje osvoboditev mesta v maju 1945. Pohod je dobro obiskan dogodek, pri katerem se prepletata ohranjanje spomina in rekreativni značaj. Avtor poudari pomen gibanja pri zaznavanju in vrednotenju dediščine. S tem se sklene krog analize z elementi spomina, materialnosti in gibanja ter poudari spoznanje, da dediščina lahko preseže svoje snovne razsežnosti, ko se z njo ustvarja odnos skupnosti do preteklosti.