2023

Educational Materials

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History of Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška concentration camps

Lesson plan

Objectives for the students

Students will:

- get new knowledge about the context and history of Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška concentration camps
- be able to analyze various sources connected with Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška concentration camps

Age of participants: 15-19

Learning materials and educational resources:

Power Point presentation with photos

Lesson flow

Repetition

Repeat with your students basic facts about Second World War in Europe, so it will be easier for them to understand the local context of the Independent State of Croatia.

The students can answer the following questions individually, discuss them in pairs or all together.

Suggested questions:

- When did the Second World War start in Europe? With which event did it start?
- Who were the two opposed sides in the war? Can you name some of the countries that belonged to these sides?
- Name at least three main characteristics of the Nazi ideology.
- Who were the groups prosecuted during the Second World War in Nazi Germany and collaborating countries?

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Motivation

Show to the students the photo of the spoon and fork from the camps. **(Photo 1)**

Ask the students the following questions:

- What do you see on the photo?
- What do you think these object were used for?
- To whom do you think these objects belonged?
- Do you think these objects were important for this person in some period of their life? Why?

Tell the students to remember their thoughts about these objects and that you will get back to them during the class. They will find out more about the objects later.

Development

Part 1 | Foundation of Independent State of Croatia (NDH)

Teacher's introduction

When WWII started in Croatia in April 1941, Croatian territory was part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The head of that state was a king from Karađorđević dynasty, and the capital was in Belgrade (today Serbia). On 25 March 1941, the state decided to join the Axis. However, some high-positioned politicians and many citizens were against that decision and a series of protests started immediately after this decision was made. On 27 March, general Simović and the army tried a *coup d'état* to change that decision. When Hitler, who planned to attack the USSR at the moment, saw the instability in Yugoslavia at the time, he decided to solve this issue before and secure his back. On April 6, the short-lasting war started in Yugoslavia, by bombing Belgrade and some other important cities in the country. Yugoslavia officially capitulated on 17 April.

The teacher is showing the map of occupied territories of Yugoslavia to show the territory of NDH **(Photo 2)**.

The teacher asks the students to analyse the map by following questions:

- Can you see on the map which foreign countries occupied the territory of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia? Read some of them.
- What did these occupying states have in common? What was the regime in these states in 1941? To which side in the war did they belong to?

On the most significant part of the territory, including today's Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and westernmost parts of Serbia, the new puppet state called the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was founded.

The teacher asks the students the following questions:

- Who is Benito Mussolini?
- What were the main characteristics of Fascist ideology?

The main leader of that state was Ante Pavelić, leader of the Ustaše movement. Main Ustaše leaders were exiled from Yugoslavia and they lived in Italy during that time. They were also trained there and got close contact with Benito Mussolini and his fascist party.

The teacher shows to the students **Photo 3** and asks the students the following questions:

- Can you recognize at least one of the people from the photo? Whom?
- Who do you think is the second person, shaking hands with Hitler? If the students don't know, the teacher tells them this is Ante Pavelić, the leader of the Ustashe movement.
- What can you conclude from the photo about their relationship? How do they look to you?
- Why do you think Pavelić met with Hitler on April 7, 1941?

NDH was founded on 10 April 1941 and Pavelić returned from Italy to the State five days later.

The teacher shows the map of the Independent State of Croatia to the students, to be aware what the country looked like **(Photo 4).**

The main aim of Ustaše ideology was the foundation of an independent Croatian state on its completely ethnic and historical territory, which is "cleaned" from other ethnic groups.

The teacher asks the students the following questions:

- Do you know what racial laws are? What do they prescribe?
- Do you know some examples of the states that had proclaimed racial laws and implemented them during the Second World War?

Racial laws were proclaimed in NDH on 30 April and they targeted Jews and Roma people. However, the Serbian population, which was one-third of the entire population of NDH, was the main target group of the Ustaše regime and its system of terror. For the Serbian population, special laws were created that prescribed that they should be forcibly expelled from the NDH, converted from Orthodox Christian to Catholicism, or killed.

Part 2 | Concentration camps in NDH

The teacher asks the students to answer the following questions:

- Do you know any concentration camps? Name several of them.
- Which groups were deported to the camps?

As NDH was a puppet state of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the Ustaše regime followed and took over the majority of their measures, law, and politics. This included also the politics of discrimination, concentration and annihilation. They wanted a country where only Croats and Bosnian Muslims would live, so they started to arrest the groups that were considered unwanted or even dangerous and transferred them to concentration camps.

The concentration camps on the territory of NDH were founded almost immediately after the foundation of the Ustaše state. The first camp was Danica near Koprivnica, which was an old factory building where the first detainees were taken. From Danica, they were deported to the Gospić system of camps – Jadovno on Velebit Mountain, Gospić and Slana, and Metajna on the island of Pag.

What people knew about these camps and what the first deportation looked like you can find out in the following insert. The witness is Dragica Vajnberger, a Jew from Zagreb, whose brother was among those taken to Danica and later killed.

Listen to the interview with Danica Vajnberger (with English subtitles) - Min 10:43 – 13:45 (Link to the interview)

Part 3 | Jasenovac concentration camp

The Ustaše were preparing the Jasenovac system of the camps to be open during the summer of 1941.

The teacher shows the student's **Photo 6** and asks the following questions:

- What do you see in this photo? Describe it.
- What does the ground surrounding the building look like?
- What do you think, why a location like this was chosen for the camp?

In addition to the flat terrain, the site near the village of Jasenovac was chosen for its good transport links and proximity to the railway. The building you see in the photos was a brickworks factory owned by the Bačić family, who owned also a sawmill, chain factory, mill, etc. The Ustaše used all these industrial buildings as concentration or working camps for deported people. First camps were placed in nearby villages of Krapje and Bročice, which were located next to the Strug River and where the

detainees were building embankments. Soon after, the camp in Jasenovac, named Camp III Brick Factory was opened.

Jasenovac system of the camps was first of all labor camp, but also a death camp. Detainees worked in the different factories around, but also in agriculture and construction works.

The teacher shows the students **Photo 7** asking them the following questions:

- What do you think, who are the people in the photo?
- What are they doing?
- What do they look like?
- Can you guess from their look and from the context of the photo, what were the conditions in Jasenovac camp like?

People were dying from harsh conditions, lack of food and hygiene, different diseases and hard labour.

However, many people were killed in Jasenovac in the most brutal ways, with hammers, axes and knives (**Photo 10**). Then, they were thrown in mass graves, on the other side of Sava river, in Donja Gradina, which is today on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The detainees tried the breakthrough on 22 April 1945, but the majority of them were killed during the event. Of around 600 men, only 92 survived the breakthrough. After that, the camp was closed and its barracks and other buildings burned down.

Part 4 | Stara Gradiška camp

The teacher shows the students **Photo 18** and asks the following questions:

- What do these buildings look like?
- What does it remind you of?
- What do you think the buildings were used for?

The place where the Stara Gradiška camp was opened were the parts of the 18th-century Napoleon fortress. Parts of the fortress were used as a prison even before. In 1941, Ustaše also used it as a prison for Croat anti-fascists, but at the end of the same year, the first detained were deported there from the Danica concentration camp and from different prisons in Zagreb. In Stara Gradiška there were many women with children, many of them without parents. Many of them were deported to the camp in the summer of 1942, after the battle on Kozara Mountain, where big Orthodox Serbian population lived. These kids later become known as “Kozara children”.

In the camp, there was a clear separation. Men were in one part, and women's part of the camps were divided into one part for Croatian and Muslim women, and the other part, known as Tower (or Kula in Croatian), was for Serbian and Jewish women and children. It was a cold, dark and very humid place and the conditions in the Tower were harsh.

Part 5 | Action of Diana Budisavljević

Diana Budisavljević, nee. Obexer was born in Austria, and she was married to Julije Budisavljević and moved with him to Zagreb.

The teacher shows the photo of Diana Budisavljević **(Photo 19)**.

Her husband was a doctor and he was of Serbian origin. When WWII started in Zagreb and when she found out that Serbian women and children were imprisoned in various camps in NDH, and were without any help or support, she started the action of helping them out. First, she collected food, clothes, blankets, and similar things that women were lacking in the camps. But, Diana used her high position in society, as well as her Austrian origin and German language, and in the summer of 1942, she got permission to get into the Stara Gradiška camp and nearby camps of Mlaka and Jablanac.

The teacher is showing to the students the **pictures 16 and 17**, asking them to analyze the photos. They can be divided into groups, and the teacher can divide the photos into several smaller groups, in order to discuss the photos.

Questions for the analysis:

- Who is the person in white in the photo?
- Who are the people around her?
- What is she doing in the photo?
- Can you guess where and when the photo is taken?
- Can you guess why Diana Budisavljević is considered important even today?

After the group work, students share their conclusions with the other groups.

The camp in Stara Gradiška was closed in April 1945, and it was used with the same purpose during the entire war.

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Part 6 | Jasenovac Memorial Site today

The teacher shows the students **Photo 11,** asking the following question:

- When you think about other concentration camps and memorials, what is unusual in this photo?

On the territory of the Jasenovac III brickworks place, in 1966 the Memorial site was created. Bogdan Bogdanović, one of the most famous Yugoslav architects and designers, created the whole place, the landscape and the monument.

Students are looking at the photo of the monument (**Photo 12**), and answer the following questions:

- What do you think this monument represents?
- What is this flower symbol of?

The teacher shows the **Photo 13** asking the students what they think, and why the train is placed within the Memorial site. What does it represent?

The museum, which is part of the Memorial Site, was opened for the first time in 1968. Then, during the entire Yugoslav period, the museum had many visitors, and it was one of the most popular museums in Yugoslavia. It was open until October 1991, when the Memorial Site and the village of Jasenovac were occupied during the War in the 1990s. The exposition was not evacuated on time, and it was taken to Banja Luka (today's Bosnia and Herzegovina). It was only in May 1995 that the place was liberated and when it was possible to start rebuilding the memorial site and the museum. After a long process, the items from the exposition of the museum were returned in 2001. The new museum was opened in 2006. This exhibition is focused on the victims and individuals, to whom the space is given to speak and show the dignity of the victims of the Jasenovac system of the camps. In the museum, you can see the photos, original documents, personal items that belonged to the detainees and those found on the territory of the former camp. Also, there are audio-visual materials, showing mostly the testimonies of the victims and survivors.

Eyewitness to History | Group work

Divide your students into groups. Each group will get one of the sources and will research the inmates and living conditions in Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška camps. Ask the question:

- What were the conditions in the described camps?

Source 1.

Egon Berger – "44 months in Jasenovac", Jasenovac, 1978.

"In the brick factory, we found the storage with the cabbage, so we took cabbage leaves and plants. That was our only source of food. Many of us were caught stealing and immediately killed, but we were not scared of that, we had to eat something. Around noon, the group of Ustaše came to our place. They pushed us out of that dwelling and took us further on. We didn't know where we are going. After several minutes, we arrived at some drier, which in the past served as a drier for the roofing tiles. The drier was without walls, there was only a roof. On the sides, there were only pillars that held the roof. The temperature was minus 10 degrees outside. We should stay in that place for an unlimited amount of time. We started to squeeze one close to the others to keep warm, but it was not of much use. There was snowing inside and the strong wind blow the snow on us. Some members of our group wanted to move to the nearby barrack. In the dark, I saw three shadows moving away from our drier. It was moonlight. When they were only a few meters away, I heard the machine gun shots from the nearby bunker. Ustaše expected that too. Freezing, we waited for the night to pass. We could not fall asleep. Those who did never awake. I do not know how many of us froze to death that night, but the final result after six nights was crushing. On the seventh morning, Ljubo Miloš, Modrić brothers, and Kojić came to inspection, all of them first-class killers. They were satisfied with the result. Only sixteen of us seven hundred stayed. We were then moved to the camp barracks, where we were a new group."

"Every day we went to work. First in the morning in front of the administrative office, and then where we were sent. From work, we came back for lunch – a few cabbage leaves in the hot water. Every day a smaller number because people were dying of cold or of hunger… Then we had enough shoes, we were taking them from the death detainees, and Ustaše were not interested in those clothes with vermin."

"We older detainees who had energy and power at least to stand straight and walk in the circle were not that severely beaten because we were considered as a workforce. They needed us more and more every day because the artisans groups were growing, while the outside groups were working mostly as gravediggers. Ustaše needed many of them – every day many new detainees arrived, and then the liquidations started. "

Source 2.

The Diary of Diana Budisavljević (Dnevnik Diane Budisavljević)

10th July 1942

"Then we went to the so-called child hospital. First, several rooms where children were lying on the beds. Those who were good to be transported were taken to a separate room.

Then we saw something terrible. Rooms without any furniture. There were only potties, and on the floor, there were sitting or lying indescribable skinny small children. In their eyes, one can see dead. What to do with them? The doctor told us that here it is too late for any help. The leader of the transport decided to take all the children that we can and try to help them. We made the choice. The children were put on their legs and those who were able to stand on their feet were taken. Those who were falling, those who did not have strength, needed to stay. And really, the majority of these poor human beings died during the day. In one room where were children infected with diphtheria, so all of them were deathly ill, we didn't even enter."

"Two days ago the big transport of women and children arrived at Stara Gradiška. They were not separated yet and they were sitting on a big meadow close to the hospital. I asked these women are they willing to give their children to us to take them. They decisively refused that. What will happen to them, will happen to their children too. It was our task to take only children without parents or children whose parents will give them voluntarily; no force."

13th July 1942.

"At 6:25 in the morning again we went to Stara Gradiška. As in the afternoon it was raining outside, we were writing the lists at the outer entrance of the children's hospital. Ustaše took the children we have listed to the first floor. They were immediately separated from their mothers who were closed behind the wooden wall in the courtyard of that building. One cannot describe how painful this sight was. How courageous were these women. Some little children didn't want to be separated from their mothers, so desperate mothers were telling their loved ones "It will be nice there, don't be afraid, I will soon come to pick you up." And there was always one silent question for us, will they ever see their children again."

Source 3.

Interview with Imre Rochlitz (Link to the interview)

Tape 3. (01:10:43) – 07:17 – 11:41

To access the video of Imre Rochlitz, you need to register to Iwitness platform.

Source 4.

Interview with Brigita Knežević (Link to the interview); 00:00 – 07:22

Reflection

Teacher asks the students the following question:

- Do you think that it is important to memorialize places of suffering like Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška and learn about them? Explain your answer.

If there is not enough time in the class, the teacher can ask the students to answer the question for homework in a written form and discuss them in the next class.

Recommended additional materials

- Jasenovac Memorial Site website, in English – with more information and resources (Link)
- Educational video on Holocaust denial and distortion on the example on Jasenovac created by *Documenta* (Link to the video)
- Croatian memories- platform with interviews of the time-witnesses from Croatia; *Documenta*
- Iwitness IWitness (usc.edu) - platform with interviews of the time-witnesses, USC Shoa Foundation

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The project is co-funded by the European Union.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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SPOMEN PODRUČJE jasenovac MEMORIAL SITE

DOCUMENTA CENTAR ZA SUOČAVANJE S PROŠLOŠĆU

Photo 1

Photo 2 | Map of partition of Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941

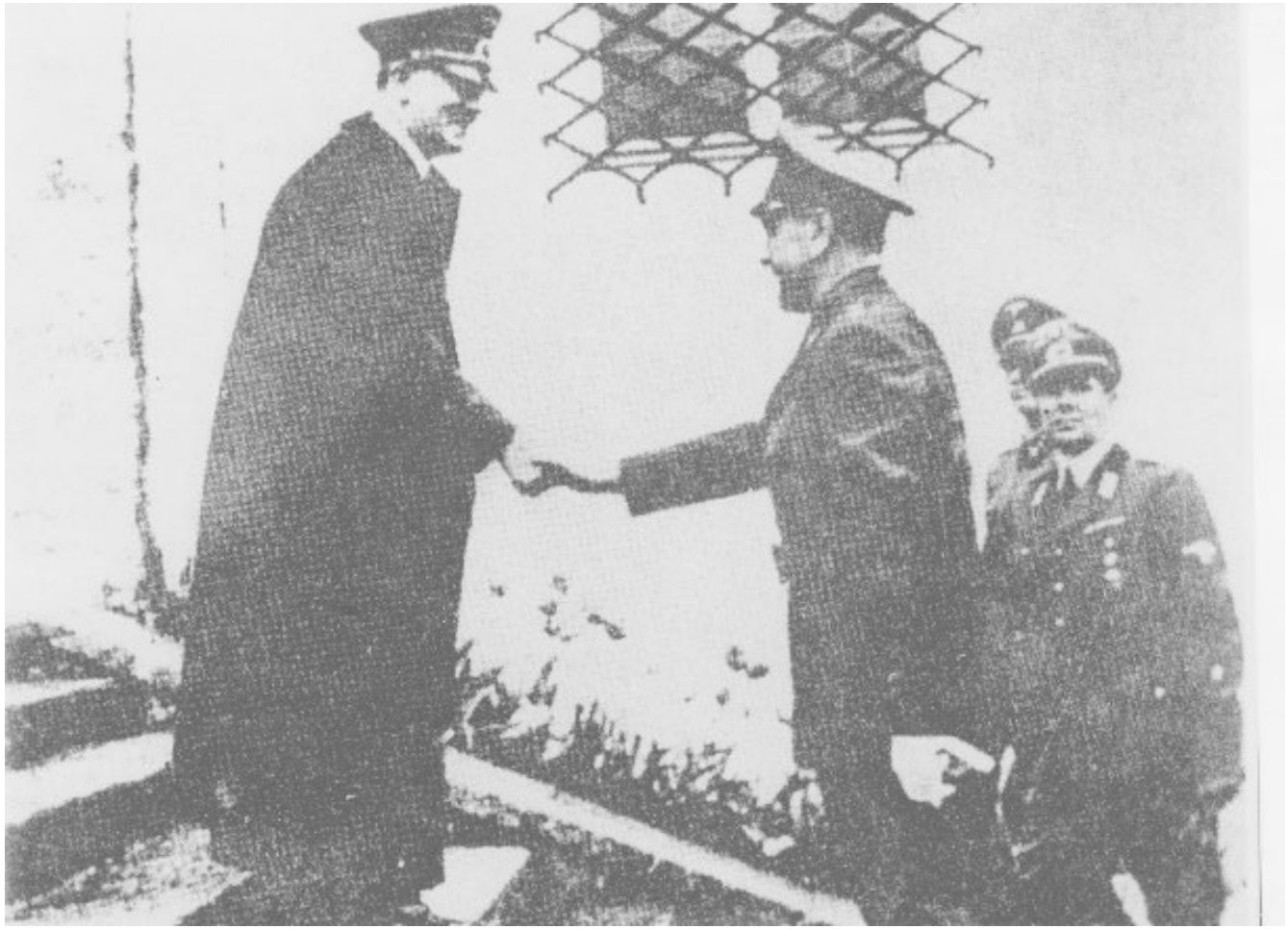

Photo 3

Photo 4 | Map that shows the the territory of Independent State of Croatia (1941-1945).

Photo 5 | At the entrance to the camp

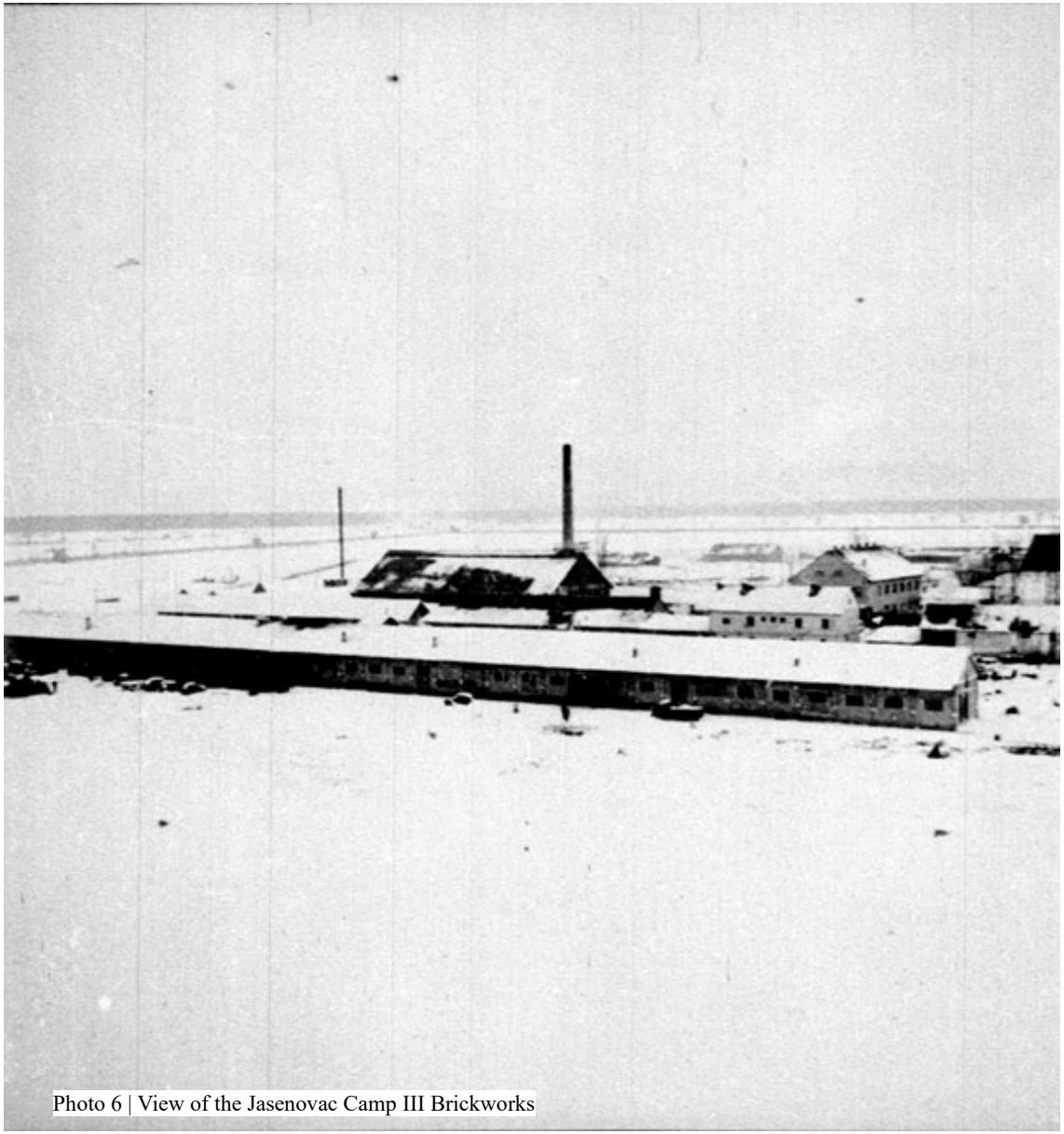

Photo 6 | View of the Jasenovac Camp III Brickworks

Photo 7

Photo 8 | Tower in the Stara Gradiška camp, 1946.

Photo 9 | Children separated from their parents in Stara Gradiška camp, 1942.

Photo 10

Photo 11 | Memorial area of the former Jasenovac Camp III Brickworks, 2018.

Photo 12

Photo 13

Photo 14 | Permanent exhibition in Jasenovac Memorial Museum, 2020.

Photo 15 | The remains of the Tower in former Stara Gradiška camp, 2008.

Photo 16

Photo 16

Photo 18 | The Tower building in Stara Gradiška

Photo 19 | Diana Budisavljević