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Contemporary Croatian Encyclopedias and the WWII Commemoration

Abstract

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The author examines the contemporary role of encyclopedias in shaping the historical knowledge of the Croatian public concerning WWII, with an emphasis on web-based projects and debates. He points to the limits of the shared authority approach and user-generated content in the encyclopedic context. This leads him to reassess the possibility of the return of professionally edited encyclopedias as a tool to provide a balanced and factual approach to the painful WWII past of the country. In this framework, he examines various factors such as the limited reliability of the Wikipedia collaborative format, ethno-nationalist legacies and populism, global disinformation campaigns and post-factuality as well as European efforts to promote “cognitive resilience”.

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Introduction

The socialist Yugoslav encyclopedic lexicography (1950–1990) produced respected, but partially controversial, publications which are still widely used or referred to in most post-Yugoslav countries. Despite this tradition, post-1990 general interest encyclopedic projects in this region – except for the Wikipedias in the regional languages – are still mostly *in statu nascendi*.¹ Only Croatia and Slovenia were able to produce extensive encyclopedic works written by expert collaborators since the beginning of the 1990s. Only in the Croatian case the updating and revision of such an encyclopedia has continued until now in the form of a web-based edition. The recent developments, both globally, regionally and locally in Croatia, cast a shadow of doubt on the user-generated content in the Wikipedia-type projects as a reliable source of historical information, especially in the case of the 20th century traumatic past, often related to World War II (WWII).

This paper will examine how contemporary general interest encyclopedic works in Croatia have approached social remembrance of the historical events of WWII. I will also discuss and evaluate the role of public history approach in commemorating historical traumas by focusing on the praxis of the collaborative online encyclopedic project – Croatian Wikipedia, the (ethno)-national adaptation of the global Wikipedia approach. Attention will be given to the criticism of the treatment of WWII in this project, especially in the light of digital media's role in recent spreading of disinformation and propaganda as well as the rise of post-factual populist politics globally.

International literature refers to several examples of the role of encyclopedias in the construction of collective memories of painful pasts by the interpretation of historical knowledge related to the WWII era. The German popular encyclopedias Meyer and Brockhaus as early as the 1920s and early 1930s reported about the victimization of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in previous decades – today commonly described as a genocide – as something that warranted no further clarification using words such as “horrors” and “cruel” to detail it. But under the National Socialist regime, the Meyers Lexikon described the issue in 1936 as “horrors”, but also blamed Armenians for provoking the Ottomans with their uprisings. Gruner states that during WWII the Nazi regime applied similar arguments in its propaganda claiming that the plight of the Armenians was deserved due to their attempts to establish their own state at the expense of Ottomans.²

The article about concentration camps in the sixth volume of Meyers Lexicon published in 1939 after the review by the censors offers a horrible example of Nazi manipulation of information in order to represent the picture of the regime in a favourable light. While in reality concentration camps served to destroy Jews and other undesirables, Meyers' article on concentration camps depicts it as a camp for education and confinement of individuals with strong criminal tendencies or past.³ After the 1960s, the era of critical examination of historical and contemporary encyclopedias, especially in relation to WWII, started in Germany. The 20-volume Brockhaus Enzyklopädie (1966–1974) was criticized by Otto Köhler

- 1 For the detailed analysis of the treatment of past painful events in lexicographic projects in the wider context of post-Yugoslav see also *Dino Mujadžević*, (Trans)-national Encyclopedias and the Post-Yugoslav Knowledge Ecosystem – Framing Painful Historical Knowledge in the Age of “Post-Truth”, in: *Dennis Dierks / Stefan Berger / Chantal Kesteloot* (eds.), *Public History on the Battlefields of Europe – Experiences of Dealing with Painful Pasts in Former Yugoslavia*, Oldenbourg, De Gruyter 2021 (Forthcoming).
- 2 *Wolf Gruner*, *Armenier-Greuel – Was wussten jüdische und nichtjüdische Deutsche im NS-Staat über den Völkermord von 1915/16?*, in: *Holocaust und Völkermorde – Die Reichweite des Vergleichs*, Frankfurt a. M., Campus 2012, pp. 40, 45–46.
- 3 *Ibidem*, p. 110–111.

who noted that Nazi atrocities were partially minimized by avoiding to mentioning them. The Nazi past of certain authors and editors of this publication was also noted. In the 1970s, Köhler reported that the situation in the Großer Brockhaus changed for the better.⁴

In the framework of recent developments, Mykola Makhortykh from the Institute of Communication and Media Studies in Bern points to “the growing impact of digital media on framing and remembering, particularly for wars and conflicts,” especially stressing Wikipedia’s involvement in remembrance of these traumatic events.⁵ Christian Pentzold, professor of Media and Communication at the University of Leipzig, describes Wikipedia as “a global memory” used for “the formation and ratification of shared knowledge that constitutes collective memory.”⁶ “Partisan” and “nationalist” in Wikipedia, often in relation to historic events, have been discussed by several authors as part of current debates about its factuality.

Encyclopedias of the Institute of Lexicography in Zagreb

The contemporary Croatian encyclopedic works including Wikipedia have been decisively shaped by the ambitious general-interest encyclopedic projects in socialist Yugoslavia produced at the Institute of Lexicography of the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (1962–84 Yugoslav Institute of Lexicography; 1984–91 Yugoslav Institute of Lexicography Miroslav Krleža) in Zagreb⁷ and its flagship project of two editions of Enciklopedija Jugoslavije (The Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia, EJ), an encyclopedia of national type. The EJ’s first edition was published in 8 volumes between 1955 and 1971. The second edition started in 1980 and was discontinued unfinished in 1991. In contrast to the first edition, it had parallel complete editions with eventual various levels of completedness: Croato-Serbian in Latin alphabet (6 volumes, 1980–1990), Serbo-Croatian in Cyrilic alphabet (2 volumes, 1983–1985), Slovenian (4 volumes, 1983–1989), Macedonian (2 volumes, 1983–1985), Albanian (2 volumes, 1984–1987) and Hungarian (2 volumes, 1985–1988). The other major general-interest projects of the institute in the socialist era included three editions of universal encyclopedia (sometimes described as very similar to the German Allgemeine Enzyklopädie model: the first and second editions were published under the name of Enciklopedija Leksikografskog zavoda (1955–1964 in 7 volumes and 1966–1969 in 6 volumes respectively); in the third edition it was renamed Opća enciklopedija Leksikografskog zavoda (1977–1982, 8 volumes).⁸

Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža was the founder and director of the Institute as well as the EJ’s editor-in-chief. After the establishment of the Institute of Lexicography in Zagreb – one of the very few federal Institutions with an address outside of Belgrade – in the early 1950s, Krleža and his associates started several lexicographic projects including the EJ as the major one that tried to construct the identities of Yugoslav peoples in accordance with the ideology of self-management socialism and federal Yugoslavism. According to most au-

4 Otto Köhler, *Der Brockhaus und sein Weltbild*, Frankfurter Hefte 30 (1975), no. 9, pp. 39–50; *Krieg der Wörter*, *Die Zeit*, 1978, no. 37, <https://www.zeit.de/1978/37/krieg-der-woerter/komplettansicht>, accessed at November 17, 2019.

5 Mikola Makhortykh, *Framing the Holocaust online: Memory of the Babi Yar Massacres on Wikipedia*, *Digital Icons*, 2017, no.18, p. 68, <https://www.digitalicons.org/issue18/framing-the-holocaust-online-memory-of-the-babi-yar-massacres>, accessed 15 February 2021.

6 Christian Pentzold, *Fixing the Floating Gap: The Online Encyclopedia Wikipedia and a Global Memory Place*, *Memory Studies*, 2 (2009) no. 2, p. 263.

7 In Croatian language: Leksikografski zavod FNRJ; Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod; Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod “Miroslav Krleža”.

8 Mujadžević, op. cit.

thors, Krleža, an erudite editor with the status of the most revered Yugoslav intellectual of the socialist era and Josip Broz Tito's backing, was able to balance between having an intellectual independence, working with associates of non-communist backgrounds, and the assertion of progressive and cosmopolitan aspects of Yugoslav cultural heritage with serving the interests of the one-party Yugoslav socialist state ideology simultaneously. Krleža saw the production of EJ as a prerequisite for the creation of a new Yugoslav socialist culture. The EJ project attempted at creating a single Yugoslav cultural reference repository with the aim to build common identity but also to improve the relations between Yugoslav ethnic communities and their intellectual elites that were severely damaged in the first half of the 20th century, especially in WWII.⁹

In his programmatic essays, Krleža declared that he wanted to stress in the EJ what he saw as a persecution of the Yugoslav peoples by powerful vicinal states “that treat us for centuries as an object”. In other words, Krleža saw it as a tool to document how South Slavic nations painfully fought their way through history which climaxed with the emergence of the victorious WWII partisan movement and the parallel social revolution.¹⁰ In the EJ, particular attention was given to the occupation of Yugoslavia by the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria) in 1941 and the emergence of their local allies (Ustaše, Četnici etc.) as well as the emergence of the consistent resistance against them by the partisan movement led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Narodnooslobodilački pokret). The lexicographic commemoration of these events was used to legitimize the communist-controlled Yugoslav socialist regime that emerged from this movement. The partisan movement was presented as a solution to the suffering brought about by the German and Italian occupa-



Waymarker to some of the burial grounds in Stara Gradiška, Bosnia. Photo: Stephani Streloke, 2019.

9 Slaven Ravlić, Enciklopedija kao socijalna utopija (Encyclopedia as social utopia), *Studia lexicographica*, 5 (2011), no. 1 (8), pp. 48–49.

10 Drago Roksandić, Krležina Enciklopedija Jugoslavije između euroskepticizma i euronormativizma: prilog poznavanju početaka Krležina projekta Enciklopedije Jugoslavije (Krleža's EJ between Euroscepticism and Euronormativism: a Contribution to the Knowledge of the Beginnings of Krleža's project EJ), *Studia lexicographica*, 8 (2014), no 2 (15), pp. 13–14.

tion of Yugoslavia and subsequent inter-communal conflicts and racial/ethnic persecution by the Axis side during the war.

The commemoration of the numerous atrocities and large number of victims of the occupation and quisling regimes in the encyclopedias of the Zagreb Institute of Lexicography was, to a certain degree, compromised by the exaggeration of the number of victims. This was especially the case with the atrocities committed by Ustaše in Jasenovac camp. For example, Croatian historian Ljubo Boban's entry on Ustaše in the first edition of EJ (1971) presented a very unrealistic number of victims exterminated in Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška concentration camps (675,000). Today it is widely accepted that the most reliable number of victims would be between 70,000 and 100,000. According to the Jasenovac memorial area (Spomen područje Jasenovac), which created the list of names of victims, the number of victims in the Jasenovac and adjacent concentration camps like Stara Gradiška is 83,145.¹¹ A similar approach to WWII history was present in the other editions of the Zagreb Institute of Lexicography in the socialist period.

Hrvatska enciklopedija

Encyclopedias that were published after 1991 in the successor states of socialist Yugoslavia reflected the new frames of interpretation that emerged in this period and still largely influence the perception of the traumatic 20th century events. Most of them use the encyclopedias produced by the Institute of Lexicography from the socialist period as either reference and inspiration or something to respond to, debate with or distance themselves from it. In Croatia, both affirmative and negative approach to the Yugoslav encyclopedic legacy is present.

After the discontinuation of the EJ and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Institute of Lexicography Miroslav Krleža since the early 1990s has continued to work on the lexicographic projects focusing on Croatian historical and cultural legacy. In this period, the Croatian Biographic Lexicon (Hrvatski biografski leksikon, begun in 1983), and a new project titled Hrvatska enciklopedija (HE) were two main projects of the Institute. The HE, which was conceived as a mix between universal and national encyclopedia, was published in 11 volumes in printed edition between 1999 and 2009. Dalibor Brozović (1999–2001), August Kovačec (2002–05) and Slaven Ravlić (2006–09) served as successive editors-in-chief. Since 2013, the HE has a free-access online edition (Mrežno izdanje Hrvatske enciklopedije; www.enciklopedija.hr), which has been constantly revised and updated.

While remaining edited, factchecked and written by professional lexicographers working in the Institute and external academics, its online edition enabled users to comment each article and correct possible mistakes and provide updates. This feature brings elements of public collaboration into the project. According to its introduction, the HE sees itself as continuing the lexicographic tradition of the first Hrvatska enciklopedija – the encyclopedic project started in pre-war 1939 and left unfinished in 1945 after the establishment of the socialist regime – and universal encyclopedias of the Institute of Lexicography (Enciklopedija Leksikografskog zavoda and Opća Enciklopedija Leksikografskog zavoda), which were

11 Ljubo Boban, Ustaše, Enciklopedija Jugoslavije, vol. 8., Zagreb 1971, p. 444. For the realistic assessment see: Koncentracijski logori, www.enciklopedija.hr (web edition of Hrvatska enciklopedija), <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=32708>, accessed on 15 February 2021; Poimenični popis žrtava KL Jasenovac 1941–1945, <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/default.aspx?sid=6284>, accessed 16 January 2021. See also the analysis by Heike Karge in this issue, pp. 73–80 (editor's note).

largely edited by Croatian non-communist and dissident editors. The EJ, which was more under Yugoslav and Marxist ideological influence, is not declared as neither a basis nor inspiration for the HE.¹²

The HE reflects new attitudes concerning the commemoration of WWII in Croatia after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the 1991–1995 war. The (post-)WWII repression by the early socialist Yugoslav regime (e. g. the mass liquidation of Ustaša soldiers after their surrender near the town Bleiburg in Austria in 1945), ignored completely in the EJ and other projects of the Zagreb Institute of Lexicography during the socialist era, was now included in the encyclopedic material.¹³ In contrast to the encyclopedia produced by the Institute during the socialist regime in Croatia and Yugoslavia, the partisan movement of WWII now lost its place as the paramount source of legitimation for the new state. Its place was largely taken over by the 1991–1995 war in Croatia which was now framed as the war of national independence (Domovinski rat) and legitimate defence against Serb rebellion and the aggression by Serbia and Montenegro.¹⁴

Still, the WWII antifascist communist-led resistance was depicted affirmatively and remained as an additional period from which independent Croatia derived its legitimacy and territory. The HE articles focused on the partisan movement only in Croatia and its Croatian features, deemphasizing the Yugoslav dimension of the antifascist struggle in Croatia. In this framework, the unification of formerly Italian-controlled Istria, Kvarner and Dalmatia with the rest of Croatia is hailed as the towering achievement of the partisan movement for the Croatian national cause. Generally, the governmental bodies of the partisan movement in Croatia are described as “safeguarding Croatian state sovereignty” and its significance for the foundation of modern Croatia is implied.¹⁵

The key articles in the HE clearly condemn the pro-Axis Croatian side in WWII. The Ustaša movement is exposed as a “separatist, nationalist and terrorist organization”. The Ustaša-run Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945) was described as being controlled by and dependent on the Axis powers and therewith delegitimized as lacking sovereignty. The terror against Jews, Serbs, Roma and political enemies organized by the Ustaša regime was prominently stressed with special attention given to the antisemitic racial legislation and the extermination of Jews as well as the Jasenovac-Stara Gradiška complex of extermination camps.¹⁶ The HE and other former and current projects of the Institute of Lexicography are often quoted by Croatian and other post-Yugoslav Wikipedia articles. These references are especially noted for being used since at least 2019 to establish the widely accepted and reliable definitions of controversial topics in Croatian Wikipedia, such as the Ustaša movement and the Independent State of Croatia, as opposed to politically biased definitions previously provided by right-wing faction of Wikipedia editors and collaborators.¹⁷

12 **Jakov Sirotković**, *Znanost i politika u Enciklopediji Jugoslavije* (Science and Politics in the EJ), *Radovi Leksikografskog zavoda Miroslav Krleža*, 10 (2001), pp. 45–48; *Mujadžević*, op. cit.

13 See for example articles “Bleiburg”, www.enciklopedija.hr, accessed 21 November 2019.

14 See for example the article “Domovinski rat”, www.enciklopedija.hr, accessed 21 November 2019.

15 See articles “Antifašizam” and “Partizani”, www.enciklopedija.hr, accessed 21 November 2019.

16 See articles “Nezavisna Država Hrvatska” (Independent State of Croatia), “Ustaše”, “rasni zakoni”(racial laws), “holocaust” and “Jasenovac”, www.enciklopedija.hr, accessed 21 November 2019.

17 See Wikipedia articles Ustaše, <https://hr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ustaše>; Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nezavisna_Država_Hrvatska, accessed 21 November 2019 and 16 January 2020.

Croatian Wikipedia

Wikipedia, an online free encyclopedia in English and other languages of the world, created and edited by collaborative effort of anonymous volunteers, has been present since 2001. In the context of its use to commemorate historical events, it is probably the best known and widely used online platform. Wikipedia subscribes to the policy of a strict “neutral point of view” (NPOV), but the enforcement of this policy is the responsibility of administrators and collaborators, not the Wikipedia foundation. Everybody can become a writer of Wikipedia, but the privileges of Wikipedia administration are given to its more active and well-known collaborators. The number of articles (and the number of words) created by Wikipedia in English is greater than in any other encyclopedia in English language, including the famous Encyclopaedia Britannica.

In addition to the original Wikipedia in English, numerous language editions of this online encyclopedia using the same technology and concept have been created, each different from each other with respect to the articles included as well as their content, number and length. In recent years, the role of the internet as a source of knowledge in general and news and education in particular has grown rapidly and Wikipedia became one of the most popular websites worldwide.¹⁸ This situation was reflected in Croatia also. According to the Alexa ranking website, in 2019 wikipedia.org was ranked the 12th most popular internet site in Croatia.¹⁹ In 2019, Croatian Wikipedia listed 211,949 articles, while the competing project of Serbo-Croatian Wikipedia included 450,317 articles.²⁰ Serbo-Croatian Wikipedia is organized around the idea of Serbo-Croatian language and it often attracts contributors who find Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian Wikipedias too narrow and nationalistic. During the 2010s, it attracted many former contributors of the Croatian Wikipedia who didn't want to participate in this project due to the dominance of right-wing editors.

In addition to its success to reach massive audience, the Wikipedia concept has globally received criticism in respect to bias, qualification, vandalism and the lack of expertise of its collaborators. Interestingly, some Wikipedia articles received also very good reviews for the quality in comparison to professionally produced encyclopedias. It can be concluded that in general the quality of Wikipedia varies drastically. Wikipedia itself recommends its collaborators not to use other Wikipedia articles as references due to potential unreliability.²¹ The area that the majority of researchers identify as the most dangerous in context of its influence on public opinion is Wikipedia's exposure to co-ordinated biased and politically motivated manipulation, often by exploiting the commemoration of traumatic historical events and contemporary crises.²² The idea of democratically accessible user-generated content, aimed to enable constant revision and improving of articles, in a politically charged and volatile climate can turn the intended goals of shared authority and collective collaboration upside down. Because of the online vandalism and malevolent interference, articles can be misused and even completely appropriated by focused and experienced anonymous extremists.

18 *Oboler / Steinberg / Stern*, op. cit., p. 285. According to www.alexa.com, a ranking site, it currently holds 9th position globally (in August 2019 it was 7th, in 2016 and 2017 it reached 5th place), see <https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/wikipedia.org>, accessed 21 November 2019.

19 <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries>, accessed on November 21, 2019.

20 *Mujadžević*, op. cit.

21 According to “Wikipedia: General disclaimer”: “... Wikipedia cannot guarantee the validity of the information found here.”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia: General_disclaimer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:General_disclaimer), accessed on November 24, 2019.

22 Bentzen, *Europe's Online Encyclopedias*, 14. On quality of Wikipedia articles see also “Vandalism on Wikipedia”, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vandalism_on_Wikipedia, accessed 24 November 2019.

The study by Andre Oboler, Gerald Steinberg and Raphael Stern concludes that the last editor can close the page for further changes and thus acquiring complete and unchecked control over the content. These authors also point to the fact that committed editors are able to manipulate Wikipedia “as a platform for political propaganda” and to exercise a “gatekeeping role”. Casual users are no match for such actors who “overwhelm, and thus eliminate, the contributions of others.”²³ So-called edit wars, the often politically motivated conflicts between editors who typically constantly revert changes in text made by each other have become a common occurrence. Wikipedia’s guidelines to limit such conflicts (such as three as the maximum number of reverts) have had only limited success and may have not stopped long lasting edit war. The problem is exacerbated by the existence of anonymous users who dispose over several identities. Also, one should note important differences of articles on the same topic across different language versions of the encyclopedia which seriously put the neutrality of Wikipedia authors in question. These versions seem to differ a lot in the case of controversial subjects such as war victims and crimes, the memorialization of which is “often instrumentalised for purposes of national self-assertion on the local level and of self-representation to the outside world”.²⁴

Phenomena such as edit wars and differences between Wikipedia language versions have developed especially in the post-socialist space and are described as “characterized by the disproportionate politicisation of digital and memory environments.”²⁵ In this part of Europe, these conflicts have been driven by small groups of dedicated users focusing on one-sided and politically charged interpretations of painful and traumatic historic events in the 20th century and were of service to the nationalist identity mobilisation. It can be argued that the Croatian (and wider post-Yugoslav) web environment, with its recent history of major military conflicts accompanying lingering WWII controversies, is definitely one of the very few most explosive online memorial landscapes in the post-socialist space. In recent years, the Croatian Wikipedia landscape has often displayed typical features of online conflicts such as edit-wars perpetuated by conflicting ideological positions. As I will show in the following examples related to the treatment of the traumatic past of WWII, the very core of Wikipedia’s mission – the participation of online users in generating the encyclopedic content – has had, at least until very recently, very controversial and even dangerous outcomes in the context of the Croatian Wikipedia.

The controversial nature of the Croatian online encyclopedic environment is visible in the German language edition of Wikipedia. A study published in 2014 which measured controversiality by looking at reverts in the editing of articles in twelve language Wikipedias detected “Kroatien” as no. 1 controversial article in the German Wikipedia! The authors of the study quantified the controversiality of an article “based on its editorial history, by focusing on ‘reverts’, i.e. when an editor undoes another editor’s edit completely and brings it to the version exactly the same as the version before the last version.”²⁶ The toxic nature of Wikipedia environment related to Croatia and its wider post-Yugoslav surroundings is also visible in the English language version of the encyclopedia. Its list of controversial issues (measured by the frequency of “re-editing in circular manner”) includes several articles or their parts that are connected to Croatia in particular, usually associated with the memori-

23 Oboler / Steinberg / Stern, op. cit., pp. 285–287.

24 Makhortykh, op. cit., pp. 72–73.

25 Ibidem, p. 71.

26 T. Yasseri / A. Spoerri / M. Graham / J. Kertész J., The Most Controversial Topics in Wikipedia – A Multilingual and Geographical Analysis, in: P. Fichman / N. Hara (eds.), Global Wikipedia – International and Cross-cultural Issues in Online Collaboration, Scarecrow Press 2014.

alization of the important modern historical events and figures: Yugoslavia (breakup of that country), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995 war), the Republika Srpska, the Republic of Serbian Krajina and Nikola Tesla (his nationality being Serb vs. Croat).²⁷

Declaratively, Croatian Wikipedia adheres to Wikipedia's proclaimed NPOV and other community norms. Nevertheless, as I will explain shortly, Croatian Wikipedia has been until very recently far below the standards of factuality and relevance that are set not only by the previously discussed HE project, but also above-mentioned basic norms of the global Wikipedia project, especially in relation to ethno-nationalist bias. At the same time, Serbo-Croatian Wikipedia, partially written by former collaborators of the Croatian one, is often singled for its more nuanced approach. This has also been noted by international researchers: in their comparative investigation of English, Dutch, Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian and Serbo-Croatian Wikipedia articles on the Srebrenica 1995 genocide. R. Rogers and E. Sendjarevic note that they reflect a "rather national than neutral point of view." Serbo-Croatian Wikipedia, according to these authors, distinguishes itself with an authentic attempt at being neutral and presenting different views of the described events.²⁸

One of the best insights into the inner workings and power struggle over a dominance within a Wikipedia language edition in the context of traumatic WWII-related commemoration of events and individuals is the recent case of the Croatian Wikipedia, which also attracted the attention, even protests, of the wider public. According to most sources, around 2009 the Croatian Wikipedia came under the dominance of administrators and users who were large supportive of right-wing and conservative views on Croatian history. In the course of time, this group coordinated efforts. In order to protect and strengthen their dominance, they communicated off usual Wikipedia channels and used multiple profiles. Encyclopedic texts written by critical and/or leftist users were commonly reverted and such contributors were very often blocked or permanently banned from the Croatian Wikipedia, while the right-wing and conservative interpretation of history and politics using often un-substantiated media and dubious academic sources, especially relating to WWII and socialist Yugoslavia, was advanced.²⁹

In 2012, a reporter wrote that the Croatian Wikipedia article on the leader of the Ustaša movement and the Independent State of Croatia, Ante Pavelić, was clearly displaying revisionist views. It was reported that this article was claiming that the Ustaša movement cannot be described as racist, totalitarian or right-wing. Furthermore, the article claimed that the repression of the Ustaša regime was merely a justifiable tit-for-tat reaction to the dictatorship of pre-war Yugoslavia. Most shamefully, the Jasenovac concentration camp was depicted as nothing less than an almost pleasant place of confinement, where extermination and torture didn't take place.³⁰ One year later, after a campaign by disgusted former Wikipedia collaborators on social media, the Croatian mainstream media outlets picked up the story reporting on articles in Croatian Wikipedia on WWII-era figures such as Adolf Hit-

27 See: Wikipedia: List of controversial issues, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_controversial_issues, accessed 25 November 2019.

28 R. Rogers / E. Sendjarevic, Neutral or National Point of View? A Comparison of Srebrenica Articles across Wikipedia's Language Versions, in: Wikipedia Academy – Research and Free Knowledge, June 29 – July 1 2012, Wikipedia Academy, Berlin 2012.

29 Dobar Skroz, Kako je teklo razotkrivanje hrvatske Wikipedije (How the Croatian Wikipedia was unveiled), www.lupiga.com, 25 November 2014, <https://www.lupiga.com/vijesti/razotkrivanje-sramotne-hrvatske-wikipedije>, accessed 25 November, 2019.

30 Marko Gregović, Nezavisna Wikipedija hrvatska, 22 February 2012, <http://www.h-alter.org/vijesti/nezavisna-wikipedija-hrvatska>, accessed on November 25, 2019. For discussions within Croatia Wikipedia community see https://hr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedija:Kafić/prigovori_na_Meti_1_vrste, accessed 18 November 2019.

ler, Ante Pavelić, Vjekoslav Luburić, Josip Broz Tito, and Jure Francetić as examples of biased and unbalanced writing aiming to make Ustaša crimes acceptable and vilify the WWII anti-fascist movement.

After these revelations and public outcry, the Croatian minister of science and education and a number of noted intellectuals publicly denounced the Croatian Wikipedia for such anomalous approach to the commemoration of WWII history.³¹ These reactions forced even the founder of Wikipedia Jimmy Wales to make a statement. The Wikimedia foundation even opened a page where complaints about the biased writings and the misconduct of the administrators in the Croatian Wikipedia could be submitted. The opponents of the right-wing control over the Croatian Wikipedia among its editors were emboldened to take action, but the vote to remove the administrative privileges from the administrators responsible for this situation narrowly failed. The complaints about voting disruption during the voting process have been filed with the Wikimedia foundation, but there were no consequences and they have remained in charge of the Croatian Wikipedia.³²

Nevertheless, by 2019, the public controversy forced the administrators to rethink their approach and allow more factually based re-writing of some of the most controversial articles such as those on Ante Pavelić, the Independent State of Croatia and the Ustaša movement, often using the HE as a reference for definitions. Despite this, some of the articles were still in 2019, at least partially, open to some claims of right-wing revisionism. For example, the November 2019 version of the article on Jasenovac concentration camp (*Sabirni logor Jasenovac*) abandoned some of the outrageous claims from its 2012 version, but it still accepted some openly revisionist authors – especially Stjepan Razum and Igor Vukić – as relevant although they aimed to minimize the level of brutality and the death toll of Ustaša terror in Jasenovac.³³ According to Nenad Jarić-Dauenhauer, in December 2019 this article still avoided naming Jasenovac death or extermination camp and wasted half of its space to the discussion about the number of victims (including revisionist claims) and unproportionately stressed the attempts of the socialist regime to manipulate the death toll. At the same time, the article still showed additional traces of ideologically motivated bias – for example, the role of the communist-led antifascist movement was perceived exclusively negatively.³⁴

Even so, the right-wing grip over Croatian Wikipedia ended during 2020. In November of the same year, the leader of the nationalist faction of editors, an anonymous individual known under the nickname Kubura, was banned from the Croatian and any other Wikipedias and soon previously most of the controversial articles on the WWII era topics were revised in a much more balanced fashion.³⁵ By February 2021, the article on the Jasenovac concentra-

31 Nenad Jarić Dauenhauer, Kako je Wikipediju uzurpirala ustašoidna desnica (How Wikipedia was Usurped by the Ustasoid Right), <https://www.tportal.hr/tehnolo/clanak/kako-je-hrvatsku-wikipediju-uzurpirala-ustasoidna-desnica-20130911>, accessed November 18, 2019.

32 See https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Requests_for_comment/2013_issues_on_Croatian_Wikipedia, accessed on November 25, 2019.

33 Sabirni logor Jasenovac, https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabirni_logor_Jasenovac, accessed 25 November 2019.

34 Nenad Jarić Dauenhauer, Hrvatska Wikipedija je takvo smeće da su i vlasnici digli ruke od nje (Croatian Wikipedia is such rubbish that the owners have given up on it), Index.hr, 8 December 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/hrvatska-wikipedia-je-takvo-smece-da-su-i-vlasnici-digli-ruke-od-nje/2138213.aspx>, accessed 16 February 2021.

35 Filip Pavić, Kuburin pad – Dobio je globalnu blokadu, a njegovi se sljedbenici, sada bez vođe, povlače (Kubura's fall - He gets a global blockade, and his followers, now without a leader, withdraw), Jutarnji list, January 31, 2021, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/hrvatska-wikipedia-je-takvo-smece-da-su-i-vlasnici-digli-ruke-od-nje/2138213.aspx>, accessed 16 February 2021.

tion camp (now named *Koncentracijski logor Jasenovac*) distanced itself clearly from Vukić's and Razum's as well as other revisionist's views and right-wing claims. The article described the Jasenovac camp as an extermination camp for Jews, Serbs and Roma.³⁶

Instead of a Conclusion

While the HE and Serbo-Croatian Wikipedia seemed to escape the legacy of politically motivated propaganda serving dominant ethno-nationalist narratives, the Croatian Wikipedia, especially in the context of the commemoration of WWII, was not able to emancipate from such an environment until recently. The long-lasting turbulences in the Croatian online encyclopedia environment seem to be reflecting similar menacing trends in Western Europe and the US, mostly taking place in the context of social media sites. These trends are seen by commentators as announcing the “post-factual” or “post-truth” era based on the spreading of non-factual knowledge. The phenomenon of so-called fake news is usually seen as a prominent part of these developments. For example, there were reports about Russian-funded social media ads and troll farms spreading disinformation and false news aiming to influence the US presidential elections in 2016.

Similarly, in recent years, pro-Russian disinformation campaigns attempting to influence the public in the EU have advanced conspiracy theories promoting the idea of the imminent collapse of the supposedly corrupt EU. Although these campaigns may have been initiated by trolls and bots paid for by Moscow, it is more worrying that their spreading has been enhanced by users on social media who were inclined to believe these claims. Such disinformation took place in the climate of increasing avoidance of classical news media outlets and of the public's orientation on social media to receive information, while at the same time, according to the polls, members of the public are very often not able to identify fake news at all. Even shockingly, the famous search engine Google, commonly used for fact-checking and education purposes, has been reported to include the algorithm-based search results that ranked highly antisemitic propaganda and conspiracy theories.³⁷

As previously stated, Wikipedia's status of knowledge resource is currently contested worldwide, especially in the context of politically motivated framing and vandalism (see above). Moreover, the appearance of collaborative, but also officially backed and controlled Chinese and Russian online encyclopedias as alternatives to Wikipedia as well as blocking of Wikipedia in certain countries, and the rise of the right-wing collaborative encyclopedic project named Metapedia, which uses Wikipedia's software, in the West have additionally discredited the Wikipedia project. An October 2017 op-ed in the US monthly *inWired* described Wikipedia as being “in existential crisis.”³⁸ The decline of the idea of participatory and user-generated online encyclopedia worldwide influenced the EU authorities to search for solutions to enhance the ability of citizens to resist disinformation. This ability is sometimes called “cognitive resilience.” A recent report published by the European Parliamentary Research Service found the solution for this cognitive crisis in return to national, professionally produced and academically reliable encyclopedias in mother tongues of European citizens, which should be accessible online to everyone at the same time and could help “boost cognitive resilience.”³⁹

36 *Koncentracijski logor Jasenovac*, https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koncentracijski_logor_Jasenovac, accessed 15 February 2021.

37 *Bentzen*, *Europe's Online Encyclopedias*, pp. 5–6, 9.

38 *Ibidem*, p. 15.

39 *Ibidem*, p. 1. See also *Mujadžević*, op. cit.

In the framework of this, Croatian society has an advantage that could help boost cognitive resilience of the general public, which is especially important in the context of remembering the painful WWII past. This is the still reverberating tradition of wide professional general-interest encyclopedic production in Zagreb which reached the pinnacle of societal importance and its most productive years during the period of socialist regime. In many European countries, the golden age of encyclopedias was finished around WWII, in the (post)-Yugoslav space and Croatia this period ended only in 1990. Such not very distant past provides Croatia with largely successful – notwithstanding the shadow of socialist authoritarian state and some of its manipulations – role models offering the tradition of professionally mediated factuality. Moreover, the Zagreb-based Yugoslav/Croatian lexicographic tradition is still preserved in the Institute of Lexicography Miroslav Krleža. The existence of such a, relatively large, state-funded institution focusing largely on encyclopedic work is still a unicum in the world production of knowledge. The current flagship project of the HE is the only ongoing online professional general-interest encyclopedic project in the region and can be seen as an example of a relevant encyclopedic work that is, despite – or precisely because of – its classical method of production accepted and used as a corrective towards the recent right-wing excesses of an online environment.