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## Democratization as an Aspect of Heritage Europeanization. The Museum Triangle

The goal of this chapter is to present heritage democratization as an important aspect of Europeanization processes. In the most general sense, the democratization of heritage is understood here primarily as providing wide access to symbolic resources related to the past, then also as empowering people to participate in the interpretation of those resources.<sup>1</sup> Since heritage itself is defined for the needs of this text as a complex, discursive phenomenon the following analysis of heritage will refer mostly to communication practices. The main focus will be put on museums, as significant identity-forming institutions.<sup>2</sup> First some dominant narrative strategies present in museums will be interpreted and then a typology of museums will be proposed in a triangle model which allows the positioning of these institutions according to the most important characteristics related to communication.

The past – distant, hybrid and complex – offers symbolic resources that are potentially valuable for collective identity formation. Stored and treasured in museums, it supports numerous identity oriented processes. In relation to the narratives of “then,” the legitimacies of “now” are established. Consequently, the control over the meaning making processes taking place in relation to the past remains one of the fundamental prerequisites of symbolic power. All these

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Walsh literally refers to attempts to monopolize forms of representation of the past as “an attack on democracy,” but the reflection on the importance of diversity and “first person perspective” has been present in museology at least since the rise of eco-museums. Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World*, New York 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Identity formation focus is widely shared in virtually all new museology approaches, see: Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, London 1989.

reasons can explain the importance of researching collective identity processes, such as Europeanization processes, with a focus on the domain of heritage: the dynamic discourse, where the past is constructed and transmitted.

Moreover, not only Europe as a whole, but also EU member states as well as regions, cities and other localities are in constant need for uses of the past with its potential for identity potential. In the construction of heritage this need is answered in various *lieux de mémoire*.<sup>3</sup> What makes museums so significant in this respect is an the opportunity for personal encounters with heritage afforded by them there for visitors, and including visitors in the processes of heritage interpretation may result in creating shared symbolic communities, which in turn take part in shaping collective identities.

There are a number of direct correspondences between the European citizenship project and heritage democratization. The most evident is the focus on social inclusion, with attempts to include citizens in the creation of the public discourse. In general, Europeans are encouraged to participate in community lives and at the same time the **human dimension** – in heritage and in European public discourse in general – gets highlighted, with an increase in participative planning on the one hand and valorization of minority narratives or of everyday heritage on the other. **Participation, responsibility, community** are all key words for both participative citizenship and democratic heritage.

It may be said that democratization processes taking place in European museums not only mirror other social changes, but may be justly related to broader collective identity formation processes related to strengthening the European legitimacy. The European narrative seen as ubiquitous, hybrid and diverse<sup>4</sup> may be well represented with social constructs of the past which can be researched and analyzed in heritage discourse.

## Democracy and interpretation

Democracy is regarded as one of the fundamental European values. Although frequently challenged, it is commonly seen as a necessary component for the rule of law as well as for the social justice system. Considered as an important

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<sup>3</sup> Museums may be regarded as a specific kind of *lieux de mémoire*, as described by Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, Paris 1992. It is important to stress their social dynamics as well as their potential for collective identity creation performed in relation to shared symbols.

<sup>4</sup> Cris Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration*, New York–London 2000.

element of identity, the concepts of democracy have a significant impact on the public discourse as a whole. Yet it is not only the **concept**, but also **practices** of democracy that can stimulate European identity formation and heritage can be regarded as a domain of dynamic democratization processes.<sup>5</sup>

The democratization of heritage discourse can be observed – among others – in museums, where the past is shaped and represented. The inclusion of stories, testimonies or objects related to minority groups as well as bringing out their perspectives<sup>6</sup> – often alternative to the official narrative – makes museums potentially democratic institutions. Since minority groups are normally underrepresented in the official discourse of history, one of the consequences of minority narratives inclusion is the valorization of intangible heritage<sup>7</sup> in museums: minority groups often do not have records of their pasts that could be musealised with the **use of** objects or written documents. This process may have some surprising consequences, namely questioning and challenging the classical concept of a historical source. Where museums decide to exhibit personal objects, oral testimonies or other records: traditionally not authorized by the dominant system of power (in this case power of representation), alternative evidences get valorized. Yet the main shift from classical museum representation to democratization lies in the fact that the inclusion of minority discourses results in supporting overall multivocality and plurality of museums' content. The official historical discourse, illustrated with authentic, valuable objects, no longer has a monopoly and becomes enriched with other narratives.

Stories of women, ethnic minorities, labor class, children, etc. had not been regarded by classical museums as suitable for the official historical narrative, yet in the light of democracy they need to be heard.<sup>8</sup> To make this happen,

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<sup>5</sup> For example the Lisbon Treaty which gave full legal effect to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union may be regarded as a legal attempt to reinforce democratic standards in use. For the Lisbon Treaty see: [http://ec.europa.eu/archives/lisbon\\_treaty/g glance/rights\\_values/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/archives/lisbon_treaty/g glance/rights_values/index_en.htm) (accessed: 25.07.2016).

<sup>6</sup> Described as a part of a paradigm "shift" in museums in Gail Anderson (ed.), *Reinventing the Museum. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, New York–Toronto–Oxford 2004. Also thoroughly interpreted by Nina Simon in *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz 2010.

<sup>7</sup> The recognition and valorization of intangible heritage may be observed both in institutionally driven acts such as the UNESCO Paris Declaration of 2003, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention> and in a number of community and eco museums (accessed: 25.07.2016).

<sup>8</sup> The valorization of marginalized narratives is also visible in official documents of the Council of Europe. For example, in documents establishing and thematising cultural routes programmes, the Council of Europe declares its support for various European identities as well as the heritages of different groups not necessarily with regard to national reference frameworks and

personal documents and individual life stories or testimonies often become a part of exhibition narratives. In light of democratization with “telling stories” and “making the voices heard” narrativity, as opposed to object representation, becomes the core element of content-making strategies in museums. Not only does the past become fragmented and contextualized but it is no longer seen as unchanged, and rather as a complex and dynamic object of interpretation.

Another vital point to be made is that the whole concept of a museum as an institution safeguarding, conserving and presenting the past has evolved. The ideal of a neutral and objective approach to presenting history is no longer evident. Museums strive to engage themselves in public life by often being citizenship oriented institutions. They redefine heritage, which is seen not as “given to be safeguarded” but much more as a dynamic and interpretable social construct. What is more, museums can be seen as becoming emancipated from the traditionally overwhelming dominance of historiography, to shift to be more visitor and community oriented.<sup>9</sup> This feature is far from the one concerning classical museums, where the emphasis on the past and supporting the official, dominant narratives was the key factor for museums’ programs.

What can be observed today is also the dispersion of interpreting authority. Museums which open their spaces for visitors and invite them to participate in heritage interpretation, cannot keep total control over the meaning-making processes taking place during interpretation. In fact, museums may use this situation for strengthening their image as open institutions allowing for diverse interpretations. Yet, since visitors are often not prepared for heritage interpretation, museums make attempts to empower their guests by providing them with adequate interpretative tools: visitors are invited to think for themselves, but they are supported by explanations, images or personal staff assistance.<sup>10</sup> With heritage democratization, the politics of display

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in the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Cultural Routes signed in 2010 it is declared “The EPA helps to strengthen the democratic dimension of cultural exchange and tourism through the involvement of grassroots networks and associations, local and regional authorities, universities and professional organizations. It contributes to the preservation of a diverse heritage through theme-based and alternative tourist itineraries and cultural projects.” See: the official site of Cultural Routes Institute, <http://culture-routes.net/council-of-europe/epa> (accessed: 25.07.2016).

<sup>9</sup> As broadly examined in: Nina Simon, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Personal guides who are trained as interpretive guides, are prepared to construct engaging, dialogue focused situations where visitors can not only immediately react to heritage presented by expressing their emotions, dilemmas and fears but they are encouraged to use their knowledge and own experiences. In museums of “difficult heritage,” such as Holocaust related museums

becomes more visitor friendly and less conservative in maintaining museums' interpretative powers.

This process may also be regarded as an aspect of a pragmatic approach to heritage, where heritage is no longer perceived as a self-explanatory construct, but requires applications outside museums. In Europe the focus is placed especially on competence-based education: contextualized and personalized heritage on display is seen as a tool for education but also for improving the quality of life. This effect may be achieved by organizing diverse competence oriented activities in museums but also by developing audience outreach strategies.<sup>11</sup> Again, this should be seen as a major shift from traditional museums' exhibition programs, where the emphasis was put on presentation.

All these aspects of heritage democratization should be related to a global phenomenon of heritage interpretation. This movement, especially popular in North America, originated at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the need to appreciate nature in national parks of the USA. In his classical book on heritage interpretation an ex-journalist and a spiritual father of interpreters, Freeman Tilden, sketched the multifaceted situation taking place in natural heritage sites.<sup>12</sup> According to Tilden's diagnosis the visitors were not supported nor guided well enough to have satisfying experiences; group visits were not handed with the knowhow of animating them and the knowledge was transmitted with complex vocabulary. Tilden advocated for another kind of visit, opting for treating it as a holistic experience. He advised, for example, substituting one-directional messages with posing questions to the visitors so that they would get engaged in a visit also by sharing their own experiences, knowledge and opinions. Tilden's rules for heritage interpretation remain the most important reference for the profession till today. In most general terms its emphasis on the process of experience may be understood as very inclusive for visitors, where participation oriented attitude results in re-shaping of traditional ways of heritage presentation as a whole. It should also be noted that Tilden's philosophy and precise

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(Washington Holocaust Museum), there are sometimes volunteers who offer psychological support to anyone having problems with the content on display.

<sup>11</sup> For example in "thematic weekends," when volunteers who have the knowledge connected with exhibits, are invited to lead workshops with visitors, the stress is put on developing competences applicable in normal ("non-museum") life. Visitors may get inspired to start a new hobby or a project where they would profit from the museum's resources. The point is to link potential visitor groups with museums by organising activities and projects outside museum (in commercial centres, schools, community centres, etc.). Museums aim at establishing communities around them.

<sup>12</sup> Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, Chapel Hill 2008.

methodology was affected among others by the capitalist idea of time and money investment and the ideal of consumer satisfaction.

There are two points that need to be made here. First of all, museums and other heritage places are treated as dynamic, socially valid institutions, supporting customer satisfaction and the personal development of visitors, not only conserving the official narratives. Secondly, processes which may be observed in the domain of heritage reflect those which affect and influence the general public discourse. The heritage interpretation movement, with its emphasis on the "human factor," resembles and echoes some of the fundamental issues of democracy, such as participation (attempts to engage people in action), representation (whose narratives are represented) or shared responsibility (accepting the consequences of the knowledge gained).

It may be said that the numerous links between democracy and heritage often constitute a record of social change. Enhancing participation in the public discourse remains a valid component of both citizen oriented and heritage related democratization processes. The inclusion of minority narratives, illustrated in the domain of heritage by the valorization of both intangible heritage and personal documents/objects coexists with a growing tendency to diversify interpretive agents: democratic museums give over their sole authority in order to share interpretation with various groups and individuals.

The European dimension of heritage democratization processes may be observed on several levels. First of all, one may see it as the direct application of ideals connected with the concept of people's representation in the system of power and decision making. In the domain of heritage participative practices of sharing interpretation as well as the inclusion of minority narratives and views in museums' programs, should also be regarded as reflecting phenomena taking place in public debate. The practices of democracy can therefore be seen as supportive for strengthening the European idea presented to the Europeans as an important identity framework.

### **The museum triangle**

However hybrid and diverse, the domain of museums and museology has been emancipating itself from the scientific backgrounds it had always been associated with. Traditionally, historical museums support their authority with the science of history, and ethnographical exhibitions may be regarded as ethnography in the making. With the postmodern crisis of grand narratives,

however, contemporary museums need to answer the demand for their legitimacy in another way. In general, museums offer convincing ways of bringing prestige to the topics they present.<sup>13</sup> They are regarded as effective institutions of commemoration and valid interpretations of heritage. Although musealization remains a recognized way of producing relevant identity frameworks, in general contemporary museums promise a dynamics which overpasses traditional musealization patterns. It may be argued that the Europeanization of heritage is not related to its **content**, but most of all to communication practices that establish meaning-making situations created in museums. In order to achieve this goal, three different types of museums will be defined and a triangle model will be presented. The proposed museum triangle allows to position specific museums according to their main communication strategies, dominant narrative formation patterns and visitors' oriented program. Apart from the similarities shared by all museums, such as dealing with the past or taking part in collective commemoration practices, the domain of museums can be characterized by immense diversity, both in terms of topics presented, media used or the politics of representation. The museum triangle is based on methodology of ideal types, as formulated by Max Weber<sup>14</sup> but can also be seen as inspired by famous culinary triangle of Claude Lévi-Strauss.<sup>15</sup> Applying Max Weber's concept of ideal types allows the presentation of reality in its model, hence, instead of strictly reporting concrete existing cases, ideal types are more concepts than realities. The reason to use ideal types is because they help to grasp complex phenomena, which on the other hand can be encoded in a structuralist model of a triangle. In structuralism, social reality is seen as a hybrid continuum, which may be fragmented for the sake of analysis and interpretation. Heritage and other collective identity formation processes are impossible topics to be fully presented with charts and tables, but heritage studies can profit from their simplification. It is hoped here that the main characteristics of all three museum types will be grasped, and their comparison will shed a new light on general situation in public discourse formation reflected in museums.

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<sup>13</sup> Duncan F. Cameron, „The Museum, a Temple or a Forum“ in: G. Anderson (ed.), *Reinventing the Museum. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, Tübingen 1905.

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Leach, *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, London 1970.



## Classical museums

Museums are known to have originated in Ancient Greece, where they were established as “temples of muses,”<sup>16</sup> offering groups and individual opportunities of contact with the Sacred. The concept of sacralization, together with building distance between the sacred (presented content) and the profane (visitors) remains the fundamental concept for classical museums. As spaces for negotiations between the sacred and the profane, museums do not only exemplify one of the core civilizational dynamics of Europe,<sup>17</sup> but also appear as institutions producing mythological content. In this aspect “myth” can be understood as a way of structuring social reality, with special emphasis on the resources of the past. The “encounter with muses” can be interpreted as answering the human need for eternity, also diminishing the fear of death: presenting objects testifying to man’s glory can be a powerful source of giving meaning to life. The concept of **temple** should be related to the idea of sacralization and what is more striking, temples make the sacred content public, they allow for actualizations of symbolic contents. Classical museums may be seen as strongly inspired by their Greek origins as they indeed sacralize the past by giving access to it through precisely selected objects and images. The narratives created in classical museums shape and support official history. They safeguard and conserve the **treasures** of the past, because it is there that important values are believed to be kept. The power of keeping treasures safe is enforced by the right to present and interpret them. It is the priests who are in charge of explaining the rudimental contents: believers come to temples in order to participate in rituals but not to change sacred messages. In classical museums the flow of messages is basically one-directional: museums speak, while visitors listen. The legitimacy of museums may not be as doubtless as in religion, but the past may sometimes be seen as secular religion. Heritage discourse provides a **natural** symbolic environment for the practices of sacralization and classical museums are keen to produce social memory frameworks by homogenizing the past.

Classical European museums are strictly connected with the nineteenth century nation building movements.<sup>18</sup> By forming and giving access to “national collections” museums supported self-concepts of new born nations. They actively took part in imagining those communities by providing them with images and

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<sup>16</sup> Jean Claire, *Malaise dans les musées*, Paris 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Ewa Bieńkowska, *Między świętym a świeckim*, Warszawa 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London–New York 1995.



texts that could act as good reference frameworks. Distant past was presented as a source of pride. The narratives of classical museums were supposed to legitimize national identities, a vital part of which was territory. Historical national museums were intended to link specific spaces with stories and explain collective myths of origin, first of all by explaining heritage left by common ancestors. Artistic national collections were intended to provide images for the national histories adding the touch of genius and beauty and hence bringing national mythology closer to the Eternal meanings.

If there was ever one nation and one state of Europe, classical museums could offer a splendid way of shaping its collective identity. Unluckily for the success of such a project, Europe's past consists of so many pasts, available in many forms, including diverse narratives of history that it is hard to create one shared representation order. Classical museums offer commemoration practices which are strictly related to specific histories and spaces, whereas linking European history with just one specific territory is quite hard to establish. Alternatively, what can be done – to support the European spirit with regard to Europe's heritage – is applying European interpretative matrices in heritage presentations. In other words, specific histories and mythologies may be retold *à l'euro péenne*. Since classical museums strive to build canons to establish them as identity reference frameworks, the Europeanization of heritage could be seen as trying to formulate the European canon of symbols, images, values, etc.

The concept of classical museums is problematic when related to democracy as a foundational European value. One of its weaknesses is that it is mainly the official narrative which gets supported, whereas minority narratives are underrepresented. As a result the overall image of the past gets simplified and static. In terms of content classical museums have a tendency to present as much as possible, which often leaves visitors with a feeling of being overwhelmed. There is not much support for the visitors, either. They are expected to learn and appreciate, while museums focus on presentation.

Classical museums are recognized by tourism as places worth visiting. Tourists, who in the limited time of their travels are motivated to visit institutions of established authority, may profit from classical museum communication strategies. The problem remains that with object oriented exhibitions (as opposed to content or visitor oriented ones) the cognitive abilities of visitors are challenged when little or no support is given by museums in terms of acquiring the knowledge. The paradigm of object oriented exhibitions in general diminishes possible complex interpretation processes, focusing on transferring images associated with official narratives.

To give an example of a classical museum, the main exhibition of the Polish Tatra Museum<sup>19</sup> will now be briefly described. The museum operates in a number of places in the Tatra Mountains region. Its main mission is to conserve and present the remains of local culture, art and history. The main exhibition is not visibly connected with other branches and offers a most general, introductory outlook at the region. The first impression visitors may have is its old fashioned style of display, which together with non-existing interactive devices leaves visitors in a strange, somewhat awkward world. The feeling of oddity may be the result of the fact that from the start of its exhibition, there is as much effort devoted to representing the world of the past as there is to explaining museums' legitimacy "to tell the story." Already in the beginning visitors learn about the scientific origins of the museums: geological research of the mountains, carried out by a scholar, marks the start of the narrative. The museum aims to show its links with the world of science, which is traditionally seen as authoritative in researching the truth.

Classical museums strive to represent the world in its totality. To achieve this (impossible) goal they structure the world with categories, an approach widely used in science. It is especially natural sciences that are respected for classifying the world's diversity, with Linnaeus's example of categorizing the abundant universe of Nature. Classical museums will use categorizations as a way of supporting its legitimacy to describe the world. They will be, as a rule, more general than specific with the content they present, but most of all the narratives are supported with objects and documents. An interesting example of self-legitimacy of classical museum narrative is presentation of objects (original or copies) which are verified as historical sources, such as location documents, coins, seals etc. In classical museums objects justify the narrative contents.

For instance in the geological part of the Tatra Museum, main exhibition items looking like "some stones and rocks" are displayed. They are stored in glass exhibiting devices, protecting them from the touch of visitors. An interesting thing, however, is that the most precious object of this part of exhibition is in fact vulnerable and not defended by this form of glass armor: its size does not permit it to be stored as other stones are. Anyway, rooting origin of the narrative of the story in geology has significant symbolic consequences. Apart from using the authority of science, the story gets immediately centered around the mountains and, to be more precise, around the materiality of the mountains.

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<sup>19</sup> Official site of the Tatra Museum, [www.museumtarzanskie.com](http://www.museumtarzanskie.com) (accessed: 28.03.2016).

As classical museums strive to illustrate as much as they can with tangible exhibits, stones and rocks are ideal in many respects. First of all they carry a sense of timelessness and embracing the narrative in the brackets of *longue durée* has a very strong effect: very old objects not only testify to the long history, but they also make up for the feeling of unique meeting with a very distant world. The point is that classical museums do not attempt to stage situations where this world could be experienced by the visitors, they teach about the past and provide exhibits as testimonies.

Another interesting part of this exhibition is **mountain nature**, where again the diversity gets categorized and presented in a traditionally musealizing way. Figurations of nature, namely stuffed animals and dried plants, are presented to illustrate the natural life of the Tatra Mountains. The effect of artificiality makes those exhibits resemble theatre decorations, but what is even more significant the anthropocentrism of these stagings is so deep that one may believe nature has been really dominated by culture. The animals stand there behind glass to show their surrender: their dead bodies treated as exhibits prove Man's dominance and the narrative of nature evolves into the narrative of civilization. Those stage representations of wildlife are in fact a very important medium, traditionally present in the domain of museums. The golden age of curiosities collected and exhibited as *wundercameras* still echoes today in the spaces of regional representations. The aspect of taming nature is as much a part of humanity's civilizational project as it supports regional and local identity presented as adaptation to the natural environment.

The ethnographic part of exhibition is as timeless as the natural one. With this display, countryside life from the past is homogenized and presented as a staged household unit. The feelings visitors can have when looking at this petrified reality may be confusion and/or boredom. The main problem in such ways of presenting the past (a house displayed in an adopted museum room) is the lack of historical, cultural and social context. This context can be provided by a personal guide. Visitors who do not hire a personal guide are in fact left alone with their guesses and interpretation. For the visitors who do not have sufficient educational background, the exhibition could be seen as a group of insignificant objects. Their use may be well explained with labels, but in a museum context their practical meaning is reduced to a symbolic one. The most important concept of object representation may be regarded as the shift from the contextualized practical use of the objects to the symbolic act of representation. In other words, the exhibits are there to illustrate, not to be used technically. Such a meaning-making situation brings museum, object centered representation close

to symbolic presence of objects in rituals where, deprived of technical meaning, they take part in symbolic processes.<sup>20</sup> The difference between the reality of ritual and the reality of a museum visit lies, among others, in the level and intensity of participation. In classical museums, visitor participation is limited to looking and reading, and the communication is one-directional, unlike in rituals where groups communicate important messages in order to make them shared. It is, however, very doubtful if classical museum displays, such as the Tatra one, may produce the relevant messages as is done in rituals.

A striking illustration of the essence of the Tatra Museum's narrative is an opening figurative scene. An official, representation style statue of an old fashioned looking man, namely Dr Tytus Chałubiński is presented together with a figure of a folk storyteller, Sabała, who is sculptured as smoking a pipe, sitting at the feet of Dr Chałubiński, art and nature connoisseur, local activist and a man of prestige. The storyteller may symbolically present life in its flow and change, grasped in orality and interactions, whereas the doctor's statue brings in the official discourse. Together they correspond well with the hybridity of narratives of this museum, but they also prove the symbolic superiority of the dominant narrative.

To sum up the characteristics of classical museums as described here in the triangle model, the main focus is put on supporting the official discourse, mainly the historical one. In general, the legitimacy of a museum may be achieved by rooting its representation strategies in the domain of science (geology, ethnography etc.). Striving to illustrate the world in its totality results in the fragmentation and simplification of narratives. To keep the messages accurate (although not necessarily understandable) a complicated vocabulary is used in descriptions and labels, giving the overall feeling of seriousness and solemnity. There is no moving image or interactive devices, sound and smell effects are limited. The past gets its perennial shape and with its mythologization with the exhibition becoming partially sacralized, too. Nature is presented in a static and systematic way, emphasizing the human civilizational dominance. In general the display strives to be neutral and objective. Social history is marginal and political activism is presented in relation to the official history formation.

The Tatra Museum, which may be an example of the classical museum type, leaves no space for alternative interpretations, but it does not inspire nor does it provide admiration. The stories told have a limited relevance for the

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<sup>20</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, New York 1969.

visitors, who are not welcomed as partners but much more as pupils, who come to listen to what is told.

## Interactive museum

Unlike classical museums, interactive museums are visitor and activity oriented. The heritage that they present is made suitable for visitors who are primarily treated as customers. They expect to get the valuable experience for their money and interactive museums see their mission as **providing experiences**.

The most popular interactive museums are science centers and children's museums, but the interactivity is a general trend visible in all museums, no matter what topics they present. Visitors do not come to interactive museums to "look and read." They expect to be entertained, educated, and thrilled. They want to play, they are ready for action, and they demand their needs to be fulfilled.

Because of the commercial success of science centers, there is a growing pressure to include various interactive devices in all contemporary museums. The exhibitions use numerous media to enhance visitor participation. For example, instead of just looking at exhibits, different ways of using the sense of sight are present: peeking through holes, gazing at large scale images, zooming in, actively searching for details or matching puzzles to get the whole picture are just a few to list here. Pressing buttons, using touch screens or headphones, collecting paper leaflets or scanning personal cards to create virtual post visit internet account: the ways to involve visitors in a visit seem to be endless. At the same time, with the focus on visitors, care for **designing** their needs and not only **answering** them, is shadowed by care for customer satisfaction. Immediate gratification coming from the pleasure of participative experience is in fact inscribed in a more general program of late capitalism. Multisensory experiences are highly valued in a time of limited leisure time, and museums start to be seen as competing for the time and money of their guests.

Interactivity changes museum experiences, marking its presence in historical museums, as much as in science centers. The rule of supporting the official historical narrative – dominant in classical museums – is not obeyed, but replaced with the imperative of building a multimedia based narrative. As exhibitions are composed of diverse media, the final message is a result of the whole visitor experience: which is far from perceiving messages designed by museum staff. What is more, there is often a clash of different discourses presented: for

example official historical discourse is represented with documents next to theatre like representations which are accompanied by film footage.

To give a clear illustration of the **clash of discourses** an exhibition of Schindler's Factory<sup>21</sup> will now be introduced. It is a branch of the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków<sup>22</sup> and as such it serves primarily as commemoration of local (urban) history. It is located in the former enamel factory, an original historical location which was reused for the film production of *Schindler's List*.<sup>23</sup> The film tells the story of a personal transformation of a German businessman, who through his sacrifice saves the lives of many innocent people condemned by the Nazi regime. The Oscar winning story offers breathtaking cinematographical work and for many people it was their first meeting with the imagery of the city of Kraków. It has to be said, however, that the locations for the shooting were not chosen according to the historical facts, but due to their cinematographic potential. For example the picturesque footage from the film ghetto, with many iconic scenes that remain a magnet for tourism, is in fact the old Jewish district, from which the Jews were expelled to the ghetto which was situated somewhere else. For the sake of the film these changes may be unimportant details, but for the historical museum of the city they were important enough to make a comment: such as the whole exhibition. Referring several times to the film, the exhibition tells the real story of the place and contextualizes the story, not by relating it to the film, but to the war history and its local forms. The main theme of the exhibition is "life of the city under German occupation."

Therefore, it is largely to many visitors' surprise that the main narrative is not devoted to the famous Steven Spielberg movie, which is the reason behind most international visits. Indeed, the domain of the film is not prevalent, but the exhibition is far from a classical style display. First of all it offers highly artistic, interpretive and often scenographic narratives which are presented with the mixture of authentic objects and spaces and installations. Images, sounds, films, documents, everyday objects, maps, photos... all coexist to form a trans-media mixture, where visitors explore and experience the past on their own. Impressing visitors seems to be the overwhelming goal of the museum.

The exhibition of Oskar Schindler's Factory consists of numerous scenographic effects and visitors may feel surrounded by theatrical representations

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<sup>21</sup> The Oskar Schindler's Factory Museum was opened in 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Official website of Kraków's Historical Museum, [www.mhk.pl](http://www.mhk.pl) (accessed: 28.03.2016).

<sup>23</sup> *Schindler's List*, dir. Steven Spielberg, 1993; awarded 7 Oscars including Best Picture.

of a distant, different world. A timeline giving facts and figures from history is introduced to give a general context. Apart from it, history is fragmented and reduced to a number of episodes: staged and “frozen” in time. Artificial human figures compliment scenographies in these theatricalized situations. An interesting consequence of including theatrical representations in the exhibition – as at the Schindler’s Factory Museum – is that visitors look at the “theatre of the past,” at scenes of time completed and finalized with no direct link with the present. There is a feeling of “tourist attraction,” and the exhibition provides free artistic representations mixing them with historical data presented mainly with text. Therefore, staged situational interpretations (such as “at the hairdresser’s”) become exemplifications of the historical, general story.

The interplay of media is visible. The exhibition starts with a photographic display, where a war-period fotoplastikon is used. The choice of medium representing the recorded time of history, results in time confusion: anticipating other hybrid representations of time that follow in the visit. Narrativity is the main paradigm for representations of time and history, yet it is motivated by visitor’s needs and expectations. For example, video recorded, individual, oral testimonies are presented as “talking heads” formatted films. This brings another clash of time models: people who were witnesses of history justify and legitimize the narrative, linking it with personal biographies. There is one more confusing time dimension present: the time of the shooting of the movie *Schindler’s List*, a period referred to by visitors but not evident in the exhibition. The situation is not any easier for the visitors, who perceive the narratives of the site as being on the original site, yet it is not clear if the film locations were all authentic or produced in studios. In general, various time representations coexist to make the whole visit experience more dynamic for the visitors.

The most important characteristic is that interactive museums produce exhibitions which are mostly visitor oriented (rather than object or content oriented). Therefore, the main emphasis is put on the immediate visitor’s experience and all narrative strategies serve this goal. Capitalist standards of customer satisfaction are met here with providing valuable symbolic resources which may be used by the visitors in their identity quests.

To sum up, interactive museums create spaces of experience. Their narrative strategies are visitor oriented and multimedia based, often using scenographic effects. There are many interactive devices, but visitors’ participation is not meant to enhance their own view points, but rather to support its attractiveness. At the same time, postmodern confusion in diverse temporal orders of representation is made stronger by continuous interplay between authentic



and artistic exhibits. Interactive museums use minority and individual narratives, to diversify historical narratives, which corresponds with a higher level of consumer satisfaction but also democratic ideals. The inclusion of those narratives is not necessarily driven by the need to support the idea of democracy or to question the official discourse, but it definitely makes the visitor experience more involving.

The debate over heritage democratization in museums should not, however, be limited to exhibition and narrative strategies. It is also a museum's institutional image and program that should be analyzed as ideology carrier. One of the issues making up the museums' vision is their attitude to vicinity. Museums understood as temples of muses should, as a rule, be distant and cut off from the world of everyday experience. But in interactive museums, vicinity is often treated as a valid resource: for example relating the presented narratives to authentic places is a good way of making the museum visit longer and more fulfilling for the visitors. At the Oskar Schindler's Factory, for example, a set of local educational walks was developed, where original questing methodology was used to establish a network of original correspondences with the former ghetto district. Relating museums to the neighboring spaces may be regarded as an act of territorialization: making direct links between the narratives and spaces.

## Democratic museums

Unlike interactive ones, some museums do not follow the customer oriented logic of the twentieth century, but promote more **prosumer** attitudes. Similarly to interactive museums, they do not intend to close themselves off from the neighboring districts, but they are more community oriented. With urban activism or community oriented audience outreach programs, these institutions are also far from the classical, object oriented museums. They will be described below as "democratic" mainly in order to grasp their civil and community involvement.

One of the key words for democratic museums is participation. The dynamics of the visit is not caused predominantly by the presence of multimedia and hybrid narrativity accompanying it. Democratic museum programs, as well as their narrative strategies, provoke situations where the private and the public dimensions are negotiated. As a result not only visitors feel personally invited to their own interpretation, but there is a conscious and vivid deconstruction process: museums not only **tell** stories, they also talk about **how** the stories are told, often justifying the use of specific media.

The Kraków based Ethnographic Museum,<sup>24</sup> for instance, uses one of their permanent exhibition rooms, thematically devoted to springtime rituals, as a project space: multisensory, interpretative and eventually supporting, re-defining the concept of museums' representations of the past. The design of the room is very modern and far from transparent in a content communication as it used to be in classical ethnographic museums. The walls, which are painted in vivid colors, are left for the visitors to write their own comments. The upper part of one wall reveals an old coat of paint as if saying "this is not finished, re-decoration is still going on." On the wall there is a collection of decorated Easter eggs, presented in a very modern, somewhat industrial display of glass and wood. The number of Easter eggs on display is very small compared to the whole collection in the museum's possession but since this exhibition is content-not object-oriented, the eggs illustrate selected ornaments and beliefs, but are not self-explanatory exhibits, as it happens in classical museums. Some short film documentaries presented on the other wall correspond to the agrarian rituals, but again the pictures are scarce considering the size of exhibition walls. In the center of the room there is a big "cosmic tree" constructed. On a screen in the background, the story of the tree used as material for the installation is told. The video shows, where the tree used to grow, how it was cut and transported to the museum. Revealing the backstage of the museum's work, namely how the exhibition was prepared, is one of the narrative strategies used in democratic museums, which presents itself as *lieu de mémoire*, where the statics of heritage is replaced by the processes of its interpretation.

Democratic museums demonstrate respect for their visitors in many ways. Most of all, they strive to construct programs so that they answer to the visitors' needs, considering them as possible partners in heritage interpretation processes. Visitors will be asked to leave their comments and opinions, sometimes to add their objects to the collection or share a unique skill by participating in volunteer projects. There is a concept of museum community, of staff, visitors and friends of museum, a concept which may unite people around diverse topics.

The selection of topics presented by democratic museums is not crucial. It is the aspect of making the current messages, bringing them to local contexts and making them important for the visitors. It is not by accident that the Ethnographic Museum's in Kraków slogan is "My museum. Museum about me." One might say that there is consumer individualist "me" present in this slogan. It is

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<sup>24</sup> The official website of Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, [www.etnomuzeum.eu](http://www.etnomuzeum.eu) (accessed: 25.07.2016).

also true that “museum **about**” reveals a strong narrative approach, characteristic to the interactive museums. Considering the museum’s program, however, it seems clear that the slogan simplification relates to the museum’s efforts to make their content relevant and personalized. These efforts may be observed in such activities as first of all, go beyond the concept of transparent museum towards community oriented institution; opening its doors to the neighbors. This is when museum focuses on local history and shares its space with its neighbors by presenting locality oriented displays and/or by developing audience outreach programs for local communities. Furthermore, democratic museums strive to make statements about current world phenomena and interpret them, neither trying to pretend the museum’s communication is neutral nor aiming at giving a representation of the whole world, but most of all avoiding “absolutism” in opinions. Then, democratic museums highlight the process of heritage interpretation as valuable and as valid as conservation-preservation practices which are traditionally associated with museums. Interpretation processes are enhanced in activities connected with exhibition running as well as in general communication strategy. Democratic museums highlight personal views and include personal stories in exhibition narratives, which become hybrid, often allowing for participation and most of all content oriented (the design of the exhibition is motivated by its main content, not the objects or visitors’ needs). They allow people whose stories are presented to present themselves with their own voices (and languages) including oral testimonies in exhibition narratives and treating them as important elements of overall exhibition design. And last but not least it stays present outside the museum walls with the messages, aiming at wide and diverse audience outreach; sharing its knowledge to assist in solving the practical problems of collective life.

There are several similarities between interactive museums and democratic ones. The inclusion of individual and private stories is present in both types. In interactive museums this inclusion supports the diverse and hybrid attractiveness of the site, whereas in democratic museums it clearly corresponds to the concept of human dignity, making a strong statement that “everybody matters.” Both types invite visitors to participate in the museum’s activities. The reason behind democratic museums is to empower visitors with competences and abilities that might find social/civil application, whereas in interactive museums participation is mainly motivated by the need to meet high customer satisfaction standards. Then both types strive to support visitors with competences, but in interactive museums the competences enrich the visit, whereas in democratic museums they are thought to support not only individual development

of visitors but to enrich the public life as a whole. The emphasis on shaping the future, and not only representing the past (as in classical museums) or intensifying the immediate experience of “now” (as in interactive museums) is another key difference between them.

Classical museums, which are predominantly object/exhibit oriented with their exhibition programs, strive to give a total representation of the world. Democratic museums are more modest in this respect presenting only specific phenomena of life. Thematisation remains a core content shaping strategy (exhibitions are devoted to specific themes and topics), yet the overall aim of a democratic museum’s exhibition is showing numerous correspondences and links by making visible semantic links between various meaning-making elements. Democratic museums aim to present their collections in order to empower visitors with interpreting skills, which can be used long after the visit is finished. Their collections are an important part of exhibitions, but they are more interested in artistic interpretations than object presentation of them.

Another example will be given below to illustrate the idea of a democratic museum. It will also refer to the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, as it is one of most vivid examples of democratic museology, as defined in the model presented in this article.

“Art of the allotment”<sup>25</sup> was a five year project<sup>26</sup> which was originally started by personal memories of childhood spent partially in urban gardens of the Socialist period. A photography project was initiated, its main theme being the life of the allotments of Kraków. Photos were taken regularly for almost three years (2009–12). They gave a unique artistic testimony to permanence and change.<sup>27</sup>

From the start, the project was thought to be as inclusive as possible but also consciously focused on one phenomenon, avoiding a totality of presentation. The research project was initiated to provide the museum with the data, objects, images and interpretations which were interdisciplinary, as the team consisted of researchers applying various methods and representing various disciplines. The main aim of the project was to present and interpret the universe of allotments. The exhibition was meant to be engaging and to meet high artistic demands.

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<sup>25</sup> Małgorzata Szczurek, Magdalena Zych (eds.), *dzieło-działka („Art of the allotment”)*, Kraków 2012.

<sup>26</sup> The research project on Polish urban gardening was officially launched in 2009 to be finalized in 2012, but the conceptual work had been carried out since 2007.

<sup>27</sup> The series created by Aleksander Duraj are available at: <http://aleksanderduraj.com/?works=photography> (accessed: 25.07.2016).

Throughout the entire preparation period until the exhibit opening, the work was done in a team of twenty researchers supervised by a scientific leader, Magdalena Zych, an ethnographer by background. Group processes were carried out to formulate the researchers' interests and findings, mind maps were developed and the researchers were invited to give a personal touch to their work. All the work was done in relation to the institutional background of the museum, but it was not limited to either field ethnography or object collections. For example, during interpretation sessions which led to the finalizing of the exhibition design, developing metaphors was regarded as an important part of the process.

The exhibition, opened in 2011, consisted of several special "zones" and interpretive "layers." The main line of the exhibition narrative was established by a series of photographs. They were exhibited in a significant way, starting from sets of smaller sizes of pictures, which gave a general visual frameworks for the life and work on the allotments. Later on, in the next zone, the sizes of photos grew larger and the images presented context based situations, which illustrated everyday activities at the allotment. The diminishing distance between the photographer and the people he had pictured was an important part of the story. It was a personal testimony of evolving from record taker to gardener's acquaintance. In the last room of the exhibition there were only four large photographs presented in the form of light boxes. They were full face portraits of allotment gardeners without any situational context depicted. There was, however, a sound sphere surrounding the photographs, where the gardeners' own comments (recorded during the project interviews) complimented the whole exhibition narrative. As a result, the visitor was guided through several stages of getting to understand the world of urban gardeners, a process which finalized with a face-to-face meeting with their large scale portraits. The medium of light boxes, commonly used in advertisement, makes the images luminous and the people who are portrayed seem to be more iconic. The light comes from behind them and their faces, looking into the eyes of visitors, are the only sources of light in this room.

There were some objects presented in the exhibition, too. There were only several original exhibits from the allotments (a trap for moles, a grill out of a washing machine), but what is striking is that none of them were labelled in a traditional way. Instead, the longer, narrative texts were papered on the wall. The texts were prepared by interpreters, who had also been on the research team. The labels were far from traditional museum analyses presenting rather records of associations and personal "semantic networks" than direct explanations.

The exhibition may be seen as a multimedia one, as it consisted of images, sounds, objects and installations. Already at the start of a visit, guests were invited

to take part in a game: there was a packet of seeds sold as a ticket and each visitor started his visit with seeds in his or her hand. Metaphorically, the museum encouraged visitors to “take seeds in hands and make use of them,” at the same time extending the time of the visit – if planted outside the museum the seeds would evolve and remain associated with the place where they were acquired. But in fact for some visitors, the visit had started before they actually entered the museum. To mark the project’s presence in Kraków, a number of urban gardening activities were undertaken, including the activities of guerrilla gardening, a narrative strategy known in urban activism and urban ecology movements. The exhibition was dispersed and existed in various spaces outside the museum.

The significant characteristics of this project make it a good example of democratic museology. Firstly the theme (urban allotments) is discussed in the public sphere, influencing lifestyles and politics. Secondly, a group of researchers is recruited and their work is based on an interpretive anthropology approach. Simultaneously, the photographic project is carried out, recording the situations and faces of the phenomenon. Artistic representations bring the narrative of the exhibition to a more universal level. Thirdly, nothing more than what is **relevant** to the main theme is represented, instead of total, global interpretations (as in classical museums), the whole and complex meaning-making maps are made accessible to visitors and the interpretation process made by the museum becomes transparent. The visitors themselves decide about the final meaning of the exhibition objects, but some guidelines are provided by the museum. What is also important is the fact that the gardeners speak about themselves and their voices are literally made heard. As a result, their own self-reflection and self-definition is given to the visitors as an important perspective. Simultaneously with this interpretive line, a museum narrative is introduced: some ethnographical data and commentaries are made as well as complex project book being published, mostly to be read after the visit. Not only is the backstage of the museum’s interpretive work made visible and shared but its representations become a part of the exhibition narrative, as well.

The exhibition became a natural reference point for the discussions about possible legislation concerning gardening at the allotments. The museum was never directly forced to express its opinion in relation to current politics, but it emphasized the value of the phenomenon at all times.

Democratization in this aspect may be interpreted as applying the fundamental European values of a person and of human dignity. The official museum discourse is complimented by an insider’s perspectives, presented as a valuable narrative. Visitors are encouraged to make their own opinions and thus there is not a single “take home” message, but instead the emphasis is put on enriching

the visitors' own horizons. Last but not least, the whole idea of presenting a contemporary, controversial theme with a project combining research, art and museum representation resulted in a change in the museum's mission. The museum makes its resources available to allow people to grasp the phenomenon of today, but also to allow for discussions about the future. In democratization, **being aware** are some of the key words and democratic museums want to take part in strengthening citizenship and civil society. The museum also becomes an institution where the Present becomes the Past with acts of their interpretation. A dynamic, social space invites for action and supports social imagination, too.

### Democratization as Europeanization. Closing remarks

Three ideal types of museums were briefly described above and the cases to illustrate them were provided. Now a summarizing table will be utilized to present their significant characteristics.

Table 1. Three types of museums and their characteristics

	Classical museum	Interactive museum	Democratic museum
<b>Main exhibition orientation</b>	object	visitor	content
<b>Visitor participation</b>	limited	total	deliberate
<b>General object of representation</b>	the world of the Past	theme/topics	a complex phenomenon
<b>Visit</b>	contemplation	activity based, competence building, personalized experience	competence and self-development
<b>Relation to the public discourse</b>	the sphere of the Sacred cut off from the sphere of everyday; supports the dominant narratives	possible, provided that it supports visitor's experience	important; citizenship and civil society orientation
<b>Design</b>	prestige	modern, user oriented	user and community oriented
<b>Minority narratives</b>	absent	present, but used mainly to enrich the visitor experience	present, legitimizing the exhibition narrative
<b>Predominant time dimension</b>	the past	the present (of immediate experience)	the future
<b>Communication</b>	one-directional	diversified with multimedia	multivocal narratives, interpretation processes made visible

Source: own study.



The chart presented above may be useful, especially for the purposes of heritage research in museums. It helps to describe museums' dominant narrative strategies and it may support the analysis of community involvement programs. Most of all, it is a methodological tool which may be used to interpret the heritage democratization processes taking place in museums. It provides a comparative framework and general criteria for museum typology and can be applied in a discursive approach to heritage analysis.

European narratives are considered here as much more hybrid and ubiquitous than official ideology, produced by European institutions. Democracy may be regarded as a paradigm, affecting communication strategies, as well as the politics of representation. In this respect all museums' actions enhancing visitor participation in heritage interpretation could be seen as attempts of social inclusion. The question of the presence of minority narratives in museum exhibitions, the valorization of private heritage or the inclusion of orality in museums' stories, could also be seen as a sign of democratization processes. They may also be treated as echoes of European personalism, where integrity and dignity of a person can justify his or her role as interpreters of history. In general terms, any form of the weakening of the interpretive monopoly (as in classical museums) may be regarded as supporting the public discourse and as corresponding to the ideals of civil society. On the other hand, provoking situations where diverse discourses clash (history, pop culture, locality, etc.) together with revealing the backstage work of heritage institutions may be perceived as building a conscious community around shared, yet negotiated values. The concepts of history, time and identity are especially challenged and raise specific museum narratives to the universal level.

Europe may not be seen as an evident reference framework for collective identity formation in museums, but the democratization which is closely connected with European fundamental values is visibly present in heritage discourse. At the same time, classical museums' impact on identity formation may be questioned, although it serves well the mission of storing the symbolic resources. Interactive museums can be very inspiring places, but they do not support civil society building in the long run, mainly because of immediate gratification rule. Still the most important European dimension lies in heritage dynamics and hybridity. Europe can be found in museums, where the official discourse of history is interpreted and enriched with a human dimension.

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