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Lessons Learned from Applied Participatory Practices in Museums and Inclusion of People from Vulnerable Social Groups

In the article, the author reflects on contemporary museology and cultural anthropology paradigms that focus on participation and collaboration to include people from vulnerable groups in the museum work. The article presents how the paradigm shift to participation or collaboration changes the epistemological value of experiential knowledge related to cultural heritages and the way museums work. Finally, the author shows how three experimental participatory, collaborative practices in national museums with the change of perspective on people's role from passive visitors to active collaborators also changed the perspective on their vulnerability and presented a valuable tool for better social inclusion. Through participatory approaches, museums can gain more social relevance in contemporary society.

Key words: museum, participation, inclusion, people from vulnerable groups, cultural heritage

Научене лекције из примењених партиципативних пракси у музејима и инклузија људи из рањивих друштвених група

Ауторка у овом чланку промишља савремене музеолошке и културно-антро-пpolошке парадигме фокусиране на партиципацију и сарадњу, а ради инклу-зије људи из рањивих друштвених група у музејски рад. Чланак показује како промена парадигме усмерене ка учешћу или сарадњи мења епистемолош-ку вредност искуственог знања у вези са културним наслеђем и начинима на који музеј функционише. На крају, ауторка показује како су три експери-менталне партиципативне, сарадничке праксе у националним музејима – променом перспективе о улози људи од пасивних посетилаца до активних сарадника – такође промениле перспективу о њиховој рањивости и пред-ставиле вредан алат за бољу друштвену инклузију. Путем партиципативних приступа, музеји могу добити већи друштвени значај у савременом друштву.

Кључне речи: музеј, партиципација, инклузија, људи из осетљивих група, културно наслеђе

FROM THE PERSONAL INTRODUCTION TO PERSPECTIVES ON PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION IN MUSEUMS

Each academic article or research has its personal story, so I present my own. I was born with a disability. Even though disability is not my only identity and never limits my daily activities, it has shaped and in-fluenced my interests in what I am doing in the ethnology and cultural anthropology field, especially museology and museum practice. For ex-ample, between 2013 and 2015, I was employed on a European project titled "Accessibility of cultural heritage to vulnerable groups",[1] which influenced my understanding of museums as creative inspiration for social inclusion of different social groups through the accessibility of

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[1] The European Social Fund and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia founded the project. Slovene Ethnographic Museum led and implemented it in five national museums and a gallery. By the end of the project, we published a publication of best practices implemented during the project (Palaić & Valič 2015).

cultural heritage.[2] At the same time, I was engaged in an interdisciplinary, international project, "Eurovision: Museums Exhibiting Europe (EMEE)"[3], where I contributed some points on the accessibility of museums to vulnerable social groups and to the toolkit titled "Integrating multicultural Europe: Museums as Social Arenas on the accessibility of museum to vulnerable groups" (Širok et al. 2016). I proposed that accessibility in museums could be reached through performative and participatory practices, giving people an engaging social experience. Through these practices, the museum can build a responsible and sustainable bond with its social environment. The collaboration within project EMEE enriched me with theoretical backgrounds and concepts such as Richard Handler's museum as "a social arena" (Handler & Gabe 1997, 9), James Clifford᾽s museum as "a contact zone" (1997, 192), and later Jocelyn Dodd, Ceri Jones and Richar Sandell᾽s concept of a museum as "a trading zone" (Bunning et al. 2015).[4] All these concepts perceive museums as public spaces where meaning is negotiated, contested and created by different social groups. Cultural heritage in the form of a collection or edited in an exhibition is created through a selection of material in a curatorial process and thus never out of ideology and hierarchically structured knowledge and relations of social/political power (cf. Pozzi 2013).

I experienced how a political/social power can be challenged (at least on a symbolic level) through a research project within the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Romania (MNAC) in Bucharest.[5] I worked parallelly on research – a participatory, social-outreach project to reach the

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[2] The term "vulnerable groups" from the project's title was taken from the definitions of EU institutions that define "vulnerability" in terms of more significant risks of social exclusion and poverty because of gender, age, ableism, race and other reasons. However, "vulnerability" is a contextual term defined by the position and situation of a person/group rather than a fixed identity. In the project, "vulnerable groups" were listed as people with disabilities, people from Roma communities, migrants and minorities and other social groups, often seen as non-visitors or neglected as visitors by museum staff.

[3] Financed by the EU through the "Culture" program, the leading institution was the University of Augsburg, Faculty of Philology and History (Germany).

[4] Jocelyn Dodd, Ceri Jones and Richard Sandell shaped the concept of "trading zones" during the inclusion of interpretations of people with disabilities on disability into museum collections and as a process by which different forms of knowledge are accepted as equivalent (ex. professional vs experiential knowledge) concerning collections. Their concept provides a more inclusive framework for understanding, producing, evaluating and imparting museum knowledge (Bunning et al. 2015).

[5] In 2017 I gained a scholarship for a research residence at the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Romania (MNAC) – the residence program aimed to contribute to the museum's reconstruction.

nearest local population of the museum. The museum is in the parliamentary palace (*Casa Poporului*)[6], one of Bucharest᾿s largest administrative and most protected buildings. The museum᾿s establishment in the building, which carries such a heavy historical symbolism related to controversial memories and emotions, was disputed since the beginning.[7] However, the political decision to establish a national museum of contemporary art in the building has some sense: the collection of the museum was founded in 2001 after the fusion of the "National Documentation and Art Exhibition Office" (ONDEA) and the "Contemporary Art Department of the National Museum of Art of Romania" (MNAR).[8]

Nevertheless, the burdens of the past are still vivid outside the museum. They can be described as a mental barrier between the museum and the inhabitants of Bucharest, especially the nearest inhabitants (most of them of Roma origins) of the quarter Rahova-Uranus. I decided to place

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[6] After the Bucharest earthquake in 1977, the authorities decided to rebuild the South part of the Dâmbovița river. Before the construction of the building started in 1984, a vast part of the city was demolished, and more than 40.000 people were allocated. The construction site, however, opened a working place to around 700 architects (led by a young architect Anca Petrescu) and 20.000 workers. From several people I contacted, I heard speculations that the project impoverished the country and provoked political turmoil – the revolution of 1989 that cost Nicolae Ceaușescu head in the end. After the revolution, the building remained unfinished and under debate: demolish it or use it for something else. Today the building hosts the Parliament, the Senat, the Chamber of Deputies and other representative political organisations, and from 2004 onwards, the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Romania.

[7] To this problem was dedicated an international conference and exhibition, "Romanian Artists (and not only) love Ceaușescu's Palace?!", curated by Ruxandra Balaci (National 2004).

[8] The department of MNAR was established in 1994 to cover the institutional lack of collection and valuation of Romania᾿s contemporary visual art. ONDEA collection was created through an office for the organisation of exhibitions established in 1968, which was put under the "Council of Socialist Culture and Education" in 1971 and, in 1991, transformed into ONDEA. Only some works were donated to the museum by Romanian artists themselves. The director Călin Dan wrote that MNAC is an institutional heir of structural problems and dysfunctions of the previous period that owe many works belonging to specific cultural and political contexts (2016, 15). In the past, the collection policy was driven by "political directives or subjective inspirations", and the "absence of clear methodology" resulted in various "embarrassments" like "too few quality works, too (little significance besides the very loosely historical ones, too many pieces with serious conservation issues and others." (2016, 18). The image of contemporary art of Romania reflected in the museum collection is impartial and "amorphous", difficult to be interpreted without discriminative notions (2016, 18). Today the museum is one of the leading institutions of contemporary art in Romania, combining in its program the presentation of contemporary artworks with exhibitions that evaluate and critically present past artworks and practices.

my research there in collaboration with the museum staff, who request-ed to build a social bond between the museum and the nearest commu-nity in Rahova-Uranus. The barrier is also physical as the museum and the quarter are divided by traffic street, as well as the wall surrounding the building with police controls, which adds to a heavy notion to already historically established perception of the palace (and the museum) as a symbol of social and political power and inaccessibility. The latter was a significant barrier to the participatory projects that I co-organised in MNAC in collaboration with artists and inhabitants of Rahova.

Often people who experience social exclusion (people with disabili-ties, people with different socio-cultural backgrounds and others) find a problem identifying with the larger community and with the images (re-) presented in the national museums and galleries. These images have a nation/state-building role, but at the same time, they are excluding, elitist and selective. Mateja Kos, the curator of the National History Museum of Slovenia, writes that the greatest challenge that national museums face today is the contemporary museological paradigms inclined towards in-clusion and participation built on local communities (2019, 234). Peter van Mensch and Leontine Meijer-van Mensch, in their book on new trends in museology, wrote that the shift in the museum practice at the beginning of the 21st century happened when the principles of inclusion, access and participation moved from the "front stage" (exhibition and education) to the "backstage" (collecting, conservation and documentation) (2015, 49). At the heart of the participatory paradigm is the cooperation between the museum and its audience(s), which are seen as "heritage communities" – groups of people built across territories and social groups that "value spe-cific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations" (Meijer-van Mensch & van Mensch 2015, 55).

Marilena Alivizatou observes that collaborative, participatory practic-es have been used in the preservation of intangible heritage since Peter Davis related ideas of safeguarding intangible heritage to the theory and practice of "ecomuseums" by the intersection of ecological and environ-mental politics in the 1960' and community museums in their connections with local people and their territory. "As Davis argues, ecomuseums are more to do with empowering local communities and preserving a sense of identity concerning local history and locality. They are spaces where the involvement and participation of local people are essential and that play an active role in preserving living culture in a holistic framework (2011). For Davis, an important aspect of ecomuseums is their ability to

contribute to local economic and socially sustainable development" (Aliv-izatou 2022, 6). Davis, among others, traced the birth of "ecomuseums" in the work of George Henri Rivière. However, Alivizatou writes that Rivière and ethnologists (as other trained researchers) in the "Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires" in Paris carried out field research and documentation by talking with people in order to make records, collecting objects, preserving and interpreting their ways of life in exhibitions, recordings or publications, so to say the idea of the involvement of local communities was important primarily as a source of information (Alivizatou 2022, 8). From my point of view, I do not see practices used by ethnographers that reduce the involvement of local communities within research to informants as participatory practice as long as they do not tend to epistemic justice or de-hierarchisation of knowledge (Harrison 2016, quoted by: Lunaček Brumen 2018, 93) or do not carry political, emancipatory potential. The basic idea of the participatory method is rooted in the concept of pedagogy of oppressed by Paulo Freire (cf. 2000, 2005), who taught adult literacy in 1960' in Brazil. According to him, the role of the educator was to develop in a dialogue with students a critical awareness in the process of "conscientizição", awareness-raising, based on developing awareness of the situation and the ability to understand reality in order to intervene with it and change it. Thus, museums, or cultural heritage institutions in general, can also be understood as spaces of learning: knowledge deriving from cultural heritage can be used creatively to understand socio-political situations and identities and recognise the levers of political power.[9]

   It is interesting to observe that although collaborative practices have been introduced since 1960', it is only since 2000' that we are speaking of participatory paradigm in museology. Around 2000, many works were published and discussed the collaboration of social/source communities in heritage preservation in museums (ex., Karp et al. 1992; Watson 2007; Golding & Modest 2013). An influential book that stimulated the partic-

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[9] I will not further develop the historical background of participatory methods in museum practice as I have written about them elsewhere (see Valič 2019). However, in these, I often refer to visual-anthropological practices as a source of good practices, for example, in the "Navajo project" in 1966, where Sol Worth, John Adair and Richard Chalfen taught Navajo students how to make documentary films. Although their primary interest was understanding the symbolic construction of social reality using visual language among the Navajo, the project incited what was later called "indigenous media". These media let, supported and shaped the indigenous population to formulate political and emancipatory requests. Similarly, the concept of "shared anthropology" was introduced by Jean Rouche as a way of de-hierarchisation and de-monopolising anthropological knowledge towards Others (cf. Lunaček Brumen 2018).

ipatory paradigm in museum practice was Nina Simon's "Participatory Museum" (2010). As the director of the "Museum of Art and History" in Santa Cruz, Nina Simon has demonstrated in practice how a dead, empty, failed museum can become self-sustaining as a relevant cultural centre for a community. She wondered how cultural institutions could connect with communities and prove their values and relevance in contemporary life. The author engaged people in the museum as cultural collaborators (participants). She defined "a participatory cultural institution" as a space where visitors can create, share their knowledge and experiences, and connect through content, i.e. cultural heritage (Simon 2010, ii–iii). In doing so, she defined different cooperation models, referring to the work "Public Participation in Scientific Research" (Rick Bonney et al.): "contribution, collaboration, and co-creation", to which she added the fourth model, "hosting" (Simon 2010, 184–188). Each model differs in the intensity of public participation and institutional control over activities. Different ways of cooperation allow visitors/participants to take an active role in creating representations about themselves and symbolically take over the socio-political power if we understand that a museum is a public institution that gives society views or images, especially on the past, through which community continuity in space and time as identity is constructed. Participatory practices in museums, therefore, also play an essential role in the empowerment and emancipation of social groups that are in any way excluded from museum contents and representations of major society.

However, here lies a dilemma: is the participatory paradigm so effective, or is there a doubt of delusion? Marilena Alivizatou points out some limitations and criticism of participatory practices through works that show participation as a new tyranny of museums, making an illusion of de-hierarchisation of power relations (in terms of knowledge and political empowerment of heritage communities) (2022, 16–18). Despite criticism that "participatory measures are less transformational than hoped" concerning social inclusion, Sharon Macdonalds sees participatory practices in museums as worthwhile regarding civic participation and learning on how knowledge is constructed and fostering co-criticality (2023, 45–46). Léontine Meijer-van Mensch writes that the participatory paradigm is most often seen as democratising the museum process and content, which equally involves different levels of decision-making. However, participation does not guarantee egalitarian negotiation in the museum; on the contrary, relations between the museum and social groups are marked by conflicts and oppositions (Meijer-van Mensch 2013, 44–45). Bernadette Lynch understands conflicts as a political demand. She leans

her assertion on political theorist Chantal Mouffe, who says that we must envisage the museum as a vibrant public sphere of opposition where different views are usefully confronted, as it is through these struggles that new identities emerge (Lynch 2014, 97). The idea is to enable lively "agonistic" public spheres of opposition where different hegemonic political projects are confronted (Chantal Mouffe, quoted by: Lynch 2017, 108).[10] Museums must go beyond the symbolic understanding of justice and allow people to meet, discuss, and argue, thus becoming genuinely "contact zones" (Lynch 2017, 119).

To enable and realise these perspectives (and through them, realise the inclusion of people from vulnerable groups), we need to transform our understanding of the production of knowledge in museums and make a difference in understanding the work in it and the idea of museums. I see these possibilities in addressing two museum concepts: the "post-museum" and the museum as "a place of utopia".

The concept of "post-museum" was conceived by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill not to confront but to complement the knowledge achieved in the "modernist museum", seen as an authoritative holder of knowledge, interpretation and dominant narrative. The shift happened not only from the visitor experience (from mere ocular-centric visual experience to more embodied experience) but additionally in terms of epistemological experience, the knowledge based on the everyday human experience of the visitors, engaging emotions and imagination (2000). Alpesh Katilal Patel states that "post-museum" offers embodied rather than visual experience and constructed collections as potential sites of contestation rather than fixed meaning. The shift from objects to audiences makes a viewer an active agent in meaning-making. The knowledge based on the everyday experience of the visitor is paired with the specialist knowledge: "Whereas the modernist museum transmits facts, the post-museum tries to involve emotions and the imagination of visitors. The viewer in a post-museum is active, not passive, a producer, not a consumer. Such a mode of viewing shifts the conceptualisation of an object (whether it be artistic or ethnographic) as a static entity to one that is performative, and our thinking about an object as doing rather than merely being" (Patel 2016, 179).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett compared museums to literary utopias and considered museums as places of utopia with the power of imagination and worldmaking. As literary utopias use worlds, the museum:

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[10] The concept of "agonism" proved helpful in war or conflict museums or museums dealing with complex, heavy, problematic heritage (cf. Bull & Hansen 2016).

"[...] takes the world apart at it joints, collects the pieces, and holds them in suspension. Identified, classified, and arranged, objects withdrawn from the world and released into the museum are held in a space of infinite recombination. A refuge for things and people – literally, a building dedicated to the muses and the arts they inspire, a space in which to muse, to be inspired – the museum puts people and things into a relationship quite unlike anything encountered in the world outside. The museum brings past, present, and future together in ways distinctly its own" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 1).

The construction of the museum narrative, built on objects, images, words and performances, gives the museums a mark of concreteness: "Thus, the museum is not simply a place for representing utopia, but rather a site for practising it as a way of imagining" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 2). Museums (and literary utopias) as utopian imaginations are the initiators of visions and reflections on how the world is and how it could be, both in terms of criticism and desire for change. Museum exhibitions are spaces of constructed reality, imaginative/representational realities (just like utopias), which act as a social bond, a call to social (and not necessarily political) cohesion. A museum is an ideal form of social space that cannot exist outside of itself. Thus, the possibility, if not the museum's task, is that it can (and should) dream with its collections and exhibitions about a society that does not exist in reality (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 5). The idea of the utopian museum can be understood as one of the forms of an engaged, socially responsible, democratic museum, and the usefulness of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's idea could be translated into an exhibition scenario. The capacity for imagination and the socially cohesive role carry the potential to establish a museum that builds its value in society by cooperating with it.

These theoretical starting points bring me to the questions of practice. Further in the text, I develop the answer to two questions. First, how, by introducing people from vulnerable groups in the museum work (the use and interpretation of cultural heritage) change their social position in terms of empowerment and improvement of their social inclusion? Second, how does the changed perspective on the knowledge achieved in museums through participatory and collaborative practices broaden our understanding of the past and enrich the interpretation of heritage?

Further on, I will present three different experiences of working with different national museums and people from vulnerable groups in which I engaged a combination of ethnographic research (doing interviews and

observations) and a more practical, collaborative engagement. I cannot describe this methodological practice as proper "Participatory Action Research" (PAR), as described by Marilena Alivizatou (2022, 28–34), but rather as participatory museum practices influenced by the work of Nina Simon (2010, 184–188). Participatory methods were introduced to work and evaluate the results of museum practice, but not in interpreting the results in this article. In doing the latter, I critically reflect on the participatory experience from my point of view as a (self-)observing co-participant (Muršič 2011, 78, quoted by: Pirman 2022, 22). Of course, this could raise the question of appropriation of the performed collective work (as in terms of autoethnography, cf. Boast 2011, 61–63). My intention is not to appropriate the work of others; I took care that everybody's role within the text is represented and that my role in this collaboration is reflected. By writing this article, I see a possibility to give a voice to projects and people who do not have access to academic writings and thus reflect on museum work as a possibility of inclusion and enrichment of the knowledge about cultural heritage.

THE HISTORY OF THE DEAF COMMUNITY IN LJUBLJANA

During the project "Accessibility of cultural heritage to vulnerable groups", I was appointed to the National Museum of Contemporary History photo-documentation department, which stores the most extensive collection of around 3 million images of Slovene territory from 20th-century photographers. Looking at inventory books shows us many negatives dedicated to institutions for deaf people.[11] I was curious about how to interpret the photographic material and find its information since it represented the recent past of deaf people in Ljubljana. With the help of a deaf teacher of art, Petra Rezar, from the "Institute of deaf and hard of hearing in Ljubljana" and a representative of the "Slovene association of teachers of deaf", we found a deaf student of art restoration, Gašper Rems, who worked on the mentioned photographic material.

During his work, Rems individually checked more than 800 negatives that carried information on deaf people and made the first selection of photos according to his interests. In the next phase, he searched for information about the photos through books and archival records and interviewed elderly deaf people while visiting two of Ljubljana's deaf organi-

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[11]   When addressing people with disabilities, I often use "people's first language". However, in the case of Slovenia, the national associations of deaf people and blind people are using "identity first language", claiming that this is an integral part of their identities.

sations. Together we spend much time on methodology: how to prepare questions for interviews, how to track information, how to search for new interlocutors, how to prepare transcriptions and many other questions. It was his first research and a new experience. It was also the first time a museum object (a photo) in a national museum describing the past of a deaf community was interpreted by a deaf person. The work through interviews was necessary for the museum, as none of the curators could do it, as nobody knew how to communicate through sign language (except with an interpreter). The latter was also reflected in the level of data, as photos were stored in the museum inventory books with a pejorative connotation of "gluhonem" (deaf and dumb). This term was still used by most curators when speaking about deaf persons. Rems's work on documentation was to re-write and re-valorise the photo material of the deaf community in the museum. However, at the same time, his presence influenced the museum staff to re-think their position and their approach toward deaf persons as co-workers and possible museum visitors as well. At that time, with the help of Rems, few programs for deaf and deafblind people were prepared.[12] Rems and I decided to prepare an exhibition of photographs that will present some aspects of the past of deaf people in Ljubljana. The final curatorial selection before the print of photographic material was done in pairs. We both had an idea of how the exhibition should look and the message to transmit. He stated in a presentation*:* "Because I am also deaf, I wanted to research the history of deaf people so that we, the deaf, can proudly show that we have a history."[13] His idea of the exhibition was a clear statement of identity and the positioning of the community of deaf people as an active co-creator of the past, present and future in the majoritarian society – an emancipatory and empowering act. My idea was from the position of a hearing person and an educative one (a hidden curriculum behind the exhibition): to educate people against prejudices and overcome stereotypes toward deaf people. Our ideas did not oppose, and we joint both views through visual and textual information.

The first opening of the exhibition was on 16 October 2014 in the conference hall of the Slovene ethnographic museum as a part of the conference titled "Deaf community in Ljubljana in the past and present" (Gluhi v Ljubljani nekoč in danes) that added a bigger picture to it. After this occasion, we established an e-exhibition on the blog of the photographic

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[12]   Rems also assisted deafblind people at the Association of deafblind of Slovenia DLAN.

[13]   https://fototekamnzs.wordpress.com/2014/07/22/gasper-rems-student-restavratorstva/ (Accessed May 10, 2022).

department of the National Museum of Contemporary History.[14] In addition, *Tipk TV*, a TV for deaf people, has done a video guide in Slovene sign language.[15]

Another opening was done in "Trubar's house of literature" in the centre of Ljubljana almost a year after, on 4 September 2015. The place aims to promote the Slovene language, literature and culture. On the occasion of the opening, the program manager Rok Dežman stated that Slovene sign language is also an essential part of Slovene language and identity, but about which, unfortunately, we do not know much, and that the house should open to marginalised groups as co-creators of Slovene culture. The community of deaf people well visited the opening as the opening was taken over by the "Slovene association of organisations of deaf and hard of hearing". It was interesting to observe the importance of the exhibition for several elder people, who recognised themselves in photos and described their pride and excitement for the TV for deaf people, *Spletna TV*.[16] As Petra Rezar stated in the emission, the information on photographs is "important for the historical memory of the deaf people".

This case shows how a museum can open toward different social groups by interpreting its museum collections, validating their experiences, and empowering their identities in the emancipatory sense. It is also a point of seeing museum collections not only as a museum end but as means and their interpretation as an ongoing process (cf. on the concept of "dynamic collections" see Meijer -van Mensch & Peter Van Mensch 2015, 13–33). This way, the museum gets new information that enriches its collections and gets new audiences and more – work as a catalyst of social regeneration and inclusion.

EXHIBITION ON THE END OF WORLD WAR II AND THE REMINISCENCE OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

2015 was the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, and I was assigned to make a photographic exhibition on the end of the war. This historical moment in Slovenia is highly politicised, especially concerning the post-

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[14]   https://fototekamnzs.wordpress.com/bxfbs/pretekle-razatave/fotografske-podobe-iz-zivljenja-gluhih-in-naglusnih-v-ljubljani/ (Accessed May 10, 2022). The blog is no longer active, but the content is still available.

[15]   https://tipk.si/oddaje/tipkove-minute/tipkove-minute-15-oddaja (Accessed May 10, 2022). This TV is no longer functioning, but the content is still available.

[16]   https://youtu.be/wI2-QwvvuKc (Accessed May 10, 2022).

war events when prisoners of war and civilians were mass murdered on demand of the newly established regime. Before I started the work on the exhibition, I was positioned as the heir of partisans on one side and the heir of a Nazi concentration camp internees. However, I shared the conviction (quite usual in my generation) that nobody should have been executed after the war without trials.

In the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia, I found more than 1600 photo negatives dated 9 May 1945, which in Slovenia, as part of Yugoslavia, was considered the "Day of victory". The date was chosen as the title of the exhibition, as today we celebrate the "Day of Europe", and with the title, I wanted to show the double meaning of the celebration. I built the exhibition concept on the observation that the totality of war surrounds us, and daily news in media made us apathetic to war atrocities. With the exhibition, I wanted people to wake up and experience the end of the war. For this reason, I have chosen big prints of 8 black and white photos transformed into 3D photographs in an anaglyph technique,[17] where looking through red-blue glasses, the images will "revive" in front of the viewer to reflect the contemporary situation.

For the exhibition, I was interested in photos that showed ordinary people's reaction to the end of the world war instead of official, heroic and political personalities and events. For a more vivid sensory experience, I searched for multi-sensorial triggers supporting the exhibition. I searched for other visual materials (such as posters), looked for the music of that period and analysed photos in search of elements to touch and smell.[18] Finally, I decided to interview elders in two elderly homes in Ljubljana and found more information on what happened on 9 May 1945.

Contrary to my expectations, they did not speak much about the war's end: most just remembered strong emotions of happiness but did not remember what they were doing that day. The photos of 9 May 1945 looked similar: good photographers that usually took "correct" photos (in terms of art theory) took unstructured photos, like snapshots of people in the street. It was interesting to observe in a book of memories of a famous Slovene photojournalist Edi Šelhaus:

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[17] The work was done by a digital designer based in London, Benjamin Rančič.

[18] For example, I prepared a multisensorial guided exhibition tour with some non-inventoried museum objects like guns and parts of uniforms, such as partisan covers, menageries and others. In the photos, I looked for flowers blooming at that time – such as horse chestnut and lilac - and with which people decorated soldiers and tanks.

"Here (in Ljubljana), however, something happened to me that should never have happened to a photojournalist. With indescribable moments of joy and happiness that the war is over, moments that only a film can preserve, I forgot my duty, to take photos. I repeat to myself today as an apology that this is human. In fact, I made only a few shots of liberated Ljubljana and the unique mood of its inhabitants" (1982, 75).

I interpreted this phenomenon with the help of Van Genepp's concept of "rites of passage" and Victor Turner's concept of "the liminal phase": the end of the world war was like a "liminal phase" where unstructured society happened, where feelings of happiness, the horrors of war had come to an end, mixed with feelings of fear and uncertainty about the future.

While preparing the exhibition, I was also working on a programme for people with Alzheimer's disease (dementia). Studies show that museum visits, programmes and museum objects as evocative objects, could provide a potential therapeutic experience to people with dementia and their caregivers by stimulating self-esteem and a sense of identity, fostering feelings of confidence and feelings of worth, fostering life review, enabling social interaction and communication, as well as encouraging cognitive stimulation (Rhoads 2009, 233–236). My decision was influenced on the one hand by my family situation, as my grandmother had dementia and my mother was active in the local organisation in support of people with dementia; on the other hand, by professional trends in museums, as between 2007 and 2014, MoMA launched an educative art program for people with dementia.[19] I prepared a program with the professional support of Elizabeta Štrubelj, an occupational therapist from the University Psychiatric Clinic in Ljubljana, who instructed me on the needs of people with dementia and communication with them based on "validation". Validation builds the relationship with a person with dementia on respect and recognition of what they are saying or doing (taking it as genuine and valid) and empathy with him/her in his/her situation.[20] Ms Štrubelj helped me to prepare an accompanying booklet with black and white photos from the exhibition with texts in an "easy-to-read" format that people could read in a nearby armchair.

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[19] *Meet me, The MoMA Alzheimer's Project: Making Art Accessible to People with Dementia*, https://www.moma.org/visit/accessibility/meetme/ (Accessed May 10, 2022).

[20] Ms Štrubelj proposed that I read the book of occupational therapist Astrid van Hülsen titled *The Wall of silence* (*Zid molka*. Logatec: Firis Imperl. 2000). The author builds the work and communication with people with dementia on the validation method of Naomi Feil.

As some people with dementia may find moving around museums difficult and exhausting, I decided to visit them in the elderly home with some photos and some of the prepared multi-sensorial material. I met two groups of people in two different elderly homes. Their conditions were different: from people in the beginning stage of dementia to people who already used wheelchairs and did not speak, but they were still able to express their feelings. I took a different approach in both groups. In one group, I introduced myself and showed people the materials I brought, and we spoke about different things – the end of the war, but soon we shifted to the post-war period. In the other group, I was introduced by an occupational therapist as a person working in a museum that is interested in the Second World War, specifically the end of it. People started suddenly to speak about the war. The first to speak were persons with internment experiences in the concentration camps. After telling her story, a woman stood up, thanked and left the group. She never joined the group again. After my return in a week, the occupational therapist said that the woman cried a lot after the session but was thankful she could share her experience. Another woman burst into tears after a partisan song and explained how her entire family was killed in a partisan raid. After calming down, she said she was grateful as she could openly and safely speak about her experience. After this event, I decided to end the project later in the evening as I did not consider myself prepared enough to work with people's traumatic war experiences.

I always regarded this project as a failed project and just recently looked at it from a new perspective of the museum as a space of "social healing", a place that re-evokes memories in order to give a reflection on the past. In this place, people can express themselves and tell their stories without prejudice and respect. I realised that this was one of my best lessons about what a museum could be and what cultural heritage and memory do – even in terms of forced and selective forgetting at the outcome of the war conflicts.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE ART MUSEUM AND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The last example of collaboration is an experience at the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Romania (MNAC) in Bucharest. It aimed to link the museum with the people living in the quarter Rahova-Uranus or make it more visible.[21] My fieldwork was done through the streets of

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[21] I described this experience in detail in other articles (Valič 2018; Valič 2019).

Strada Uranus, Calea Rahovei and around the Flower market. The quarter was affected by Ceauşescu project: a part of the quarter was demolished to make a place for the Palace, The Romanian Academy of Science (*Casa Academiei*) and the block of flats for the administration working in the palace; part of the quarter gave shelter to those who remained without a home. In the past, the quarter was a vivid marketplace with the stock exchange (*Bursa Marfurilor*) and a beer factory, but the business declined in the 1990'. The quarter has a bad reputation among the inhabitants of other, wealthiest parts of Bucharest. Historically, it was considered a quarter for immigrants from rural areas – poor and uneducated people. These views also persisted during my stay: some curators considered the quarter inhabitants poor and uneducated and the social outreach project nonsense because these people lived a very different reality with no space for contemporary art. Nowadays, the quarter is one of the "hottest spots" for real estate business and so in the process of gentrification. It is seen from the outside by the structure of homes: the quarter is a mixture between old and deteriorated houses and new expensive villas, which gives an idea of the social status of its population. Primarily older people live in deteriorated houses or people of Roma origins with a lack of finances and education. Roma people are concentrated in the houses around the Flower market. Many faced forced evictions due to a lack of unregulated procedures and insufficient legislation in denationalisation processes around 2000. The business in the Flower market is run mainly by Roma women, who control the life around the market.[22]

A group of Roma women and mothers with young artists and activists formed *the "Generosity Offensive Initiative"* in 2006, which created the base for *"LaBomba – Community Centre for Education and Active Art"*[23] in 2009. The idea of the centre was the collaboration of professional artists and the community of Rahova-Uranus in improving the quality of life in the quarter by critically addressing and actively solving the problems of inhabitants. Unfortunately, by the time of my research "LaBomba" community centre was closed, and the initiative was in decline. However, a group of women worked on their problems of forced eviction and prepared an interactive performance, "The Subjective Museum of Living" (*Muzeul*

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[22] By the time of the research, I was pregnant, which made it easier to enter into the community of Roma women – they were interested in my pregnancy and future child, we shared experiences, and they gave me much advice.

[23] An essential artist in this initiative was Maria Draghici, who developed the concept of active art/community art (*arta activa/ arta comunitara*).

Subiectiv al Locuirii). As the community centre closed, the quarter remained with no cultural or artistic space, except a fancy, private event place called *"The Ark"* and a music festival named "Outernational Days". So it was advantageous for MNAC to cover the need for more cultural events and education. However, the problem was that most of Rahova-Uranus inhabitants had never heard about MNAC nor ever passed the security walls of the Parliamentary Palace. Moreover, as one of the quarter's inhabitants said: "People in the Flower market work day and night in few turns; they do not have time for other things, such as contemporary art."

In the summer of 2017, the museum proposed that I collaborate with a German artist duo, Birgit Auf der Lauer (Birgit Binder) and Caspar Pauly, who got IFA (Institute für Auslandsbeziehungen) support. The duo had experiences doing participatory art in collaboration with vulnerable groups (immigrants and people with sensory impairments). Moreover, Birgit was born in Romania into a Saxon family that moved to Germany. Before the artists came, I was doing ethnographic fieldwork research with interviews and observations to understand the dynamics of the quarter. Students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Social Work, University of Bucharest, Alexandra Stef, a student of anthropology experienced in social outreach projects, and a volunteer of "LaBomba", Ioana Raileanu, who was familiar with the quarter and played the role of cultural interpreter, helped me with communication. I was introduced into the quarter through Cristina Eremia, an informal leader of the Roma women around "LaBomba".

With Birgit and Caspar, we first planned to do museum visits for people from the quarter nearest to the museum, and the main visitors were children and a few adults (primarily women, mothers). Together, we playfully visited the exhibitions, researched artworks, drew, played games and did other things. We were helped by one of the museum guards, Adrian, who lived in Rahova and was interested in the artworks exposed in the museum. He helped us with communication to bring contemporary art closer to people, as one of the women from Rahova said: "You know, he is speaking our language". Discussion followed visit sessions, where visitors shared ideas about how to make the museum more attractive to people from the quarter and what they would bring to the museum if they could. After these sessions, Birgit and Caspar went to the quarter and did interviews, listened to people's opinions, and photographed and drew to prepare for the final event.

The final event was done on 5 August 2017. It was meant to be a night walk through the Flower market to the museum with projected

light images, drawings on the streets about the ideas museum staff would bring to Rahova and an adventure in the darkness of the museum with torches and lights projections of drawings of the things that people from Rahova suggested to bring in the museum. The event was meant to allow the exchange of ideas between the museum and Rahova through light projections of images in the dark; the last was interpreted as a space that could be filled with lights of imagination. One idea was also to include women's performances from "LaBomba". However, we decided to abandon the idea and made a separate event, which caused disappointment in the "LaBomba" group, who did not participate in the event. [24]

The organisation was a big challenge, new also to the museum staff. One week before the event, the museum staff declared the permission papers to the authorities and the guard service of the palace. Nevertheless, on the day of the event, we found out that the date of the event on the papers needed to be corrected. We started the projections with one hour of delay in the hope that the managing staff of the museum would solve the problem before we came to the palace's gates. Around 70 people were waiting at the Flower market to attend the event. Most came from other parts of Bucharest; just a few were from Rahova, some children and workers from the Flower market. The light projections were amazing and amusing; each idea was voted for acceptance by the public. Everything went well until the gates of the palace: there we were stopped by the guards who did not let us enter because of the wrong dates. Half the people left the event, blaming us for the lousy organisation or the relentless guards. In the end, the problem was resolved by a call in the middle of the night by the director of MNAC to the principal director of the protection service. Finally, we could proceed with the programme for the rest of the evening.

The people who stayed understood this experience as a metaphor for the experience shared by most of the people from Rahova, who, by being Roma or poor or uneducated, are being discriminated against and left out-

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[24] We made the performance later in September 2017. Their interactive performance, based on the methods of the theatre of the oppressed, told the experiences of forced evictions of women from the quarter Rahova-Uranus and Vulturilor 50. Each act of the performance started with protagonists standing still, like statues in the museum. We situated the performance in the same place as the "Marshalling Yard" exhibition, which functions as an open depo. During the performance, the visitors could move (or leave) around the protagonists surrounded by red bonds (like art pieces in the museum) and the museum's artefacts. The performance in MNAC was followed by a conversation organised by women of *LaBomba* and was a mixture of past and present situations of the quarter, joined by different actors.

side "the gates" many times in daily situations. It was a special night for those from Rahova who joined the event. As they pointed out, their voices were finally heard. In the Parliamentary palace! Nobody related to the museum but to the Parliamentary palace, the government, and political power. Even though the main idea of connecting the neighbourhood was not successful, in a symbolic way, presenting their ideas in the museum was seen as a takeover of social and political power.

This case, even minor to the existing problems of the Roma population in Romania, shows that the museum should support the communities, especially those considered oppressed by the ruling majorities and the governing bodies. Museums should raise their voice and confront the governing bodies to show the irrationalities of ruling models. Antagonisms and conflicts should not be considered problematic but rather a hand opening "the gates" to a discussion about inequalities and discrimination and a way to empower minorities to speak about themselves.

CONCLUSION

Three cases from national museums show that opening a museum – as a space of multi-sensoriality, imagination, (utopian) possibilities and antagonism – to the participation of people from vulnerable groups enriches and broadens our knowledge of cultural heritage as well as changes our understanding of a museum not only as a space of objects, but a space of social (inter-)relations against socio-political discussions. By engaging people from vulnerable groups in collaborative projects, the museum can reflect on its relation toward these groups and, outside of its spaces, address and raise awareness against social exclusion's (pre-)conditions. People from vulnerable groups cannot often express their past and cultural identities in national museums. However, the museum is a safe space of creative discourse, offering valuable self-presentation opportunities. In that case, it can stimulate processes of "subjectification" (Kroflič 2018), a possibility of expressing individuals as responsible beings that leads to empowerment and emancipation. Of course, this kind of work opens a chain of ethical questions, but sometimes it is worth it if we want museums to be relevant places for society.

Moreover, why do cultural anthropologists matter in contemporary museums? Methods that cultural anthropology developed through the 20th century are built upon long-standing and ethical relations with people, recognising and questioning the processes of alterity and constructions of Otherness. With collaborative practices, contemporary anthropology has set theoretical and methodological approaches to epistemic justice

and de-hierarchisation of knowledge (cf. Lunaček Brumen 2018, 92–94), which should be the starting position in contemporary museology and museum practice.

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