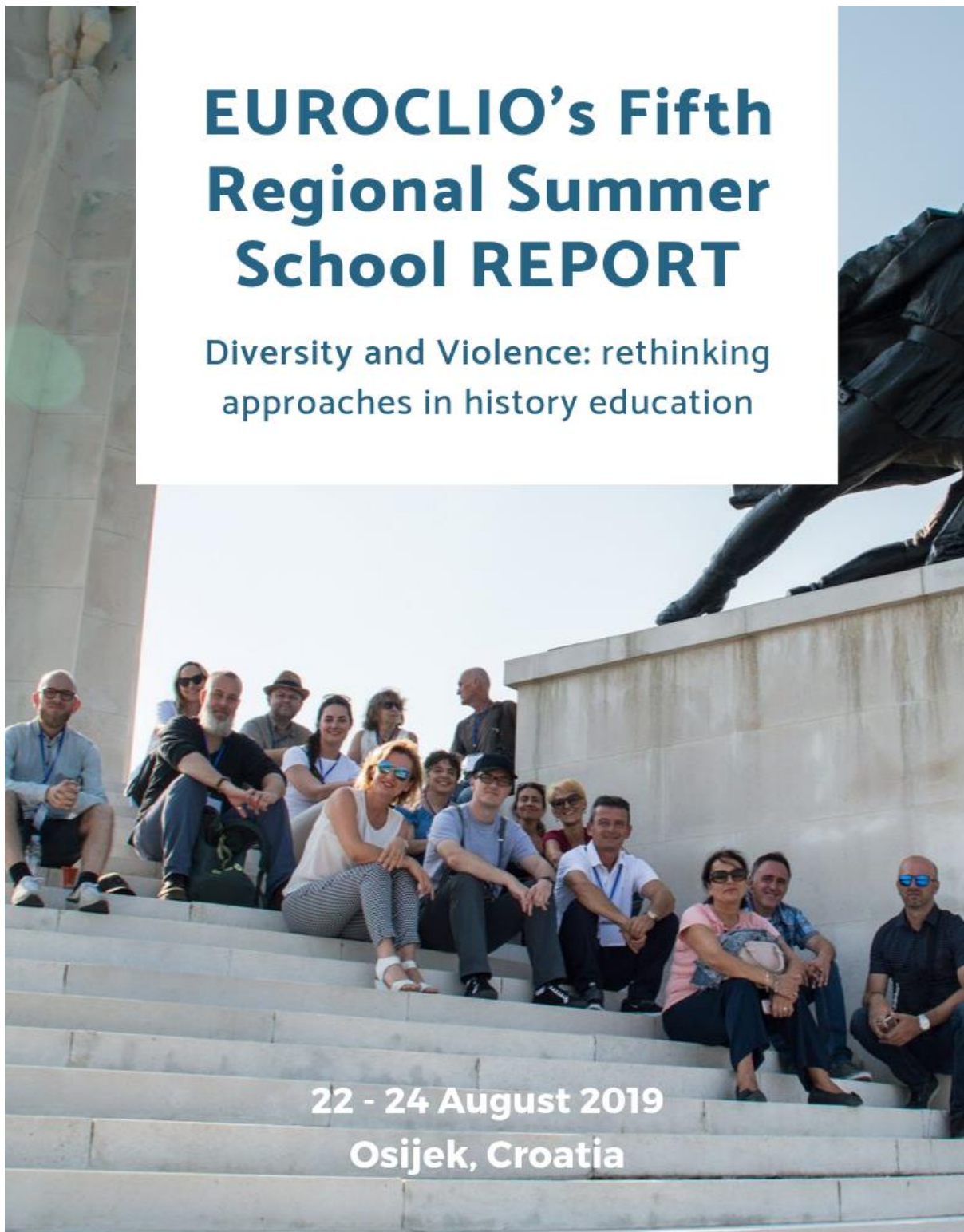


EUROCLIO's Fifth Regional Summer School REPORT

Diversity and Violence: rethinking
approaches in history education



22 - 24 August 2019
Osijek, Croatia



Photos: Vedran Ristić, Report: Judith Geerling

The summer school in short

The regional summer school was the fifth EUROCLIO summer school organised in the Balkan region. It was hosted by the National Museum of Slavonia in Osijek, Croatia from 22-24 August 2019, and co-organised by the History Teacher's Association of Croatia (HUNP). Around 20 educators from 11 different countries came together in Eastern Croatia to explore the topics of Diversity and Violence in relation to approaches in history teaching. In the setting of a country that experienced active conflict just over two decades ago, we explored the effects of recent conflicts and world wars on the multi-ethnic Slavonia region.

The programme evolved around two specific subthemes:

1. **Multiculturalism and Threats of War** – The 1990s war in Croatia was part of the biggest conflict in Europe after the Second World War. Its cost was enormous: human losses, refugees, depopulation, impoverishment and destruction of urban and rural settlements, economic infrastructure and cultural heritage. All these consequences still largely shape fragile and sensitive relations in and between societies and states of the region.
2. **Coexistence and Remembrance** – Some scholars describe the commemorative culture in Croatia by the concept “islands of memory”, meaning that there are separate communities of remembrance which deal with different traumatic events and rarely overlap in doing so. Through the exploration of memorial sites participants reflected on the connection of education and remembrance in relation to these historical events.

The aims of the summer school were to:

- Explore the issues of **diversity and remembrance** in history education
- Explore the **effects of recent conflicts** and world wars on multi-ethnic communities in Eastern Croatia.
- Learn about **positive practices** of dealing with diversity in Croatia.
- **Share experiences** of remembering violent conflict in the region.



Multiculturalism and Threats of War

The summer school started with a **workshop by Vedran Ristić**, a history teacher from Osijek and one of the local organisers. Looking at objects in relation to violent conflict, the participants were asked before the start of the training to bring a (photo of an) object, book, art piece or personal experience that first made them think about violence conflict, if possible in the Balkan region. With everyone sharing something personal related to such a heavy topic, this session helped to get to know each other and to get into the theme.

On-site learning on WW2: Batina Memorial complex



Impression of the visit to the Batina Memorial complex

The on-site learning programme on the Second World War as to the **Batina Memorial complex**, on the border of Croatia, Serbia and Hungary. This complex was erected in 1946 by the well-known Croatian sculptor Antun Augustincic to commemorate the Battle of Batina that took place during WW2. It commemorates a key victory of the Red Army and partisans over the Nazi occupiers. The monument rests on a mass grave for Soviet soldiers that lost their lives. With a typical grand socialist style, the commemorations that are still held here have been subject to some controversy due to changed views on the role of the Red Army and due to involvement of some former Soviet states in current commemorations.

Did you know...

Croatia has an officially recognised German minority since the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Historically they are mainly concentrated in the area around Osijek and in Baranja (Eastern Slavonia). A big exodus after the war forced the vast majority out of Croatia towards the end of and after the war, as was the case in other Eastern European countries that came under the influence of the USSR.

On-site learning on the Homeland war: Vukovar memorial sites

We decided to visit Vukovar because of the many memorial sites and the special position this city has in relation to the co-called Homeland war in the 1990s. Vukovar is a city in eastern Croatia, and hosts Croatia's largest river port, at the confluence of the Vuka and the Danube rivers. During the 1990s wars, it was the setting of the *Battle of Vukovar*, a 87-day siege of the city by the Yugoslav People's Army, between August and November 1991. At the time, this was the fiercest and most protracted battle seen in Europe since 1945, and Vukovar was the first major European town to be entirely destroyed since the Second World War.



Impression of the visit to the memorial sites in and around Vukovar

The visit included the **Memorial Centre of Homeland War Vukovar**, the **Memorial Museum in the Vukovar Hospital**, the **Ovčara Memorial** and close by **mass grave site**, and the **Vukovar Memorial Cemetery**. The hospital, which was under heavy shelling throughout 1991, continued to operate from its cellar until the fall of the town. The basement now hosts a Memorial-museum. The Ovčara Memorial has been erected at the location where over 200 patients, civilians and hospital staff were executed after the capture of the hospital. The Memorial Cemetery is erected at the location of the largest mass grave where over 900 soldiers and civilians were buried after the occupation of the city in November 1991.

Coexistence and remembrance

Nansen Dialogue Centre in Osijek gave a presentation on intercultural learning. The organisation was founded in 2001 with a mission of social recovery and development of multi-ethnic communities, they have done numerous educational projects and were involved in the set-up of the intercultural school in Osijek. This 'new school', co-created with teachers, parents, pedagogues and psychologists, was meant to be the first integrated and intercultural elementary school in the city of Vukovar. More information on the Centre and their projects can be found here: <https://www.ndcosijek.hr/>.



Session by Nansen Dialogue Centre

During a **panel discussion** with Tihomir Živić, (Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek) and Kristina Babić, (Local Democracy Agency Osijek) participants found out more about the unique peaceful integration process that brought Vukovar and the surrounding region back under Croatian control after the end of the war. Both members of the UN established Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) on behalf of Croatia, they worked together with representatives of Serbia and the UN on integration the region into Croatia in a peaceful way. There was an option to liberate the region by force, but this avenue was not chosen as the expected casualties and damage to institutions would be enormous. What makes this process unique was that there was strong political will from both sides to succeed in this process, despite a lot of resistance by the Croatian population towards the process.

This session was followed by a **workshop** hosted by local educator Nikica Torbica on teaching about peaceful reintegration. Together with some students, participants worked in groups with different artifacts, photos and documents to come with suggestions how to teach about this process in a way that would actually interest students and challenge them to think more positively about coexistence.



Workshop 'Teaching about peaceful integration' by Nikica Torbica

This was followed by broader **discussion groups** in which participants reflected on approaches to diversity and violence in history education, hosted by HUNP President Dea Marić. Using the format of a world café, the topics museums & memorials, reflection, methods & approaches and topics & content were discussed. Many suggestions were made, such as looking at personal stories and family histories, looking at the topic of mixed marriages which are very common in the region, reflecting on how you can 'step outside' your perspective, and on an important difference in the function of museums (historical education) and memorials (give meaning, healing).

Social programme

In addition to the official day programme, the summer school also had some more informal social programme elements so participants could get to know each other better and relax together. This included a **guided city walk** in Tvrđa, the citadel or Old Town of the city of Osijek where the hotel and venue were also situated. It contains the largest amount of Baroque buildings in the country and is situated on the river Drava.

The group also visited the **Gerstmajer vineyard** and wine making facilities where the winemaking process was explained and participants enjoyed the wine with local food. The vineyard has almost a century-long tradition of wine making.

Traditionally the summer school also included an **intercultural evening and pub quiz night**. Hosted by local organiser Vedran Ristic and EUROCLIO coordinator Judith Geerling the participants were challenged on their knowledge of the area, facts coming from the programme elements and general knowledge.



Impression of the social programme including the pubquiz (left top) with pub quiz master Vedran Ristić and the winning team (top), the city walk and the vineyard.

Conclusions and evaluation

The summer school provided a wide range of sessions, workshops and on-site learning experiences that explored the themes of diversity and violence in the context of the Slavonia region and Croatia as a state. Despite the fact that the topics discussed were sometimes quite heavy, the relatively smaller group of participants made the atmosphere intimate and safe to share experiences and thoughts. We had a wonderful guide Marko at the Memorial sites in Vukovar, who was very open to our many questions which enriched the learning experience. Participants evaluated the overall summer school with a 4.9 out of 5, especially appreciating the positive and open atmosphere, diverse trainers and many relevant discussions throughout the training.