

Museums “at the heart of community”: local museums in the post-socialist period in Slovenia

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The author tries to define the changing role of local or community museums in the last few decades, when the crisis of museum institutions became a fact and when museum institutions were very often labeled as “fossilised”, “ossified” and conservative institutions, and that are now facing the ongoing fast social changes. He points out that Slovenian museums, in the last decade of socialist and post-socialist rule, have also gone through the same development. The first “incentives” for making necessary changes in museums and for using different methods and approaches came after 1980, mostly in local and regional museums, and most of the new approaches and efforts for transformation came from ethnologists. Finally, he describes his personal museum experience in three museum projects from 1993, 2000 and 2006 where he tries to “humanize” museum objects and solve some problems concerning “museum crisis”.

KEYWORDS: community museum, humanization of museum, museum crises, new museology, new museum, ethnographic objects.

MANY AUTHORS THAT HAVE DISCUSSED MUSEUMS AND MUSEOLOGY (Shelton 1992; Jones 1993; MacDonald 1996) believed that in the past decade the museum as an institution has undergone a serious crisis. The notion of this crisis is so deeply ingrained in the heads of theoreticians and museologists that after a while it almost seems like a permanent or defining characteristic of 20th century museums. Further, some believe that “born of royal, noble or bourgeois collections, museums have known periods of crisis and success since their very origins” (Monreal 2001: 9). In Slovenia the crisis was first “noticed” in 1983, after Jorge Glusberg (1983a) wrote his famous book on hot and cold museums, mainly because the Croatian translation of his book was published the same year. In one of the first articles on museology in Slovenia (Hudales 1986b: 20), the crisis of museum institutions today was clearly identified as

a fact; museum institutions (including Slovenian ones) have very often been labeled “fossilised”, “ossified” and conservative institutions which face the ongoing rapid social changes in their own characteristic manner, based on past established values. This calls into question whether museums today are capable of carrying out the tasks imposed on them by the requirements of modern society, both for today and for tomorrow. Glusberg’s vision of museums has been pointed out on many occasions:

There is no doubt that museums as such will exist also in the future, but it is a fact that there will be fewer visitors: representatives of vain snobbery and intentional sophistry. Museums should be packed by enthusiastic crowds with all their eagerness and lack of refinement, just like they are in the sport stadiums. (...) There is only one solution for the museum as an institution dedicated to the past: it should change to incorporate various phenomena that are characteristic for the modern society of the 20th century, like protection of the environment and the so-called leisure revolution, the phenomenon that has equally stirred all social classes. (Glusberg 1983b: 39)

So we can say that the idea of the museum in crisis, and consequently the idea of permanent demand for continuous change, is a sort of constant – very much in line with the rapid social changes, where change may be declared as the only constant. By the end of the 20th century, museums had been massively criticised. In spite of the growing number of new museums – and this shows that the institution as such is successful after all – museums were facing quite serious questions: For whom were they established? What was their social role? The number of visitors had been constantly decreasing, and the attempt to attract marginal groups into museums had failed. There were lots of things to worry about: increasing costs of obtaining new artefacts and higher costs of preserving collections. Last but not least, they faced great competition by the electronic media and other forms of the leisure industry. All in all, by the end of the century, almost all goals and long-term visions for the development of museums had been challenged, and boundaries between museums and similar institutions had become so transient that many renowned museologists claimed we no longer know what a museum actually is.

The truth is that we no longer know what a museum institution is. This fact may drive legislators crazy and make traditional curators unhappy, but it should be faced. All the former limits are blurred, all the boundaries with adjacent areas are insecure or have been crossed already. (Šola 1997: 132)

On the other hand, the interest of the public and media has been increasing, as has been academic interest. According to Sharon MacDonald, in the

last decade of the 20th century we witnessed an increased number of theoretical works exposing the advantages of museums: the stability and permanency of the institutions, their authentic nature and position in their respective countries. The number of newly established museums rose with incredible speed, even making it difficult to follow for statistical reasons (MacDonald 1996: 1). In the last decade of the 20th century, in the more developed countries of Europe, we could see instances of one or two museums being established in a single week (Šola 1997: 9).

The ambivalent situation of museums is partly due to the fact that, worldwide, museums differ greatly in their scope. In the past decades we faced the emergence of new terminology, the "new museology" compared to the "old museology" that is too much about museum methods, and too little about the purposes of museums (Vergo 1989:3). Meanwhile Peter van Mensch (1995: 135) describes the process of newly emerging museums as the "second museum revolution", which is similar to the "first museum revolution" in 1900; this was accompanied by new terminology and was consequently marked as "new museology" (van Mensch 1992: 2-3). All attempts to redefine museum theory and practice came to the conclusion that contemporary museum practice is ossified and outdated. Many critical reviews were made about how museums are unprofessional and require a redefinition of professional training in view of the future social role of the museum. Hence the designation of "community museology" appeared, according to which museums shall be institutions for performing public service, employed in the collection, protection and preservation of cultural heritage. The "new museology" redirected its aims from the past to the present, and also into the development of society; the future became the motto of its operation.

Tomislav Šola divides museums into traditional and reformed museums: he drew up a comprehensive list (close to 50) of prevailing characteristics and orientations of traditional museums on one side, and prevailing characteristics and orientations of reformed museums on the other side. However, he is fully aware of the fact that the list is "therefore, but a reminder of the possible extremes rarely found so clearly opposed in actual practice" (Šola 1997: 36-38). In museum practice, however, some museums may be classified as traditional due to their characteristics, while others may be termed reformed. It is obvious, however, that it is in the group of "new museums" where we will mostly find the "reformed museums", as well as a variety of museum forms and activities that takes into account the interests and demands of local communities. Such are, for example, eco-museums, folk show exhibitions, cultural centres with strong educational and heritage-oriented content, and museums with new technologies and media, which have enabled a variety of interactive performances. Some of these museums turned into real fun fairs, Disneyland or theatres, rather than traditional

museums (MacDonald 1996: 2). Furthermore, in the intensive process of globalisation the importance of the museum is becoming stronger; on account of their great number, museums have taken on the role of global disseminators of images and ideas. At the outset of the crisis, new forms and content of the museum (which had always been just the right answer to the many challenges throughout its history) led to the revitalisation of existing museum institutions. This contradictory and ambivalent nature of museums caused them to become the crucial cultural focus of today. Museum exhibitions inevitably reflect and daily confront the issues of knowledge and power, equality and diversity, and durability and ephemerality. Thus museums became the global symbols of contemporary society, through which status is represented, and local and regional communities express themselves (MacDonald 1996: 2).

Another feature seems to be a special characteristic of museums of the 20th century, namely the persistently growing importance of smaller local museums. Their self-confident performance has very often set directions for larger museums as well, showing them new approaches, goals and tasks for the museum as an institution. Big national museums with a hundred years of tradition (or at least a few decades) in many countries (including Slovenia during the '80s and '90s) were very often labelled as traditional, dusty institutions, "living fossils", and local museums were the ones considered to be dynamic, reformed institutions.

By the end of the 20th century, local museums had been marked as the ideal form of the museum, as we may see in the publication *Generators of Culture: Museums as a Stage*.

The ideal museum is, after all, like Borges' library: it contains everything, up to and including art that has yet to be created, that does not exist, that has been lost, banned or burnt. Apart from that ideal museum, though, I personally would like local museums to show me what happened in that particular place from the Ice Age up to now. There is nothing embarrassing about local history, and there is no need to place it on a lower level than fine art in the hierarchy of museums. On the contrary, museums should be proud that they can show something unique, something that cannot be seen anywhere else – surely that is the best claim a museum can make. (van Rapard 1989: 76)

The role of local museums in general consideration of the development orientation of the museum in the 21st century, as discussed during a conference in Barcelona in 2001, is very similar. When the president of ICOM, Mr. Jacques Perot, spoke of the museums we need and wish for in the 21st century, he pointed out the major threats to our museums (intolerance, cupidity, natural

disaster and armed conflict) and listed some of the outstanding tasks of the museum of the 21st century:

Museums – whatever their size, their collections, their type of institution – often play a major role in the development of a city's policy. There is no sustainable development without cultural development. Rightly, the museum is in the service of society. (Perot 2001: 3)

But then again, museums and museum workers very often have doubts as how to perform their tasks, with whom to cooperate, and what sources and new technologies to use in an environment of quick and constant change – in a world where the free capital market has made a triumphant breakthrough; in a world of the inexorable advance of globalisation. One option for an exit from this crisis lies by all means in constant observation of this ever-changing world and in finding answers to the important questions: Can museums be seen as businesses? How cost-effective can they be? How can the various elements of society ensure that museums survive and develop? And last but not least:

These considerations deserve to be included in our calculation: we have to recognise that the museum of yesteryear, which was purely a place of study and private pleasure, and was often inward-looking, has reached the end of its life-span, and our establishment will only survive if it places itself at the heart of the community and is entirely open to it. Then and only then (...) will the communities around them, whether we call them local authorities, sponsors, patrons or friends, provide museums with the means to develop. (Perot 2001: 3)

SLOVENIAN MUSEUMS AT THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY

At first sight – but only superficially – one can easily state that Slovenian museums went through the same development. The first "incentives" for making necessary changes in museums and for using different methods and approaches came from local and regional museums – and quite strangely, most of the new approaches and efforts for transformation came from ethnologists. In principle, the complete (ethnological) museum production from the middle of the 20th century to the beginning of the '80s has been discussed quite clearly and can be labeled "old museum practice" (which is pretty much the same as the museum practice of the first half of the century). It was characterised mainly by "traditional settings with aesthetic character", which were related mainly to "artefacts of material and spiritual culture". In ethnological constellations we witnessed the "romantic folkloristic" approach, which *a priori* excludes the

possibility of a comprehensive presentation taking into account social circumstances, time-dependent definition and comparison” (Brumen 1987: 1-3).

Moreover, ever since the beginning of the 1980s we have been witnessing the very slow growth of the “museum idea”; it is symptomatic that the name of the new science – “museology” – was hardly used in professional circles until the ’80s. The first important moves were made in that period in theory as well as in practice, especially after the first generation of young museologists – ethnologists – appeared. We saw some moves on the conceptual level during the consultative meeting in Nova Gorica in 1980 (Naško Križnar and Jože Hudales), and this continued in Maribor with the discussion on the relationship between ethnology and history (1984), as well as in the publication *SED* (Ralf Čeplak) on the essence of ethnological museum issues. At that time these new conceptual incentives and solutions were followed by numerous influential ethnological exhibitions, which were organised beyond the boundaries of the national ethnographic museum. The exhibition of the Dolenjska museum on sawmill workers and millers on the Krka river, which was prepared in 1982 by Janez Bogataj as the first comparative presentation of the culture of one social and occupational group (sawmill workers) to the other social strata, along with ethnological exhibitions in the Velenje museum (Jože Hudales, 1982: Coal-mining in Slovenia), the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (Tanja Tomažič, 1983: Ljubljana historical fashion overview) and the Brežice museum (Ivanka Počkar, 1987: Plum pickers) successfully fought against prejudices about the prevailing “rural” image of ethnological museums and exhibitions.

Some in-depth analysis of museum settings was also made (mainly ethnological), followed by a few new directions. One of them is certainly Brumen’s analysis of ethnological museums, where he speaks for abandoning the classical collection style of presentation, and defends the introduction of social and time-dependent contexts into museum presentations, as well as taking into account the needs of visitors, which could be identified by analysing their suggestions and requests (1987: 2). This could lead us to a solution to the “museum crisis”. And last but not least, and perhaps Brumen’s most important contribution to the development of the ethnological museum in Slovenia: he strives for a “contemporary active conception of a museum”, which is further hindered by cultural bureaucracy. Because of this bureaucracy, the social role of museums is defined by regulations, institutionalised and marginalised to the level of mere representation (1987: 3).

The number of the discussions related to the museum issue during the 1990s has doubled or even tripled, and so has the number of exhibitions, new museums and new collections, especially the number of private ethnological collections. Many significant Slovenian museum projects show that the development of Slovenian museums by the end of the 20th century is comparable to

other European museums, quality-wise. To be specific, several museum exhibitions, especially during the '90s, were successfully promoted in the broader European museum space (15 were nominated for the European Museum of the Year Award, and of these five were recognised). At that time it was ethnological museums and/or curators (ethnologists, mostly from local or regional museums) who made this breakout and tried to turn ossified museum institutions and petrified permanent exhibitions into dynamic and successful up-to-date institutions.

It may seem at first glance that, at least for some Slovenian museums, the basic characteristic of museum development of the postmodern era holds true. They made a move towards their visitors: museum activities are taking place in new situations between the museums and the audience, where an important role is outlined – a new and diversified communication between the visitors and the museum stories (Rovšnik 2001: 23). Slovenian museums are also presenting exhibitions which are colourful, loud, comprehensive – where artefacts interact with visitors. These exhibitions, however, present only one of the many forms of museum communication, whereas the larger purpose is to encourage new activities, guest appearances by groups that will use the museum area in their own manner, or the organisation of talks and round tables with artists, scientists and authors. Things will eventually lead to the production of events and exhibitions that will enable different views and opinions to be heard. Also in our country (according to Eilean Hooper Greenhill), the knowledge in the museum will no longer be monolithic, and will not be created and disseminated merely by curators, but will be more fragmented and polyphonic. This will be a cacophony of voices which present the whole scale of views, opinions, experiences and values, and the voice of the museum will be only one of the many in this polyphony (in Rovšnik 2001: 23).

This, however, is not a truly comprehensive image of the Slovenian museum today. At this moment we might say that in Slovenian museums during the booming period in the 1990s, we saw some imitation of Europe and the rest of the world. With a very modest knowledge of theoretical discourse on museums, the theory and practice of museum activities remained merely on an intuitive museological level, which did result in a number of breakthroughs in the exterior image of museums in the so-called "exhibition complex", where they had quite a bit of success even on the European level. However, no serious analysis of theory and substance has been made on this issue so far. In spite of the extensive "ideological digression" during the period of "red museums", this issue, save for some rare exceptions (e.g. Gačnik, Habinc), has not become a fundamental research issue in museums, but rather has remained a task for the future. The case is very similar with the overall self-examination of ideological foundations that have been accepted, created or obeyed by Slovenian museums throughout their history. Moreover, we were not able to clearly identify

the crisis that was so evident (in spite of the fast growth of museums during the 1990s), as the decreasing number of visitors to the national museums clearly indicated.

Statistical data show that the number of Slovenian museums (before 1939 there were 18) by the end of the 1950s had tripled: in 1951 there were 23, and by the end of 1959 almost 60. In the '60s there was some slow-down in the opening of new collections and new museums; in the '70s and '80s, however, growth again accelerated somewhat, and in 1988 there were as many as 188 cultural entities that had been statistically identified as a collection or museum (Baš 1951: 257; Hudales 2001: 9). The number of museums has therefore doubled or even tripled, and has grown at a similar pace as in Western Europe. The latest Guide to Museums and Galleries in Slovenia (Rihter and Ciglenečki 2001) contains some three times as many museums, galleries and museum collections (252 of them, to be precise) as in 1988. Less than 20% of them are art museums (galleries and gallery collections); some one-third of them are museums (32.6%); and the rest are various museum collections and discrete museum units, many of them privately owned. Furthermore, the latest analysis of ethnological collections (Porenta 2006: 3), which had previously covered less than 40% of Slovenia's territory, had recorded by the end of 2005 an additional 160 private ethnological and similar collections, which were at least partly open to the public or were soon to be opened.

Unfortunately we cannot back up these encouraging data with other indices of the success of museums, such as the number of visitors. The statistical data for the total number of visitors to Slovenian museums in the period from 1939 to 1998 show that in 1939 Slovenian museums had 47.000 visitors, and in 1947 some 54.000 visitors. The number of visitors was from then on rapidly increasing, and in 1950 reached some 100.000 visitors; in 1953 it was 300.000, and by the middle of the '50s there were half a million visitors (523.000 visitors in 1956). By 1961 the number had doubled – close to one million visitors. Following slow growth in the '60s, we see that in the 1970s the museum visits curve swung upward again, and by the end of that decade we broke the record – 2.483.000 museum visitors, a record that still holds. In the '80s, the number of museum visits dropped to some two million visitors per year and has remained unchanged ever since. The beginning of the 1990s was an exception, coinciding with the war in the former Yugoslavia and the independence of Slovenia; we recorded merely one million visitors in 1991. The number of visitors again exceeded two million in 1996, and in the following years it has remained at this level. The stated numbers unequivocally show that the number of visits to Slovenian museums and gallery collections in the past three years has remained the same! Taking into account the fact that the number of museums, galleries, and museum and gallery collections in the past two years has grown rapidly, we can speak of an absolute decrease in the

number of museum visits in Slovenia. In spite of the introduction of contemporary work methods, techniques and educational activities in museums, in spite of the efforts to achieve openness of the museums, in spite of new marketing approaches and galleries, we still haven't been able to attract new visitors! Nor has the number of visitors and newly acquired museum artefacts grown at the same pace as the number of galleries, museums and museum collections. These data, of course, turn upside down our firm beliefs about the rapid growth of Slovenian museums after 1990, which is evident in the number as well as the quality of museum programming, international achievements and promotion of Slovenian museums in the '90s. A reasonable explanation for such discordance may lie in the assumption that during this time the number of visitors has greatly increased only in some local and regional museums, while in other museums it has stayed pretty much the same or even decreased.

Nevertheless, Slovenian museums as yet have failed to deal, in a semantic and theoretical way, with the problems originating from their activities. In the '60s and '70s there were no critical surveys of museums, and in the '80s there were rare and solitary voices not only speaking of the "museum crisis", but also trying to find a way out of it. During the '90s museum criticism was more frequent, although it lacked intensity and in-depth theoretical analysis. So besides the glittering *external* image of museums, we have to deal with the *internal* museum crisis – which is probably permanent. This crisis has not been clearly defined but is reflected, for example, in the low number of visitors – despite the rapid growth in the number of Slovenian museums during the '90s, the number of visitors has remained the same as in the '70s. It is also symptomatic that the first theoretical analysis of heritage and museums was made in 2004, in two volumes of the book series of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, *Heritage in the Eye of Science* and *Heritage in the Hand of Discipline* (Hudales and Visočnik 2004).

SOME PERSONAL EXPERIENCE – MY MUSEUM PROJECTS

During the last 15 years I was, as a curator (of the Velenje museum) or project leader, involved in various museum projects which reflect some interesting developments concerning the population's expectations, the political setting, original projects and the local desire for ethnography, as well as reflecting my personal approach on how to solve problems concerning "museum crisis".

The first project was the renovation and museum reconstruction of an old farmhouse, the Kavčnik homestead, from 1986 until its opening in 1993. The home of a small farmer situated in the mountain village Zavodnje (more than 800 metres above sea level), it represents a 400-year-old smokehouse, the last still extant example of an Alpine smokehouse in Slovenia. Building of this kind was dominant in this area from the 11th till the end of the 18th centuries. At that

time the smokehouse unit was the only living room in the Kavčnik house for all the inhabitants and also for the domestic animals. In the 18th century authorities prohibited such buildings, as they often caused fires; they were replaced by contemporary buildings with a “black” kitchen and “white” living room. Back then the Kavčnik family decided to build a new living unit attached to the house, a so-called “house” with a wood-firing oven made of tiles. The homestead is by all means an excellent example of the residential ways of a minority of people, which had practically disappeared elsewhere in Slovenia.

Following expert analysis, the Kavčnik house was assigned the title of a national monument of ethnological architectural heritage, and the project was funded in equal shares by the state and the municipality. However, when we started with the restoration the local authorities showed little or no enthusiasm. Back then, the cultural policy and consequently the funding of cultural projects were carried out via administrative bodies, the so-called “Cultural Community”, where decisions were made on all levels (from state to local) regarding the funding of various cultural activities (libraries, museums, theatres, amateur cultural activities, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage, etc.). The administration of the Cultural Community operated according to a two-chamber system: in one chamber, there were the elected representatives of the “culture operators” – all cultural institutions and amateur cultural activities in the local community; and in the other chamber there were the “culture consumers” – representatives of all other segments of the community (local industry, local political authorities, etc.). In both chambers of the Cultural Community, the protection of this type of natural and cultural heritage seemed to be of lesser importance. They considered “investing into walls” to be reasonable only in cases of restoring a castle, a mansion or at least a church! Each year this two-chamber Cultural Community approved the budget for the following year, and every year between since 1986 and 1992, both chambers discussed the restoration of the Kavčnik house unsuccessfully. Curators from the Velenje museum and experts from the Celje regional agency for restoration of the cultural and natural heritage put all our efforts towards convincing the chamber of culture operators, and of course the prevailing opinion of the local (municipal) government, to provide their share of money for project, instead of investing it only in “professional living culture” – library, galleries, publishing projects, etc. We had to convince the chamber of “culture consumers” that investing in this type of cultural heritage is at least as important as investment into local (rural and urban) and working-class amateur culture (choirs, local galleries, amateur theatre, etc.). Quite often, their ultimate argument was that this was a project of restoring the national heritage, for which the state (the former Yugoslavia) provided 50% of the required funds. Since most of the time the local community received from the budget only resources for two co-funded projects, the story ended there.

Moreover, the local community – the inhabitants of the village Zavodnje – didn't like the idea of presenting this particular building as a cultural monument. They could still remember how different the people who only a few years ago (until 1983!) lived in the smokehouse were: "They were somehow dirty, poorly dressed, they even smelled different (because of the smoke) when they came to the church every Sunday." And some of the neighbours often said to me, during the field work in the village, that it wasn't fair we would represent to the "outside world" their "culture of poverty and misery", although the village has many modern farms with new facilities for milk production and the like. But the desires of the local community weren't important at the time – the curators and experts on restoration were in charge and responsible to save the national heritage, no matter what local community thought of the project.

In spite of all this, we managed to carry out the museum project quite successfully, based on our own experiences and considerations that have been developed since the beginning of the 1980s while restoring the Coal-mining Museum of Slovenia in 1982 at Velenje Castle, and also later on, where our guidance subsisted in the interdisciplinary approach. This approach was supposed to help us overcome the crisis of ossified self-sufficiency which is so characteristic of our museums, and which should later be surpassed mainly by studying (documenting) the museum's substance and explanatory power, its incorporation into the context – i. e. the context of its natural environment, mainly connected with its operators (users, producers). We must also strive for the humanisation of museums and find new techniques of "how to employ the museum exposition and museum activities in general, to break the thick walls of museum institutions" (Hudales 1980; 1986). We have also considered the possibility of including various types of amusement activities and games as legitimate elements of the museum's offerings, highlighting the need for the museum to serve humankind and museum visitors, thus employing every possible means to enable better communication (Hudales 1987: 111-117).

With a hint of irony, one might say that the main generator of good solutions for the Kavčnik house was the time/money factor. Both were scarce, so it took 10 years for the project to be completed. During this time the curators and conservators had enough time to get to know each other and to thoroughly plan all the necessary procedures. In the case of the Kavčnik house, money was the main reason we managed to solve the ancient dilemma of the relationship between the curator/conservator as author of the restoration or collection, and the architect as designer. The solution was, of course, made to the benefit of the curator and conservator – there simply was no architect, since we had no money. On the other hand, both of them, the curator and the conservator, came to the conclusion that successful restoration work or a successful museum constellation requires above all a good knowledge of the

way of life and functioning of the homestead, while any other creative interventions by the designers would turn out to be superfluous. So the complete restoration was carried out exclusively as an interaction between the curator and conservator, in the form of endless dialogues between both, who actually knew the homestead down to the last detail.

After thorough and detailed talks and discussions about what the meaning of each artefact and every corner of the homestead was, and what their function might be, followed by an additional search for data in various information sources, the museum presentation was slowly generated (the scenario was never written down) according to some sort of “museological intuition”, but with a great input of knowledge and skills.

Based on these considerations, we managed to create a concept of museum presentation, with which we have tried to catch and preserve all the sediments of time protected by the residents of the house. We let the wall originating from the 17th century speak for itself, while the accessories and equipment in the rooms were multilayered according to various periods of time, dating two centuries back into the past. One can find there artefacts that came into the house only a decade before the restoration started, at the end of the 1960s, when the smokehouse was still used for cooking, eating, sleeping and working. Rather than toward an ideal reconstruction of the residential culture of a particular time period, we were inclined towards presenting the development of the building, and at the same time the development of the use of artefacts over time. Besides, in real life, people don't use only new pieces of equipment, but also equipment that belonged to various time periods, and this was especially true in the past. Analysis of the artefacts fund showed that around the year 1970 the residents of the homestead used equipment that was around a hundred years old, or even older. We decided to choose the '60s as the starting point and left the artefacts alone to present the architectural elements of the homestead and to bear witness to the previous periods of the life of the homestead. We thought it was quite important to leave in the house the mark of its last residents.

The other component of the design concept was based on development of the functions of the museum and its activities within its environment. Within the trademark of the Kavčnik house – “Glow of the Centuries” – which has been developing ever since its opening in 1993, we have carried out quite a few marketing projects in the best sense of the word. We try to prepare a visit to the Kavčnik house as an event for each group; we show how the smokehouse operates, we take care of the traditional culinary delights, which in their modest version comprise a glass of brandy and baked apples (the only sweet dish known in this house during the past); we also bake bread, and so on. On some occasions we have even prepared the farmer's feast *koline* (pig slaughtering and homemade sausages).

There are also other events organised at the house: brandy distilling, St. Florian's festival and *šnitarija* (frying bread slices soaked in eggs), Midsummer's Eve celebration, *ofiranje* (festive name-day celebration), and the aforementioned *koline*, the farmer's feast which back then was one of the largest farm festivals. We have carried out workshops and started with the revitalisation of ways the shepherds lived back then, their games and skills. All this is, of course, backed up with stories connected in some way with the homestead and its residents, or with the village. This especially goes for the neighbouring area of the homestead, where for almost a decade we have been trying to cultivate a sustainable meadow. We have planted a number of various herbs and included them into the story of Ančka Samec, the next-to-last owner of the homestead, who was known in these parts as a healer and expert in herbs. This is why the Kavčnik house is, even a decade and a half after being turned into a museum, still alive and more contemporary than ever, in spite of its age.

This attempt to preserve not only museum "hardware", but also the "software" (village community knowledge, wisdom and all kinds of intangible heritage), was another reason that in the first years after its opening (1993) we established much better relationships with the village community, especially neighbours. They helped us (most of them as volunteers) to prepare the house for the visiting season each year, and they were involved in different museum events which take place each year under the slogan "Glow of the Centuries".

The project was designated as one of the best new Slovenian museum projects and nominated for EMYA 1994 (European Museum of the Year Award) because it represents "truthful, honest ethnography, with no attempt to romanticise" (Hudson 1994: 49). After nomination, all the obstacles and controversy disappeared.

The next big museum project I was involved with as curator and "storyline writer" was the Coal-mining Museum of Slovenia. The project was initiated in 1996 by the Velenje coal mine, which is still today the biggest coal mine in Slovenia. Their intent was to prepare in this area "a unique museum attraction 180 metres below the surface, which could put Velenje on the tourist map of Slovenia". The expectations of the coal mine company were very clear – at that time they also wanted to develop a large tourist and recreational area beside the lake, which resulted from coal excavation over the last hundred years. The area had already been recultivated with restaurants, tennis courts, golf courses, boating facilities and so on. The museum attraction was expected to provide several thousand extra visitors. Let us note that Velenje at the time was an industrial town and not a tourist destination.

The project was started as a joint venture of the coal-mining company, which provided the money; the Velenje museum, which provided museological know-how and museum exhibits from its coal-mining collection (assembled since 1957); and the municipality of Velenje as founder of the Municipal

Museum of Velenje. During the project we had no problems at all: money was always on hand, and in 1999 together we prepared the underground museum – an old mine shaft from 1889 with 3 km of underground trails located 180 metres below the surface, 9.000 km² of exhibition grounds, 36 re-created scenes, 16 multimedia presentations, an underground canteen and a 700 m train ride, among other things. The storyline was written based on data from all available historical sources, social statistics, reports, memoirs, registers, land registers and all other available literature. The social aspects of the lives of Slovenian colliers and their families from the end of the 19th century up to the start of World War II was told by the curator, but through the mouth of the well-known poet Anton Aškerc, who actually visited this particular mine in 1894. This “poetic approach” was our museological attempt to make the “underground experience” even more attractive. All information is given to the visitors by “his” voice, and of course with the very picturesque words of a poet.

On the other side this was a way of “humanization” of collection or “anthropologisation of museums”, an attempt to make “museum objects speak”. We tried to emphasize the changing roles of different “people” behind, beside and in front of the museum’s objects; these are not only the people who created, made or used the museum object, but also the museum curator, who is the real “creator” of ethnographic objects. As Barbara Kirschenblatt – Gimblett wrote, when exploring the paradox of showing things that were never meant to be displayed:

“Ethnographic artifacts are objects of ethnography. They are artifacts created by ethnographers.” So in this case the curator “invented” an ethnographic object beyond different machines and tools used in coal-mines a century ago and “invented” narratives regarding them and the colliers, through the mouth of the poet.

In the year 2000 we prepared an “above-ground” museum presentation on 600 m² of exhibition grounds, including 78 display panels, 350 photographs, drawings and diagrammes, a miner’s dwelling from the 1920s, and an exhibition area, miners’ canteen and First Aid room. Two months before opening, the mining company designated a director for the museum who was already in charge as director of the recreational centre beside the lake. He began to work on museum marketing – building audiences. The museum was also equipped with staff – coal miners without any museological training – although we offered some kind of museological training. We continued without disagreement when preparing the surface part of the museum in 2000; we prepared educational programmes for different museum audiences (children of various ages, visually impaired people, people confined to wheelchairs, etc.). At that

point our role was finished, and they were convinced that they didn't need any museological knowledge about museum marketing, museum evaluation (regarding public desires and expectations) or the like. When the museum was recognised with the Ford award for heritage preservation and nominated for EMYA in 2000, and was also recognised with a special award for technical museums, our cooperation was finished at once; we were also quietly removed from the museum's scientific board. Soon after that I accepted a position at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana as a lecturer on museology. The museum is still among the most successful museum projects and attractions in Slovenia, but the number of visitors has stagnated in recent years. The museum staff will probably soon realize that they will need curatorial knowledge and their experience once again.

The last big project I was involved in (at first as museological advisor of the developmental agency in the Savinja valley, and since September 2006 as project coordinator) was the eco-museum of hop growing and brewery in Žalec. We decided to choose an eco-museum as a project based on community agreement and as a type of dynamic way in which communities preserve, interpret and manage their heritage for sustainable development. This is, after two unsuccessful projects, the third attempt to establish an eco-museum in Slovenia. Our Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology runs the project in cooperation with the local development agency, the Faculty of Architecture and local marketing advisors. We started in September 2006, and by the end of the year we had already produced 400 pages of documentation about hop growing and brewery heritage in the area, about eco-museums and contemporary museological trends, and strategic plans and documents we and/or they will need to establish the new museum – which will have a major museum building and several information points (local museums, "open door" farms with hop growing activity or home breweries) in each of the six municipalities which supports the project. In January we also began with a series of workshops in each local community, where we began to explain the concepts in order to establish (and educate) a wide network of possible local partners in the area. At the present point in time, we have a collision of numerous and very different (sometimes diametrically opposed) "ethnographic desires" – most of them connected with a variety of "invented traditions", "local heritage", and so on. Anyway, we decided to respect these traditions as much as possible; museums have produced such invented traditions and built "national" and/or "regional heritage" during previous centuries in the name of the social elites. Maybe now is the time to build within this project a cacophony of different voices, expressing local identities, which will always be socially constructed. Perhaps our main role is to encourage "other" voices, "other" traditions and "other" heritages that have been neglected or oppressed, such as gender perspectives or children's voices.

I would like to conclude by affirming what Jean–Yves Durand wrote in the invitation for this seminar: “I feel that, at least insofar as ethnographic museums are concerned, museum studies tend to focus too exclusively on big institutions. Small local museums continue to play a role for anthropology, if only that of being one of the few employers of our students.” But of course they do not play only that role: anthropological research and its museological expression constantly come face to face with new social phenomena, which they must assess and take into account: cultural diversity, immigration, social exclusion, otherness/identification, racism, xenophobia, nationalism, etc. In our opinion, ethnological-anthropological research through ethnographic museums can and should help illustrate today’s problems to a fuller extent, as well as contributing to their solution.

Most of them will always be locally expressed. So I’m sure that big museum institutions which were established and founded for the preservation (and invention) of national (or European or world) heritage should likewise work in their local urban surroundings – perhaps “think globally and act locally” could serve as an example for such museums.

By all means every museum, regardless of its “expert origins”, should be aware that there will be other changes, like globalisation. Participation in the process of globalisation actually means participation in the process of “cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation”, as noted by the sociologist Roland Robertson (in Young 2002: 3) – we witness a situation where numerous local institutions (heterogenising difference) attempt to fight back the homogenisation process, opening new museums and new challenges. We should now collect and record these “hybrid cultural forms” as well, the products of the globalisation process. However, museums will always remain warehouses of traditional, sometimes “extinct” cultures; artefacts will have to be preserved as a memory to show respect, as a gift and responsibility from the past. But on the other hand, museums should avoid becoming antique shops and nostalgic historical places. To achieve this, they should focus also on contemporary issues. This means that museum practice should include the operators of the museum artefacts, the original owners or their descendants. There are of course other methods as well (suggested by historical anthropology), seeking out the “native voice” that can help us understand the context of culture(s) imbedded in the museum collections – even if this means the repatriation of the majority of the museum material. Experiences show that contact by the museum with the subjects (living or deceased) of their collections results in new knowledge. Such collections from the past and present will become, as Arjun Appadurai says, “the depots and stores of cultural scenarios”, and precisely in such a form, also a source of human creativity within the environment. It is the museums that should promote their use in the local community. And of course, museums should interpret old and new cultures through

the perspective of tolerance: "The future path of the museum is defined by teaching generations to be proud of the achievements of one's own culture and to be curious, along with respect towards other cultures" (Young 2002: 3).

One of the largest and most comprehensive museums of the modern world National Museum of Science and Industry (NMSI) in London (with its branches: the railway museum in York, the Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford, the Museum of Science in London) has issued in spring 2001 a publication containing their view to the role of the museum in the 21st century.

Passive no longer, the archivist becomes activist, eager to do great things, eager to make a significant impact, whatever it takes. NMSI desires change. Big change not little change. We want larger numbers entering our buildings. We want to reach audiences we don't normally address. We want to tell the stories that remain untold and look again at those already heard. We want to increase people's opportunity for learning and we want to take a far more rigorous role within the community at large. (Hewitt 2002: 48)

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Os museus "no coração da comunidade": museus locais e o período pós-socialista na Eslovénia
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Neste texto, o autor procura descrever a mudança do lugar dos museus locais ou de "comunidade" ao longo das últimas décadas, onde a crise das instituições museológicas era uma realidade e onde os museus eram vistos como sendo lugares "fossilizados" e "ossificados", sendo que hoje se deparam com intensas mudanças sociais. Ele descreve como os museus eslovenos, nos últimos anos de governo socialista e pós-socialista, também assistiram a desenvolvimentos semelhantes. Os primeiros "incentivos" para a mudança obrigatória nos museus e para a utilização de novos métodos e abordagens chegaram depois de 1980, essencialmente em museus locais e regionais, em grande parte graças à iniciativa de etnólogos. Finalmente, o autor descreve a sua própria experiência pessoal de participação em três projectos museológicos em 1993, 2000 e 2003, onde procurou "humanizar" os objectos museológicos e resolver alguns dos problemas relativos à "crise dos museus".

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: museu de comunidade, humanização do museu, crise de museu, nova museologia, novo museu, objectos etnográficos.