



HERMAN POTOČNIK NOORDUNG: 100 MONUMENTAL INFLUENCES at Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies (KSEVT)

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1. Exhibition Concept

The main focus of KSEVT's inaugural exhibition is on Herman Potočnik Noordung's book *Problem der Befahrung des Weltraums* ("The Problem of Space Travel") published in 1929 and the influences it had on its successors, as well as on astronautic theory mainly on human habitation of space.

The exhibition wants to convey that the historical and cultural situation surrounding H. Potočnik was very favorable of his development in astronautic theory, as well as demonstrating how the Arts and Sciences have been intertwined throughout history, thus laying the foundation of an interconnected future.

2. Reception

KSEVT - The Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies originated from an idea of Dragan Živadinov, Miha Turšič and Dunja Zupančič. In the Slovenian town of Vitanje the first memorial centre dedicated to the European space pioneer Herman Potočnik Noordung has opened in September 2006. Within the same year, an exhibition on Postgravity art opened at the EU Commission Berlaymont building in Bruxelles. Top-level EU commissioners participated at the event and supported the idea of founding an institute, which would dedicate its mission to Space culturalization and the Composite of Art and Science. In 2008 the Slovenian Embassy in Washington D.C. and the Air & Space Museum organized a symposium dedicated to Herman Potočnik Noordung.

In 2009 the Architectural association for Vitanje presented their vision of a building that would be hosting the research mission for Space culturalization and the Composite of Art and Science. The architectural mission to create a functional space for KSEVT was approved by the municipality of Vitanje, the Republic of Slovenia and the EU Regional Development Funds. After two years of construction the KSEVT (The Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies) opened its doors on **September 6th, 2012** with an exhibition dedicated to the work of Herman Potočnik Noordung. Within the next six months, more than 30.000 visitors has visited the exhibition and the centre.

The effort to build KSEVT joined together four Slovenian architectural firms and in 2013 KSEVT has been awarded the prestigious Plečnik Award: the highest national Architecture Award in Slovenia. In addition to recall Potočnik's space wheel itself, the design of the building evokes Constructivism, the 20th century Russian aesthetic and architectural movement.

3. Exhibition Design

The *100 Monumental Influences* exhibition is a presentation of artifacts and images using storytelling to convey a narrative of people, ideas, and influences. The visual and historical content of the exhibition wraps entirely around a curved display area following the contours of the cylindrical building itself. Drawing from the theme of space exploration, everything in the exhibition appears to be levitating, without gravity.

The exhibition display is always experienced with a guide. Groups of visitors are led through the exhibition by a person trained as a storyteller – thus a large part of the exhibition's content is delivered in the guide's own words and expression. In one sense the whole exhibit is a background for these stories. Given the visitors' short time in the small exhibition space, this presentation renders the exhibition more performative, and more personal.

4. Visitors Approach-Activation/Participation

Overall, KSEVT is an institute which has the purpose to initiate and facilitate space culturalization research and development activities by means of intellectual and artistic investigation through cross disciplinary activities. Its secondary activity is that of a museum, which acknowledges space research and its implications on cultural production and creates an immersive environment for contemporary and historical intercultural scientific investigation. To disseminate knowledge dedicated to space culturalization to the larger public through publishing, and educational activities as well as to engage in the production of exhibitions and events where establishes a regular contact with various audiences. The third main activity is that of a laboratory dedicated to practical informal educational activities, often connected to exhibitions, where younger generations can reproduce small objects and learn about space research.

KSEVT has identified education as very important methodology for the transfer of knowledge about the Slovenian tradition of space engineering. Throughout the year, KSEVT hosts educational activities for primary and secondary schools. So far around 150 schools have already visited Vitanje. Schools increasingly schedule their yearly culture and nature days in KSEVT.



Orbital emission/ ZeroGravity. The participants of these workshops encounter gravity and its opposite – zero gravity. The main goal of this educational session is to understand the conditions of gravity on Earth and the singularity of the absence of gravity in Space, which Herman Potočnik Noordung has already described in his book.

Orbital emission/ How does a rocket function? At the beginning of the 20th century, Herman Potočnik Noordung and his contemporaries have explored the possibilities of traveling to space. The participants of the workshop learn how a rocket functions and make their own rocket models. This activity stimulates the technical functions of the rocket.

Orbital Emission/ Herman Potočnik Noordung. Herman Potočnik Noordung has been a central figure in the development of Slovenian and European space technologies. He was the first one who has applied scientific knowledge to the question of how to inhabit space. He was also the first scientist who has calculated the geostationary orbit, within which satellites are circulating still today. The participants of this educational workshop learn about the historical background of Herman Potočnik Noordung.

Orbital Emission/ Vitanje and Space. Within this workshop the streets of Vitanje become an image of our solar system. During the workshop activities, the participants learn about planets, satellites and human accomplishments in space.

5. Conclusion: in respect to the COP1 and COP2.

Toolkit 1 – to make Europe visible (COP1) – Potočnik was born within an Austro-Hungarian empire that does not exist anymore - now five different European countries occupy that same physical territory. Potočnik himself lived and worked in most of them. Therefore, a distinctly European story is told through his life story, and the exhibit. The Austro-Hungarian Empire in Potočnik's time was one of the most technologically advanced among others and offered him the most valuable educational system. On the other hand his deep experience of the First World War let him to further studies in which he questions habitation condition in space. His successors Hermann Oberth and his co-workers, and later Wernher von Braun and Arthur C. Clarke as well as Russian Sergey Pavlovich Korolev were all influenced by Potočnik's book.

Toolkit 2 – integrating cultural Europe (social arena): (COP2) - KSEVT operates on an **interaction** between the local, the regional, and the planetary. KSEVT works on the local level: described as "a living room of Vitanje inhabitants and a space for the synthesis of Art and Science focused on the post-gravity art" /On a regional level KSEVT generates connections between Trieste, Italy (liaising it with the Trieste Constructivist Ambient from 1927); Pula, Croatia (Potočnik's birth town); and Graz, Austria. And on the planetary level KSEVT already cooperates with space agencies as well as international partners such as the Russian State Museum in St Petersburg and the National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C.



Toolkit 3 – activation, participation and & role modification: (COP2) In addition to the workshops described in Section 4, KSEVT regularly hosts lectures, discussions, film screenings, and musical performances, and its representatives share their research and performances at events such as TEDx, International Astronautical Conference and international cultural and space related festivals.

Toolkit 4 – synesthetic translation of perspective (COP1) As described in **section 3**, The exhibits in KSEVT are presented not only through images or objects, but always accompanied by a performer/storyteller, who can interactively discuss the themes and topics with visitors.

Toolkit 5 - Social web and interaction: (COP2) Social web and interaction: (COP2) KSEVT has an informational web page and blog in Slovenian and English, a Twitter account (@KSEVT) which occasionally shares updates from the research team in Slovenian and English, and hosts an active Page (<https://www.facebook.com/KSEVT>) on Facebook.

Focus on COP 1

Image 1: Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies (KSEVT), a center for the synthesis of art and science, Vitanje Slovenia, 2012 Foto: Tomaz Gregoric

Image 2: Exhibition *Herman Potočnik Noordung: 100 Monumental Influences* Foto: Tomaz Gregoric

Image 3: Russian spacesuits, part of the exhibition entitled *Herman Potočnik Noordung: 100 Monumental Influences* at the Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies (KSEVT), 2012 Foto: Creative Commons Slovenia [Attribution-No Derivative Works 2.5 Generic](#)



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