



National Museums Making Histories in a Diverse Europe

EuNaMus Report no 7



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National Museums Making Histories in a Diverse Europe

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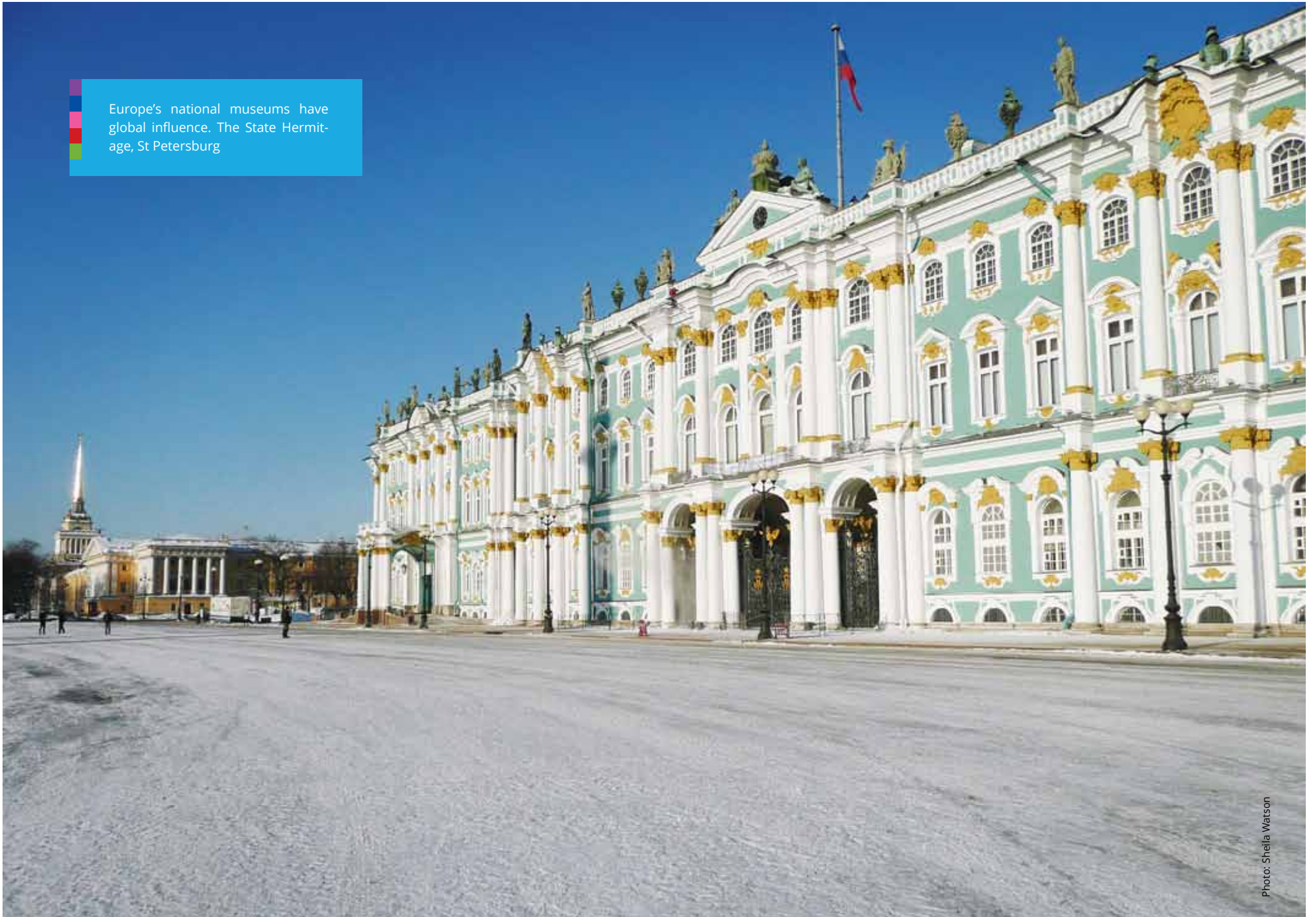


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Europe's national museums have global influence. The State Hermitage, St Petersburg



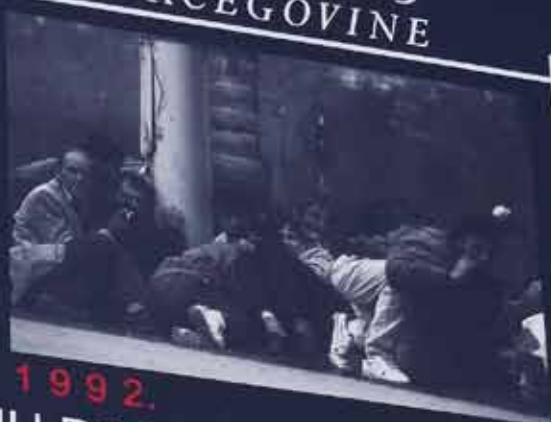


Introduction





HISTORIJSKI MUZEJ
BOSNE I HERCEGOVINE



POSJETITE NAŠU STALNU POSTAVKU "OPKOLJENO SARAJEVO" U HISTORIJS

APRIL 1992.

Do national museums keep conflicts alive?
Bosnia Hercegovina's History Museum retains
the scars of the siege of Sarajevo.



National museums in a changing Europe

The national museum is a European invention, established to define and stabilise knowledge and national identities in a continent possessing a rich history of expansion, innovation, migration and territorial conflict. While the 'European project', in its various guises, has done much to engender transnational understanding, the continent remains vulnerable to divisive forces that stress national, ethnic and religious differences, and which prevent Europe from realising its full political, economic and cultural potential on the world stage. As trusted institutions, national museums hold great significance for nations and for Europe, and they have, since the end of the Second World War, been important players in cultural diplomacy between nations.

This document reflects upon the way histories are constructed and deployed in Europe's national museums. Its observations come out of three years of research examining the role of national museums across Europe, supported by a series of reports and conference proceedings exploring museums' role in the making of nations, the narratives and collections they curate, their acts of contestation and cultural connection, the deployment of national museums in policy, and the experiences of visitors to these museums (see the endpage of this document for links). This report, *National Museums Making History*, sets out to address two questions: In what ways do national museums, and the histories they display, contribute to social division and cohesion? How might national museums be a force for greater social cohesion in Europe in the future?

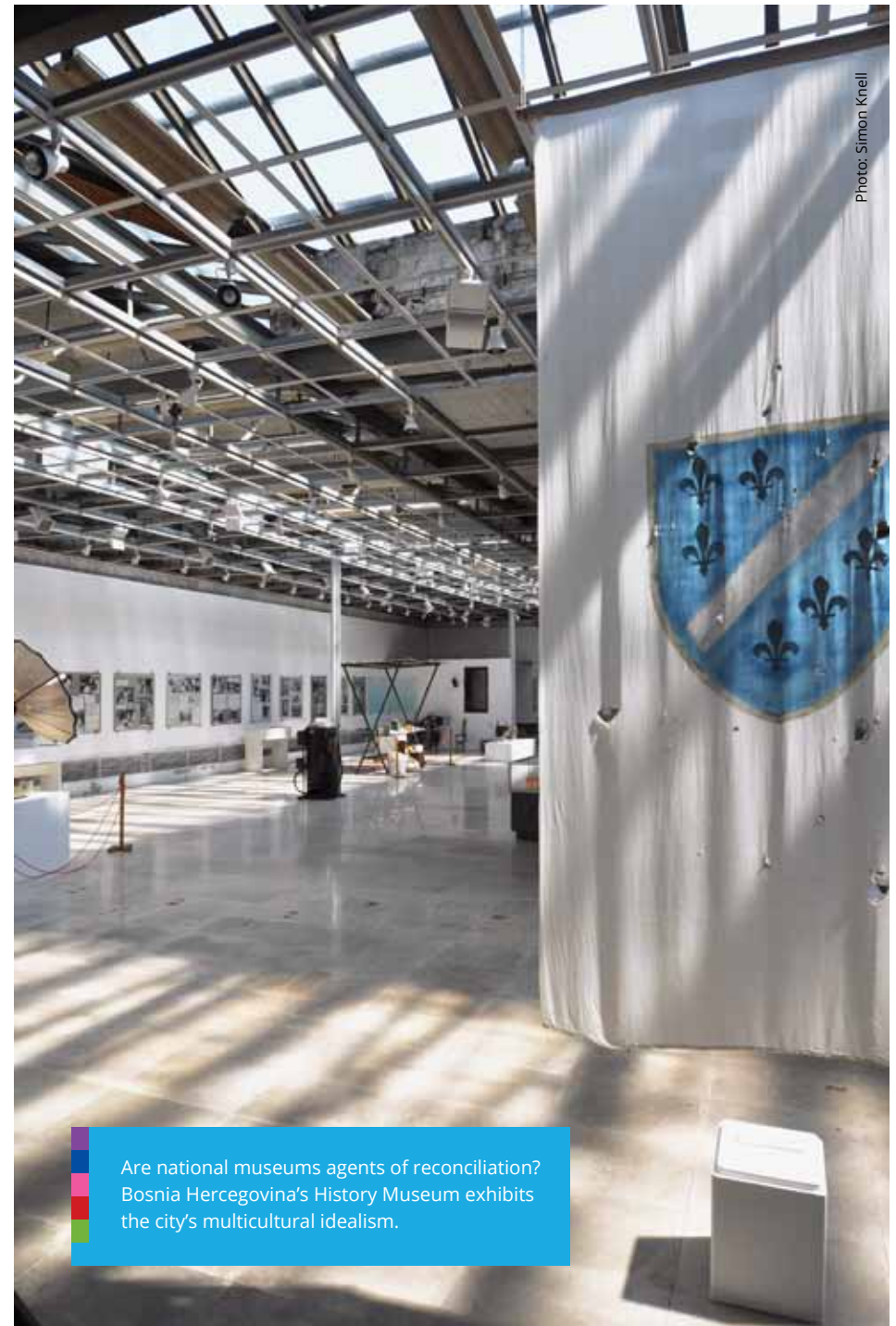


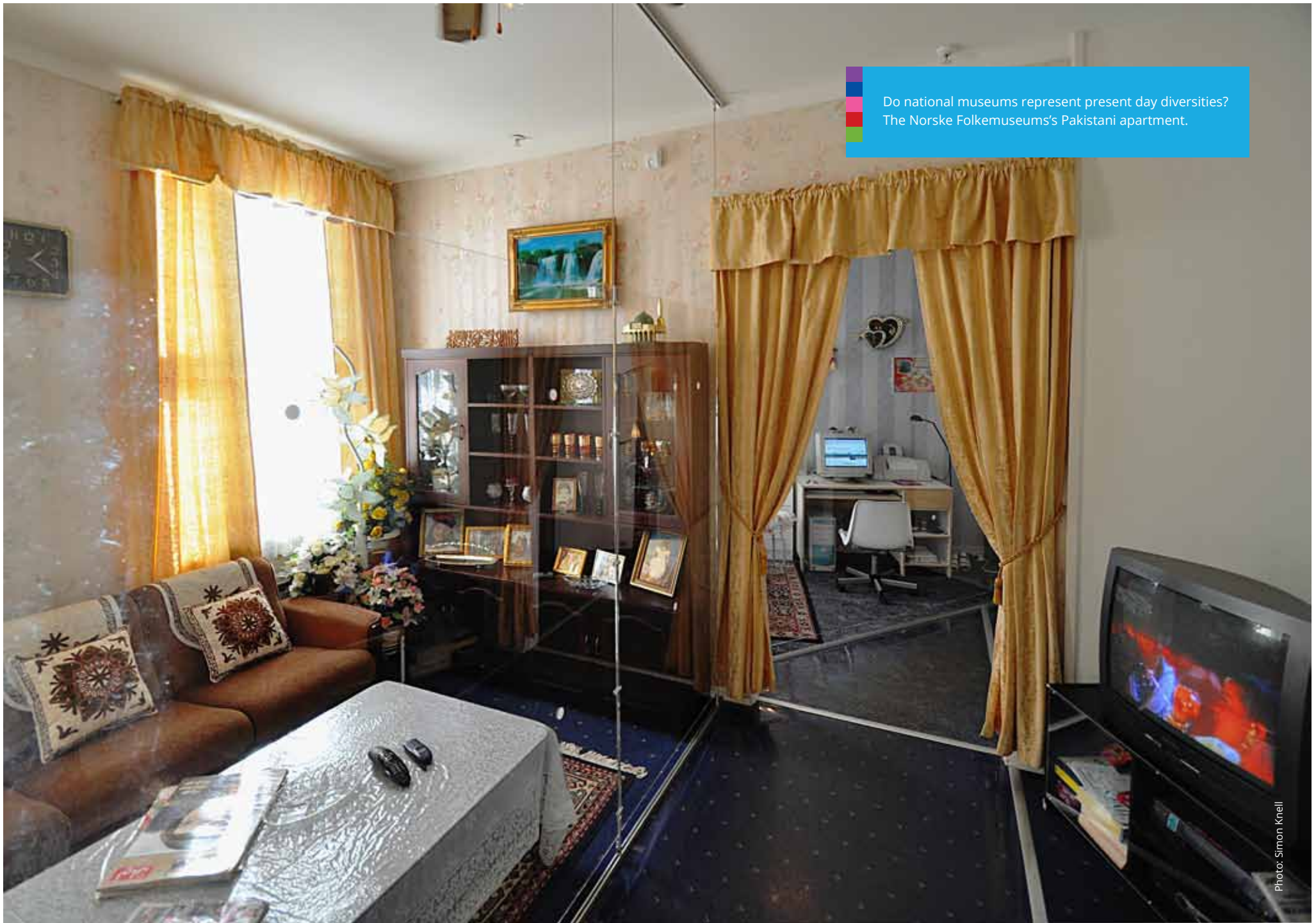
Photo: Simon Knell

Are national museums agents of reconciliation?
Bosnia Hercegovina's History Museum exhibits
the city's multicultural idealism.

Berlin's Neues Museum evidences the rise of a new confident Germany from the ashes of the Second World War.



Photo: Simon Knell



Do national museums represent present day diversities?
The Norske Folkemuseums's Pakistani apartment.



What is a national museum?

For operational reasons, museum professionals understand national museums as defined by funding arrangement, act of parliament or government decree. Such narrow definitions are unhelpful if one aims to understand processes of change and cultural variations in practice. For this reason, Eunamus has taken a more liberal view: by 'national museum' we mean those institutions, collections and displays claiming, articulating and representing dominant national values, myths and realities. National museums are institutionalized negotiations of national values that form a basis for national identity and cultural underpinnings for the operation of the state. National museums cannot, however, simply be viewed as insular productions; they emerged first in Europe because that continent was engaged in a competition between powerful nations and held within its numerous "occupied" territories aspirations for political autonomy.

National museums speak of Europe

National museums infrequently give focus to Europe, and while visitors consider Europe one context for understanding the national story, they believe as well that Europe should not be a significant subject for national museums. However, the intense process of competition and emulation that arose from Europe's peculiarly high population density, large number of nation states, turbulent history, border insecurity and small continental size fostered the development of a shared language of representation. As a result, nations invested their efforts in representing themselves through identical categories of objects – many gathered before the formation of the disciplines that now study them. National museums, their collections of objects and their architecture, formed in Europe as an "agreed" perfor-



National museums share a common language of representation. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

mance, have effectively brought Europe into being as a defined cultural form and most particularly as a material language that permits cultural diplomacy. These common cultural forms permit Europe to be experienced implicitly.

Our studies showed that visitors to national museums understood this language and could make connections between the material on display and the wider European context, despite limited representation of Europe itself. As with other subjects, national museums acted as spaces within which such established notions were refined or reinforced. Some visitors described how they were geographically part of Europe, joined together by culture, society and history, and were able to see these connections in terms of similar laws, social values and rights, art and handicrafts, buildings and material culture. There was a 'way of being' that was reflected in a European mentality, a culture that was recognisably different from 'Others' who did not share those traits (such as people in the USA, China and India). These were sentiments visitors took into national museums, not perceptions developed through interaction with the historical narratives there.

"I think that being European means to pursue some values that were developed, exist, in Europe, the West. Respect for humans, privacy, respect of individual rights, for personal property. I think it is mostly the human rights that make me feel European."

Re-imagining the national museum

National museums were formed to build walls around communities, to act as cultural armaments that defined the self and the other and to establish world views through the lens of the nation. These are not institutional characteristics that immediately suggest a role in greater European cohesion. It is, however, the very fact that these institutions are often proudly nationalistic that makes them particularly useful for acts of reconciliation and social, and cultural, adjustment. As trusted purveyors of national orthodoxies, more than any other institution they have the power to re-imagine, to construct histories that build bridges between communities and nations.



Eunamus researchers at Ireland's National Museum (Decorative Arts and History).

History making in national museums exploits our psychological responses to objects in space. It is not simply about telling stories. Dimitrie Gusti National Village Museum, Bucharest.





National Museum as Medium



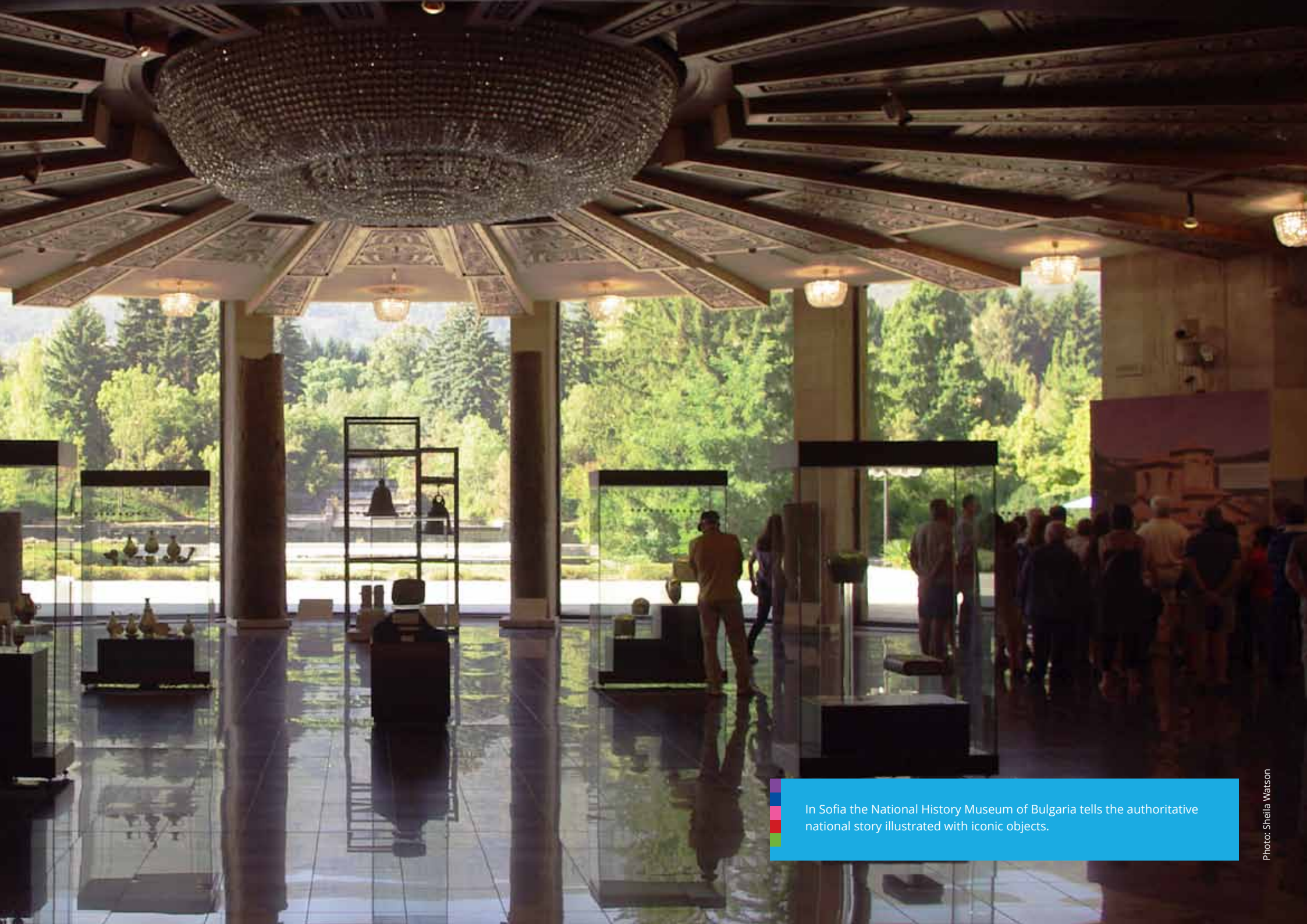
National museums give the nation concrete form

While national museums are established to present the nation, professionals working in them may not consider their institutions as national in a political sense but rather as being a national service. Indeed, the professional desire, largely successful, to speak in a language of neutrality, objectivity and reasonableness gives these museums unique status as trusted authorities on matters of the past. This status has been embedded in society through the long-established performance of one of two oppositional approaches to the past. One performance might be considered essentially conservative, attached to reality and the preservation of the past, with a belief in the possibilities for its reconstruction. The other, more liberal, is based on scholarly inquisitiveness that is open to new historical interpretations.

Authoritative histories

In the first performance, the authority of the institution goes unquestioned. Ideas and objects become entwined and enclosed in a black box; the object then appears to speak for the idea and, in many cases, the nation. Of course, objects never really speak, but the impression forms in the minds of visitors for whom real objects now appear as unmediated evidence. By these processes, and centuries of digestion, the museum is seen as possessing treasures and contributing to knowledge while simultaneously making concrete the cultural attributes of the nation. This is the performance undertaken by most national museums: visitors are expected to bow to the authority of the institution as it possesses the real evidence of the past. Our surveys suggest that most visitors oblige. Indeed, visitors expect and desire this performance.





In Sofia the National History Museum of Bulgaria tells the authoritative national story illustrated with iconic objects.

Empowering histories

The second performance permits the audience greater autonomy in negotiating meaning or allows it some understanding of what lies behind the authority of the museum. Knowledge is here understood to be in development - more ephemeral and fugitive - and the position of authorities is consequently exposed. Here text may be important to overcoming assumptions associated with iconic objects. The significance of this performance lies not in the presentation of things but in the manner of the engagement and particularly in the empowerment of the audience. This, too, can be used to speak of the nation on a number of levels.

Who tells your history?

The same object or the same event
can be shown in different ways.
It depends on who is doing the telling.

There are groups today who use history
to strengthen their identity.
What about the group-identities that existed in prehistory,
can we discover and understand them today?

Different scholars have differing views
as to whether it is possible, or even important,
to attempt to find the origins of different cultures
stretching back to prehistory.

Vilka lever tillsammans här?

Who live together here?

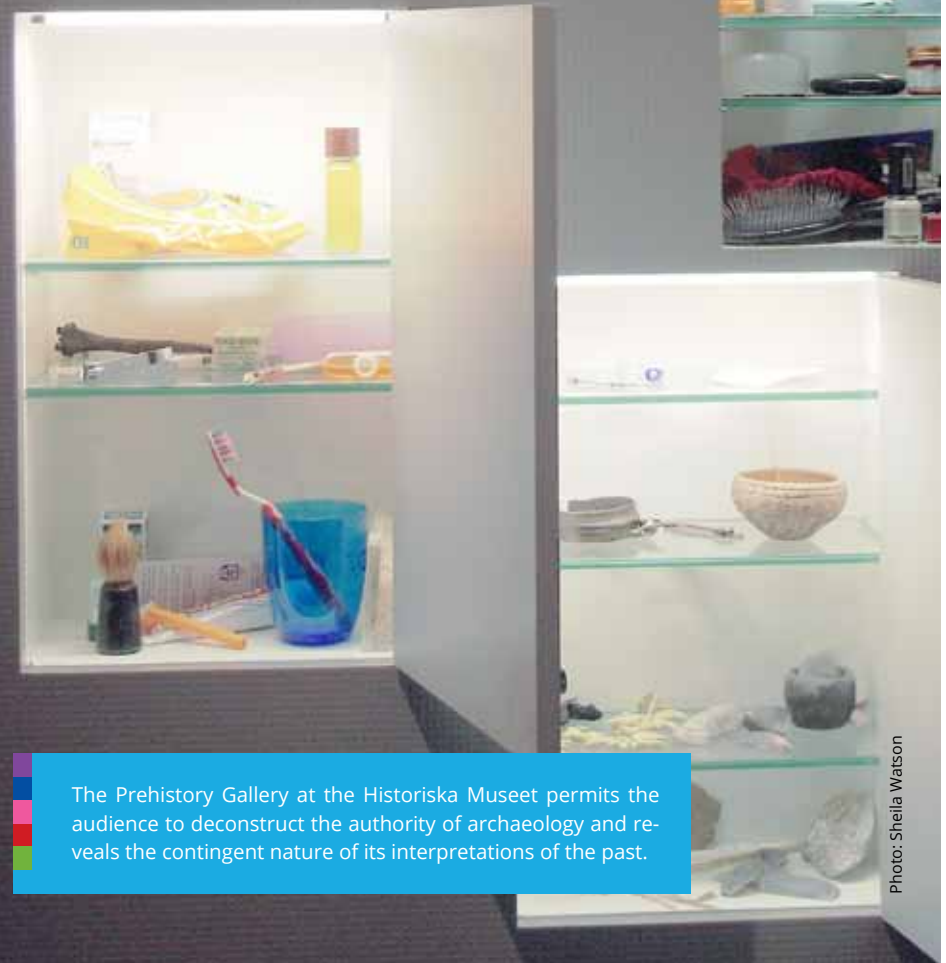


Photo: Sheila Watson



Speglar gravarna levande livet?

• Do the graves reflect life as it was lived?



National museums stage performances for psychological effect

National museums stage a performance that is rather more theatrical in its effects than audiences perceive, though visitors expect the grand spatial experience, the quality of materials and lighting and so on. Professionals deploy or endorse particular visual and sensory effects that contribute to this communicative success. In many parts of Europe the profession avoids, and is generally unaware of, the possible political effects of their actions. However, elsewhere in Europe, particularly in newer institutions, the political goals of the institution are evident to staff, who find moral justification for their actions.

Weight and constancy

National museums are perceived as keepers and guardians of national treasures, unchanging and yet also acting cumulatively in building up materials representative of the nation's wealth and history. National museums project their weight in

grand architectural performances, in purpose-built museums, or the occupation of palaces, courthouses, post offices and other buildings possessing monumental architecture. Museum and architecture work together as part of the performance, imposing a perception on visitors that these institutions are older, richer and more authoritative than they actually are. Iconic objects, constantly on display, add to a sense that the nation is as constant and secure as is the museum.

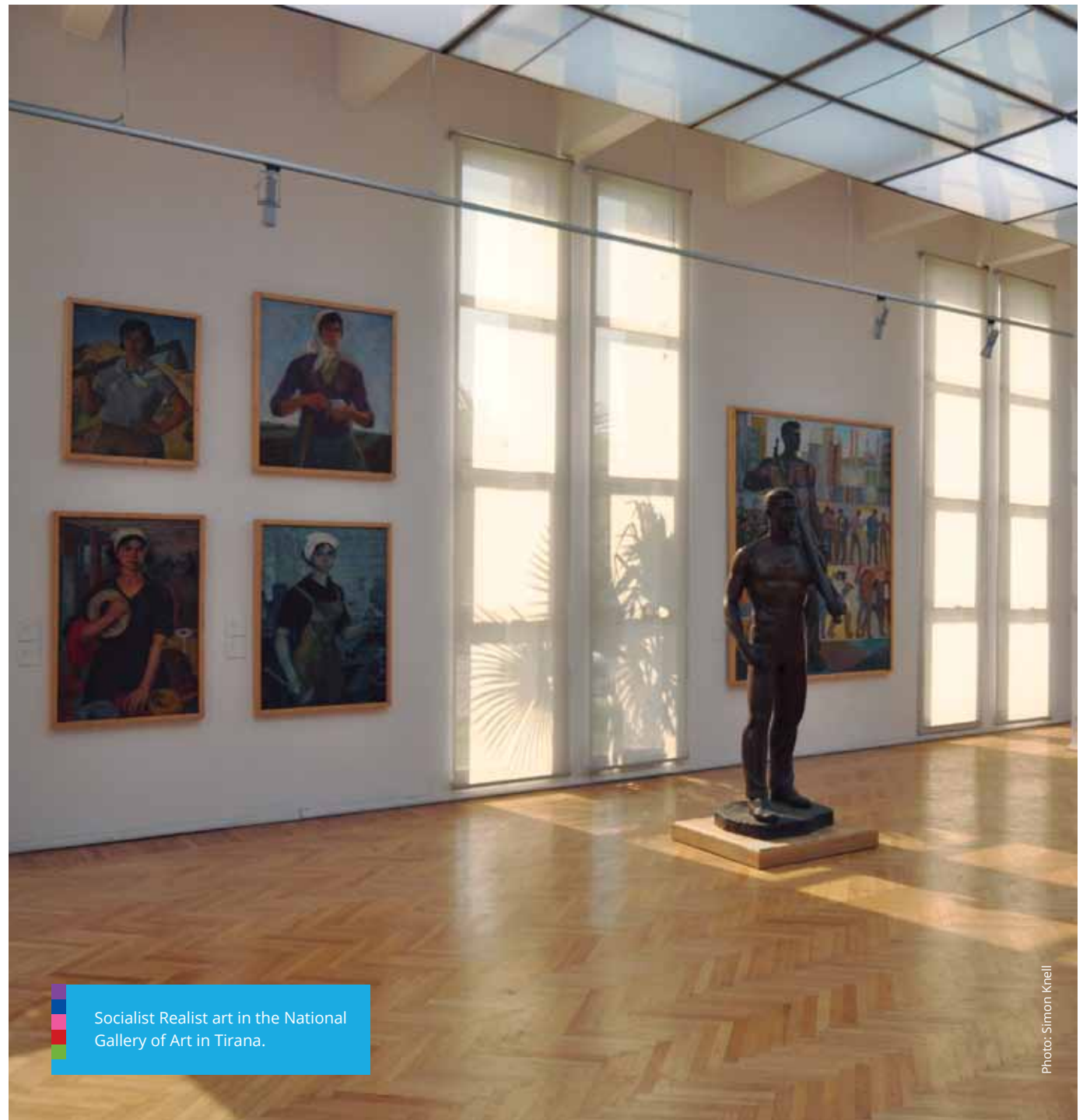
The majority of Europe's national museums were established in a period of imperialism and nationalism, or as a result of political struggle or imposition. The ideologies that brought them into being were often written into the architecture of the buildings themselves, which gave them glorious permanence, permitting these institutions to perpetuate old ideas against which a modernizing culture of representation has had to fight. National stereotypes and nationalistic utopias, perhaps a century old, can continue to have life in these institutions.



The Prado Museum in Madrid claims to be one of the greatest national galleries in the world. It was established in 1819.

Neutralisation and objectivity

The skilled or diplomatic deployment of words and images, and the permitting of silences, give objects academic distancing which suggests that their placement and interpretation are 'disinterested'. Abstraction, a focus on objects rather than people, interpretive minimalism and homogenization further contribute to a sense that objects justify their place as of right and that the histories presented are real, reconstructed and true.



Socialist Realist art in the National Gallery of Art in Tirana.

Photo: Simon Knell



Ancient Egypt as a 'given', normalised in European culture. British Museum, London.

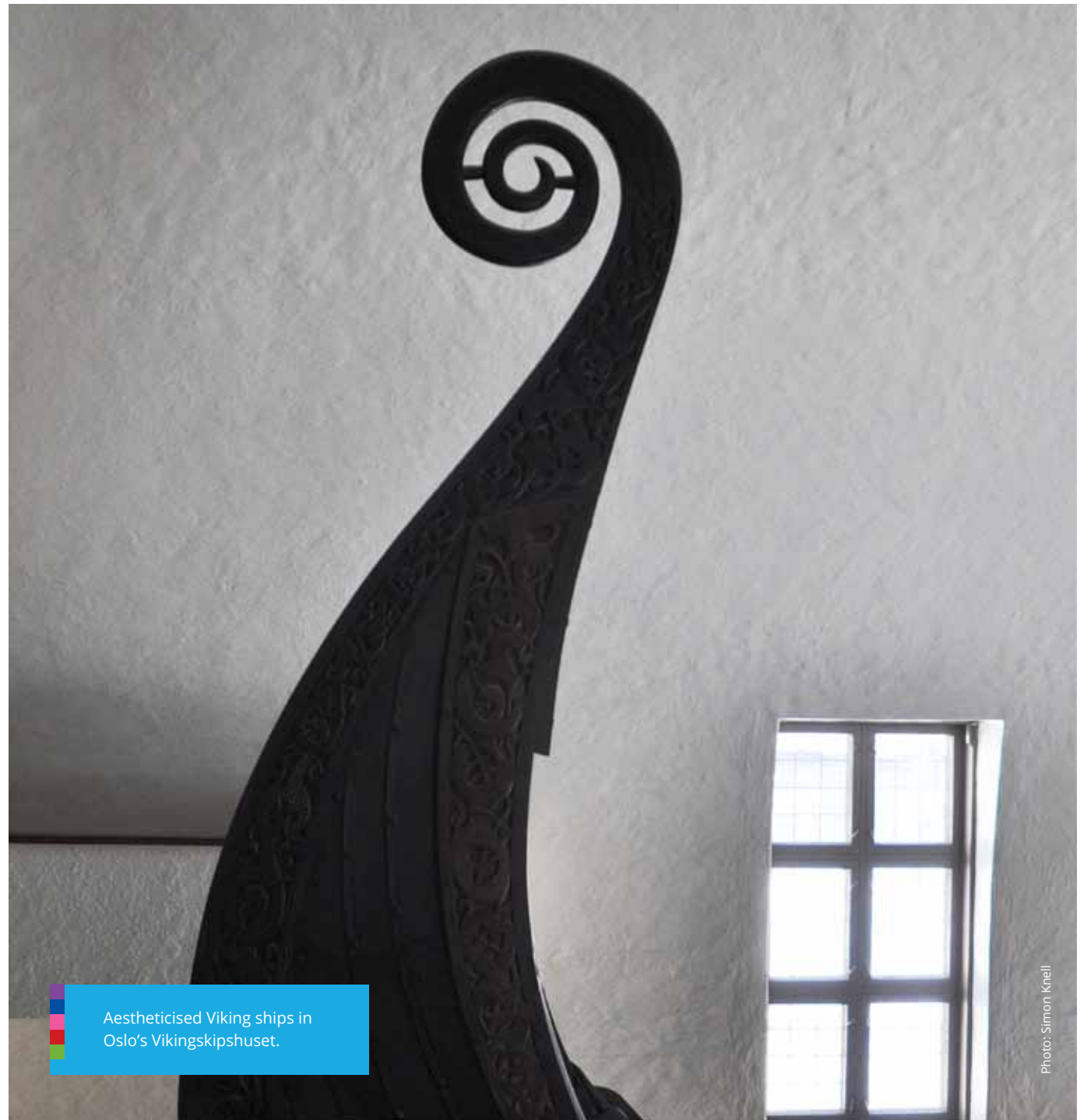
Photo: Simon Knell

Real things as unmediated evidence

Familiar iconic works become normalised as evidence of genius and treasure, as if no human hand has been involved in the acts of elevation. Objects are consumed as real without any notion that the realness of the object might be bounded and partly arise from its staging.

Aestheticisation and allusion

The aestheticisation of objects permits them elevated performances, such as in the presentation of the national story of art. Curatorial skill in the placement and display of objects is fundamental to this act of transporting objects beyond the everyday. Art objects, perhaps incomplete or of unknown provenance, are further elevated by the controlled use of language (“workshop of...”, “school of...”) and a mythologizing focus on artists’ names rather than the works themselves.



Aestheticised Viking ships in Oslo's Vikingskipshuset.

Photo: Simon Knell



Nordiska Museet, Stockholm.

Photo: Simon Knell

Places of Contradiction

In some museums, architecture and interpretation seem almost oppositional. Nordiska Museet in Stockholm possesses a sublime and imposing cathedral-like architecture which now seems at odds with the museum's strongly humanistic interpretation. Today, the balcony-like exhibition galleries are visually separated from the museum's great - and largely empty - central hall.



Photo: Simon Knell

Locating the nation

In younger or re-invented nations, such as in post-communist Romania, national museums of various kinds are active in the construction and external relations of the nation. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant, for example, gives the nation deep morality through the vehicle of the stoical peasant. As in folk museums elsewhere in Europe, it reaches back into a primordial past but also makes connections to the living country. The collections are curated in a rustic aesthetic manner. Across the city, MNAC, the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Romania, activates another national desire; it acts as an instrument of internationalisation. Its role is to recover a sense of international place for a nation that seems to have been dispossessed or disconnected from the West.

National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest.

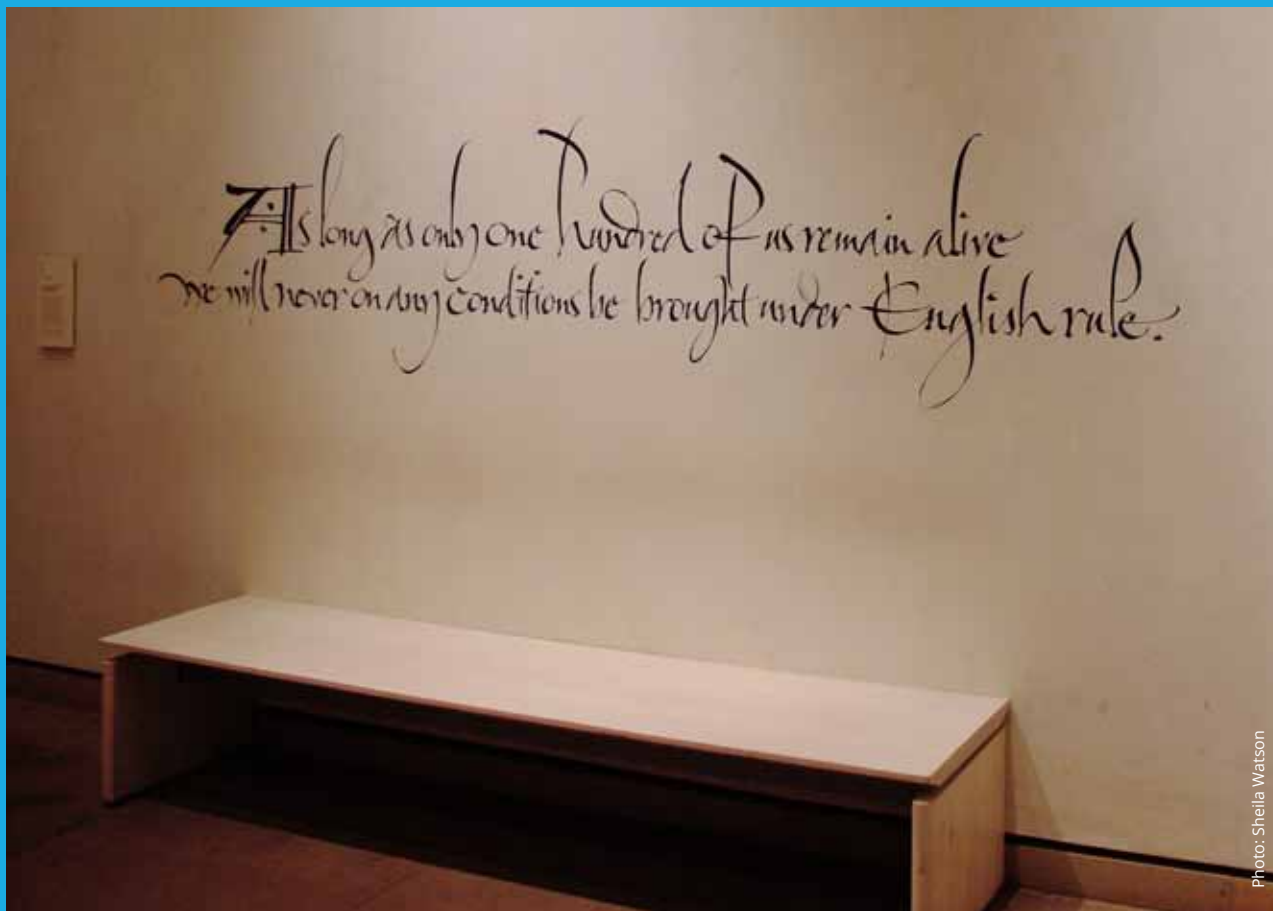


Creativity and defending icons

Objects themselves can impede change. Iconic pieces, objects too large to be put into store, public favourites, and so on, all prevent national museums from presenting purely rational histories.

The National Gallery in Oslo famously found itself a site of protest when it was proposed that the gallery itself move to a new building where the representation of art in Norway would be re-imagined. Protestors saw this as the loss of a national icon which had long acted as the keeper of the Norwegian story of art.

The National Gallery in Oslo.



The changing nation

National museums cannot control the changing political meaning and psychological impact of historical objects; they are, nevertheless, aware of the political resonances of the objects they “objectively” put on display. In the National Museum of Scotland, the Declaration of Arbroath greets every visitor who enters the medieval section of the museum. A declaration of Scottish independence prepared in 1320, it converted the Pope to the Scottish cause of freedom against the English Norman king Edward II. When the then Museum of Scotland first opened in 1998, an independent Scotland seemed unlikely, but in 2012, its meaning is rather different. The Declaration is no longer just a reminder of Scotland’s proud past but a rallying cry for twenty-first century independence from the United Kingdom. The past again has political resonance; it is not neutral, academic or abstract.

‘As long as only one hundred of us remain alive we will never on any condition be brought under English rule’. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.



Elites speaking to elites

Visitor research in museums across Europe reveals that the majority of visitors to national museums are highly educated and regular attendees. This has also been found to be true in other parts of the world. This fact, when first comprehended nearly half a century ago, incentivised an influential critique of these and other cultural institutions. Our results show that surprisingly little has changed. Many national museums have actively pursued greater social relevance and inclusivity, but their successes have proven ephemeral and in need of constant action, policy and funding support, and institutional desire. Critics suggest that the form and culture of engagement to be found in these institutions is resistant to deep change; excluded audiences are permitted to engage but only on institutional terms. The expense of travel to, and of staying in, the capital further selects against less affluent social groups. Additionally, rival attractions and cultural predisposition fostered by education and upbringing resist the development of more diverse audiences. National museums in the more internationally-established capital cities, therefore, perform most effectively as a resource for tourists.

While the messages of the national museums cannot be said to reach the population as whole, there is, nevertheless, widespread support for the national museum as an institution of state. Visitors of all backgrounds surveyed, including those from minority groups, valued national museums for their independent, authoritative and trusted 'voice' on matters of national history and identity. Indeed, few of those surveyed challenged the importance and significance of the national museum: it was seen as absolutely vital that the nation had a national museum to represent "what and who it was" to its people and the outside world. The political and symbolic significance of these institutions was recognised by most, including minority groups who saw in these institutions the potential for recognition and confirmation that they belonged.

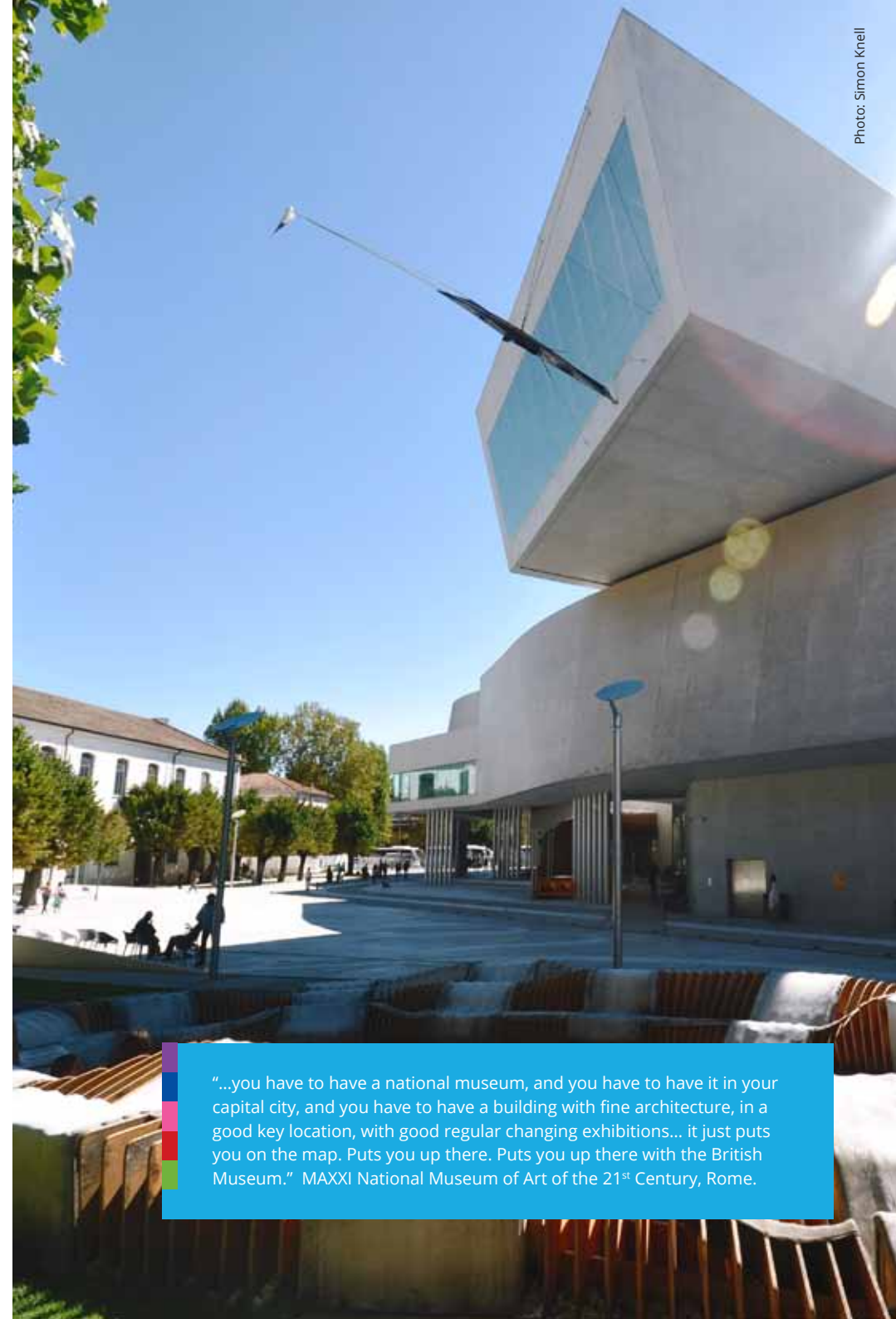


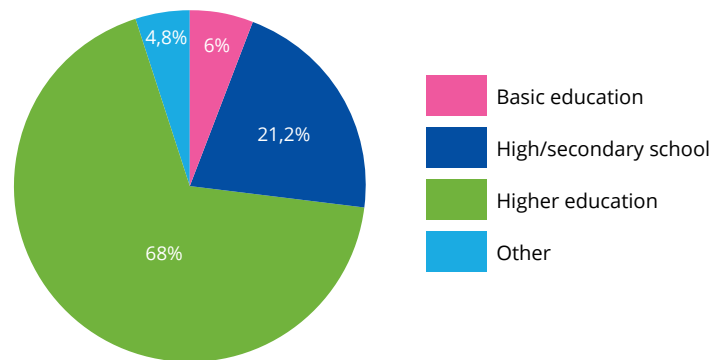
Photo: Simon Knell

"...you have to have a national museum, and you have to have it in your capital city, and you have to have a building with fine architecture, in a good key location, with good regular changing exhibitions... it just puts you on the map. Puts you up there. Puts you up there with the British Museum." MAXXI National Museum of Art of the 21st Century, Rome.



National museums are about history

Most visitors surveyed said they came to national museums for social reasons, for entertainment and education. They did not visit with the intention of developing, understanding or crystallising their national identities. They believed these museums were about history, not identity. Visitors have clear ideas about the purpose of national museums. Most agreed that national museums needed to serve the needs of both national and international visitors but that by far their most important role was to present an “accurate” history of the nation. Slightly more visitors expected this history to privilege great events, heroes and treasures, than expected stories of ordinary people. Both perspectives, however, were expected. A smaller number expected this history to situate the nation in Europe and fewer still, though still a majority, thought the museum should explore the meaning of national citizenship.



Educational status of national museum visitors completing questionnaires.

Missing identities

It is easy for researchers, policy makers and museum professionals to imagine that aspects of the national past are simply being consumed to re-enforce national feelings, but it would be wrong to do so. Visitors to two ethnographic museums in Latvia and Estonia, for example, were far more interested in personal recollections of rural life. Such displays may possess national characteristics but they are also part of a lived or historical normality beyond the rhetoric of nationhood and identity-formation. Given the highly educated nature of the audience for these museums, it is unsurprising that a number of visitors could recognise the complex factors, such as landscape, language and popular culture, which shaped identity but which because of scale, intangibility and contemporaneity were unlikely to be represented in national museums.

“What it means to be Scottish is a very current thing and, you know, I’m not sure the museum does that. I’m not sure if that’s the place of a museum, because the museum is there to tell the history of a nation rather than what it means to be Scottish today, because at different times in Scottish history, what it means to be Scotland meant completely different things... So to actually say what makes you Scottish, I don’t know if you could ever write that in a word or a sentence or an essay.”

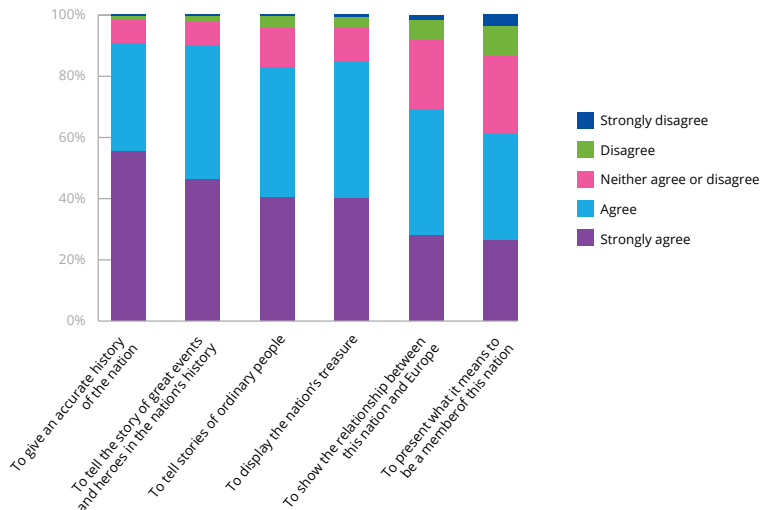
Complex identities

Not all participants were so secure about their national identities. For some it was too complex (Scotland), too emotional (Latvia) or too troubled by present-day concerns (Greece, Ireland). Visitors with hybrid identities or dual citizenship, as a result of family history or migration, negotiated between two or more identities. Some were happy to live with this ambiguity. For others, it was difficult, even painful. Sometimes these feelings combined with those of exclusion, a lack of acceptance, or a recognition of difference by the national majority. A sense of belonging, for those with hybrid identities, appeared to depend on how ‘at home’ that person felt in their respective country.

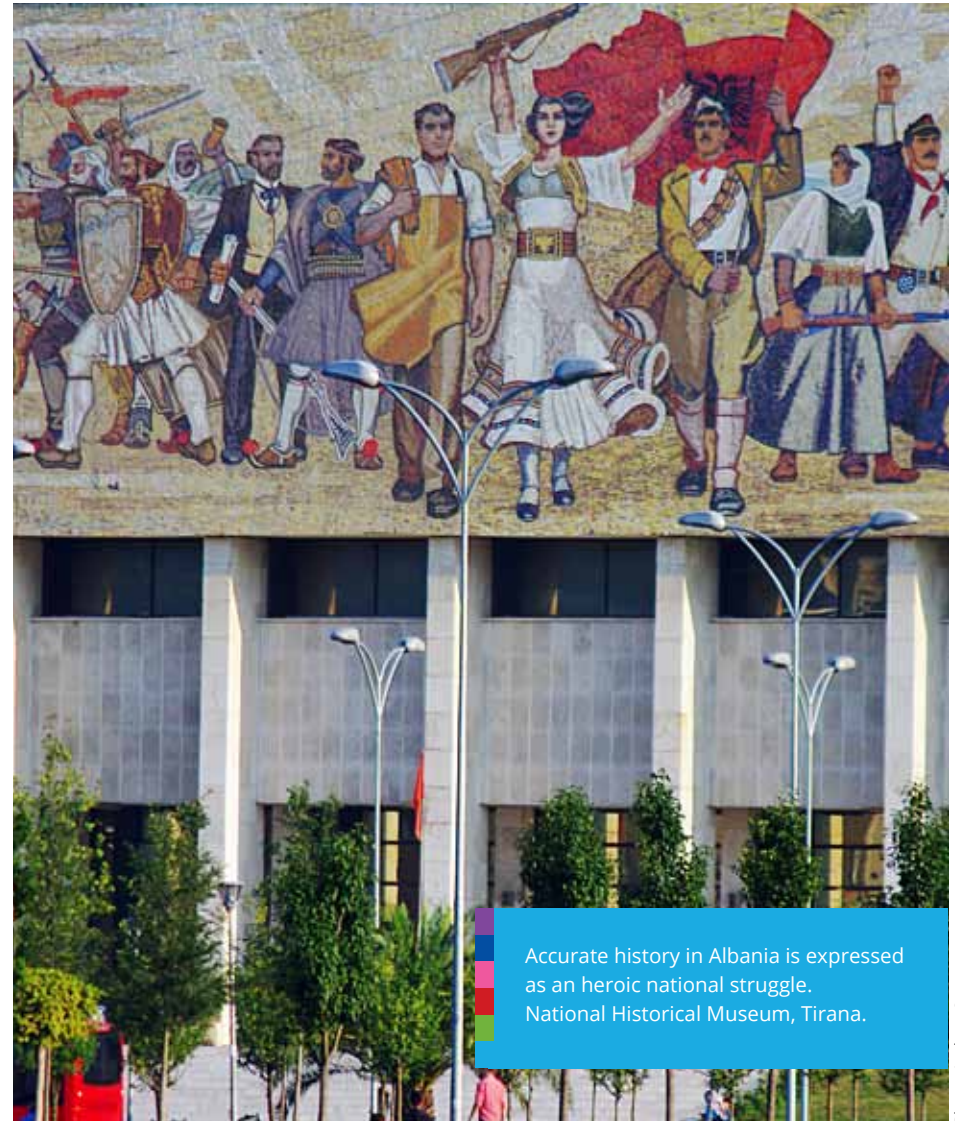
“What can I say, this is really difficult...we haven’t constructed an answer, inside us. And we have to do that now?”

Identity reinforcement

Visitors do, however, enter museums possessing identities, and they use these identities as lenses through which to interpret the displays and develop their own personal narratives. National museum narratives – the experiences of national museum spaces and exhibits – appear to be particularly effective in reinforcing national identities where visitors can locate universal or repeated characteristics in the histories on display. Visitors locate a sense of belonging in the national museum’s authoritative narratives: Greeks in hard fought independence, Estonians and Latvians in the humble and hardworking peasant, Scots in a distinct culture and independent spirit, Irish in centuries of craftsmanship, Germans in a struggle with a difficult past. These are, however, simply examples of the visitor responses, which were not always so positive. The Latvian researchers, for example, were surprised at the negativity some Latvians expressed towards their national character (spitefulness, envy, impudence). And for the German visitors, the self-critical nature of their history and identity-making was itself seen as a positive national characteristic.



Visitors see national museums as places that present “accurate” heroic histories of the nation.



Accurate history in Albania is expressed as an heroic national struggle. National Historical Museum, Tirana.

Photo: Andrew Sawyer



National museums give reassurance in a changing world

National history museums provide foundational narratives and a sense of continuity. Of all the identities a visitor might possess, national identity is the most easily understood. It is a feeling that can be evidenced by a raft of beliefs and experiences. Unlike other identities, it possesses a name. Its existence often goes unchallenged.

"I guess when you ask me that question, the first thing I think is English. That's the only kind of thing that springs to mind when you say 'what's my identity?'"

"Basically I didn't say it [Greek] because it goes without saying... It would be the first thing."



Estonian identity and language are eternally rooted in the land. Estonian National Ethnographic Museum, Tartu.

Photo: Andrew Sawyer



At the Deutsches Historisches Museum, several visitors found it difficult to express what it meant to be German because of history. The concept was inherently complex and deeply affected by the unpalatable legacy of the Second World War. Some seemed to be forging a new national identity, based on the recent past and reunification – events which produced a sense of pride but which were small components of the museum’s long narrative. Others felt the museum failed to recognise the regional identities that composed this national confederation.



Photo: Andrew Sawyer

Buildings like Collins Barracks and the General Post Office (which played a prominent role in the 1916 Uprising), both built by the British, have made important contributions to Irish identity. Yet at the National Museum of Ireland at Collins Barracks, Dublin, national identity was not as important as it appeared to be to Greek visitors, despite both nations sharing present-day economic hardships. The museum's impact was not felt as strongly as in Greece, perhaps because Irish visitors were generally confident about their identities and perhaps did not need the same reassurance. However, the museum in Ireland was also laid out very differently from that in Athens, where a clear ideological project to equate the heroism of the War of Independence with Greek national identity was on display. Nevertheless, survey responses at Collins Barracks rang with the same pent-up frustrations:

And you see all the stuff going on in the world at the moment where people are rebelling and different things. And you forget all that happened here... It's kind of depressing now when you look at it and people just seem to have lost any ability to complain or do anything and just accept the way they're being pushed around. It's been inspiring coming here and seeing that sort of thing and remembering. It gives you a bit of pride I think in Ireland as well in a way.



Photos: Andrew Sawyer

Greece's heroic history: The heart of Konstantinos Kanaris (left) and the spoils of war (right). For Greek visitors, the National History Museum gave a historical context in which to locate national identity, make comparisons and reflect on the present. Visitors venerated certain objects as relics, such as the preserved heart of Kanaris (a prominent figure in the War of Independence and former Prime Minister) shown here. Such objects held an "emotional value" for visitors. There was a strong consensus that this museum created a sense of Greek identity and showed how the Greek nation had succeeded in overcoming its difficulties in the past and could do so again:

It's the period closest to us and I think it's important like other periods are important for Greece. It's just that at this time we almost vanished. And a few people, without money, without anything managed to make a Greek state.

Are national history museums inherently ideological?
The Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineer
and Signal Corps, St Petersburg.





National Museum Histories





National museums adopt two representational strategies

National museums present the past through acts of interpretation and narrative construction. While these practices merge in style and method, they originate in quite separate traditions of history making. The first might be considered museological while the second is primarily historiographic. The first begins with the object and builds upon the museological notion that knowledge can be retrieved from real things. The second believes that the past is real and may in part be recovered and illustrated with the evidence of real things.

Interpretive histories

The fragmented form of the interpretive exhibition may suggest that it is not actually a history. It starts with the object and what we might learn from its observation and study. It relies, in its effectiveness, on the creativity of the curator and other museum workers – the soft architecture of the museum. This interpretive approach does not rely simply upon labelling. Selecting and placing an object in a space, perhaps next to other objects, opens up interpretive possibilities for the audience, most of whom are not steeped in the subject matter or material culture on display. By these means, museum workers can instrumentalise material culture to construct particular performances which imbue the visitor with implicitly understood – rather than rationally articulated – beliefs and values about the things on display; about ancient Egypt, the genius in art, and so on. Aspects of identity that might come into being through these interactions play upon visitor receptivity as well as their rationality. Gallery text may contextualise the contents on display and may indicate stylistic or temporal progression through the galleries, introducing an overarching, though nevertheless subsidiary, element of narrative. Interpretive exhibitions are widely developed in art, natural history, archaeology, and other, museums.



Interpreting the object at the Byzantine Museum in Athens.

Photo: Sheila Watson



Telling a story of maritime progress, from early vessels to modern, in the Deutsche Technikmuseum, Berlin.

Photo: Andrew Sawyer

Narrative histories

The narrative exhibition is fundamentally different. It begins with the narrative, a coherent and developing discourse, and places objects and images to illustrate this narrative. While visitors may be asked to interpret the meaning of displayed items, these are subsidiary diversions from the controlling narrative. These kinds of narrative histories reflect the historian's desire to marshal evidence into a convincing explanatory form. While history does possess subdisciplines (histories of art, design, technology, and so on) with museological pedigree, narrative histories have been introduced into museums from other media, and most importantly the book. Narratives may also be superimposed on interpretive exhibitions using audioguides, first person interpretation, catalogues and so on. Highly developed narrative history exhibitions can be found in the Deutches Historisches Museum in Berlin and the National Museum in Budapest.



National museums deploy three narrative perspectives

National museums write their narratives in the language of internationalism, the nation, and ideology. These may be developed in entirely separate institutions.

Internationalism

The internationalist museum engages in the collection of European or global material culture, perhaps within particular disciplinary bounds (art, numismatics, costume). Internationalism developed out of a desire to be a central or dominant culture in control of knowledge about the world and was often accompanied by colonialism, national expansionism, trade, and economic, political or military muscle. Established as a norm by the British Museum and Louvre, internationalism became a signifier for nations that wished to see themselves as equivalents in cultural development. Internationalism became most established and normalised in the movement and representation of art objects, and particularly paintings, and thus in the establishment of a European history of art. In other fields it has been accompanied by contestation over possession. Although the terms 'encyclopaedic' and 'universal' are widely and loosely applied to these museums they are often misnomers. Neither the Louvre, which has expanded in scope since its original conception, nor the British Museum, which has shrunk in terms of interests over an equivalent period of time, embrace the full panoply of material culture displayed in national museums in their respective countries. Museological interest in the development of historical narratives is thus not a concern with the typological range of material culture but with the desire of a nation to author histories which impose its views on the material culture of other nations.



Paris authoring a world view.
Assyrian sculpture at the
Louvre, Paris.

Photo: Simon Knell



Paris narrates the nation.
French paintings at the Louvre,
Paris.

Photo: Simon Knell

The nation

The nationalistic paradigm, which developed in national museums of various kinds in Germany during the run-up to unification in the nineteenth century, is still very strong today and continues to serve nation-building agendas. These nation-defining and nation-building narratives often produce an essentialised view of the nation; something that can be possessed and thus built upon. For example, the Hungarian national narrative, played out across different national museums and symbolic spaces in Budapest, makes frequent reference to the importance of St Stephen, the monarchy, the Christian church, and the nation's centrality in Europe. Elsewhere, archaeological and folk-life museums are central to forging national origins in a distant or mythological past and making an authentic link between people and place. In Greece, the Neolithic past came to accompany the dominant classical model in a revised story of national origins. These national stories inevitably exploit the internalisation of more widely distributed material culture and social practices in order to give them national meaning. National galleries of the nation's art are particularly noteworthy in this regard. The definition of national traits in art and culture also permit nations to make claims to international significance, as seen in the role of the national galleries in Budapest to an international understanding of the contribution of Hungarians to Fauvism. In many national museums, such as the Swiss National Museum, such narratives have been fundamentally rewritten to deconstruct iconic national images. In others, such the Historiska Museet in Stockholm, the grandeur of the narrative has been replaced by more episodic humanistic elements. Nevertheless, strongly nationalistic museums continue to be proposed in Western Europe and developed in the Balkan nations today, as in other parts of Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Ideology

A third kind of narrative is purely ideological and has been most developed under totalitarian fascist and communist regimes. These present the most extreme examples of the instrumentalisation of the past. In Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic States, among others, the national museum became associated with Soviet indoctrination delivered to citizens through compulsory museum visits which invoked the virtues and truth of Soviet Man. In these countries, state propaganda and indoctrination extended to all aspects of cultural life, frequently making connections to older national institutions which exploited folklore and ethnography to build national origins. Nazi Heimat museums exploited narratives based on the archaeology of the Roman Empire. Besides the possibilities for resurgent nationalism, post-totalitarian national museums also engage in historical critique contrasted with re-invention: the display of violence and atrocities; the comparison of Fascism and Communism; a “nostalgic exoticism” of everyday objects; a mystical concept of the nation; a transnational or pan-European implication. In Romania, a reconnection with the peasant past involved a turn away from written narratives towards a more aesthetic encounter. In Albania, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania the past is variously demonised, historicised or made an object of mockery. It has also been reflected upon with fondness, though not in national museums, as in Berlin’s DDR Museum. It is recognised, of course, that to some degree all museums are ideological.



Reflections on Soviet ideology
at the Political Museum,
St Petersburg.

Photo: Sheila Watson

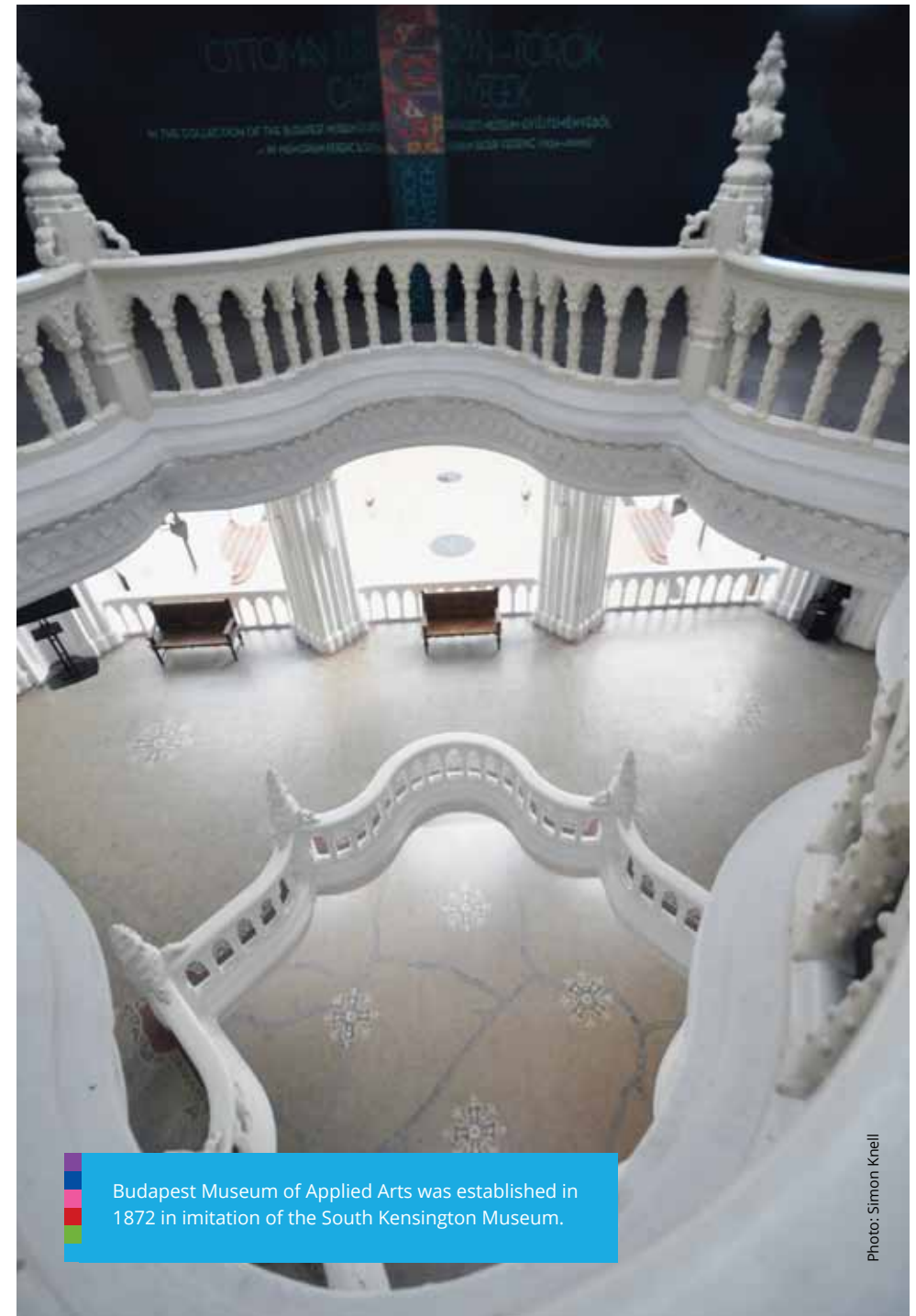


National museum narratives are constrained by the political complexion of the nation

As nations grow in confidence and security so they become increasingly able to engage in non-essentialised reflection on the national makeup. In Europe, at any one point in time, there are examples of nations possessing each of the following political complexions, which then constrain their views of the past and present. In the past, national visionaries have recognised the potential of these national settings in museum developments and in other national movements, men such as Artur Hazelius in Stockholm, Freiherr Hans v. Aufseß in Nuremberg, Luigi Pigorini in Rome, Henry Cole in London.

Representing the nation

Nations seeking to express themselves often present essentialised renditions of the nation, perhaps identifying non-national others and even enemies. They have also expressed themselves in collections of great art and cultural wealth which, of itself, lacks nationalistic sentiment. The key motivation here is lack of national confidence in the face of international competition or, in more politically-charged parts of Europe, the denial of identity by foreign powers in the present or recent past. The strongest mobilisation of history and heritage in present-day Europe occurs in the Balkans in such countries as the FYR of Macedonia, Albania and Croatia. Acts of national definition here serve to build strong defences against political voices that continue to test a nation's borders, its autonomy and national cohesion. A thin line might exist between the histories these museums produce and political propaganda. For many of these museums, the past remains politically active.



Budapest Museum of Applied Arts was established in 1872 in imitation of the South Kensington Museum.

The new National Archaeological Museum, Skopje, is part of the 'antiquisation' of the nation.



Modernising the nation

Nations engaged in the development of national museums of this kind may share attributes with the first; nations never entirely lose a sense of insecurity or a need for defence. The modernising nations in Europe, however, sought to retain a competitive edge. Museums of fine and decorative arts, for example, which begin with the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 and the establishment of the South Kensington Museum (later V&A) led to a movement to establish almost identical institutions in major cities across Europe. These museums were attached to the growth of the manufacturing industry and its effects on perceptions of taste, and, indeed, a call for national tastes to be materialised in manufactures. The present day spread of national museums of contemporary art equally reflects a competition between nations to be “contemporary”. Museums were incorporated into national educational programmes and more generally sought to elevate the nation, not to represent its being but to attach it to the idea of progress, to a changing, forever modern identity. Such a nation can begin to exist in a league of nations, confident in its existence. The past has now become more distanced and abstract; more comfortable.

Naturalising the other

Seen particularly in nations that have adopted multicultural policies or cultural pluralism, national museums begin to take responsibility for representing minor-

ity groups, migrants and once-foreign religious traditions, indicating that these now form part of the national makeup. The nation itself is being modernised while Others are being naturalised. This performance, however, remains rare in Europe and the cause of the biggest complaints by migrants. It was seen in the Norsk Folkemuseum in Oslo where a 2002 apartment of a Pakistani family was recreated.

The post-national national museum

The degree to which a nation can adopt this post-national position in its institutions depends on social liberalism, the possibilities for internationalism and institutional autonomy. The motives for this kind of development are numerous and not all result in post-national narratives. Of all the national museums in Europe, the British Museum best typifies this philosophical transformation. Here the significance of cultural objects has been rebalanced: Greek objects are no longer viewed as personifying artistic perfection, just as African objects no longer exemplify primitivism. The autonomy of the institution, beyond direct government interference, together with a desire to defend against morally powerful national claims for repatriation, have made this post-national repositioning politically and ethically essential. Of course, visitors to this museum might view this mix of power and enlightenment as confirming that this museum is still a British national museum.



National museums produce necessary histories

National museums produce histories that are politically contingent. They are produced to conform to expectation so as not to offend, to respond to a contemporary political context, perhaps to implicitly express the value and values of the institution, to meet perceived public need, and to realise the potential of the objects possessed. This is apparent in the kinds of history produced by different institutions across Europe. Histories of the Second World War – a pan-European historic event – illustrate this well. In many countries in Europe the history of the Second World War is complicated by defeat, the humiliation of occupation, civil war, collaboration with the enemy, side-changing, betrayal, locally-supported genocide, territorial change, mass population loss, and post-war occupation. For Europe, and for most nations, the war itself provides no easy narrative of glory or commemoration.



Photo: Andrew Sawyer

In Russia, the Second World War is remembered as the Great Patriotic War, a name which refers to, as was exploited at the time, the Patriotic War of 1812, when Russian forces expelled the Napoleonic invasion. Unsurprisingly, the Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineer and Signal Corps in St. Petersburg displays a glorified narrative of military victory and heroic generals. With no reflection on the methods used to force men to fight, this is a history quite unlike that found in modern history books on the Eastern Front.



Photo: Andrew Sawyer

In Poland, the phoenix-like revival from the ashes of destroyed cities, a nation and a people, has become part of the national myth. Such patriotic renditions require a rebalancing of the narrative: a diminution of failure and an elevation of escape, recovery, and an indomitable spirit. The (post-Communist) Warsaw Rising Museum shrinks the conflict to a few months of 1944 and focuses on suppression by the Nazis, “betrayal” by the Allies and bitter Soviet oppression. The catastrophic depth of the tragedy has the effect of making the recovery of the nation all the more remarkable and admirable, and by remembering the war dead in the museum, a debt is paid and those sacrificed continue to act, giving strength to the nation.



Photo: Andrew Sawyer

The Athens War Museum adroitly sidesteps the Greek Civil War of the 1940s. Here, after cursory references to key leaders of civil war factions during the Nazi occupation, visitors proceed to an uncomplicated liberation in 1944. While the Nazis have receded into history, the Civil War remains politically alive.



Photo: Sheila Watson

The National Museum of Military History in Sofia dwells on the Bulgarians as victims of allied bombing (as in the photomontage here) before the nation swapped sides in 1944. In the present history the country's actions as one of the Axis powers, for most of the war, is diminished and rather more emphasis put on Bulgaria's subsequent role in the Allied victory.



Photo: Sheila Watson

The displays in the Army Museum in Stockholm present Swedish neutrality as honourable and permit Sweden to remain untainted by war. The audio guides, however, reflect on Swedish collaboration with Nazi Germany, which allowed troops and supplies through its territories during the battle for Norway. Here the juxtaposition of the traditional interpretation and a newer, more critical one allows Swedish citizens to choose which national history they wish to accept: They can decide for themselves whether the Swedish government's collaboration was deeply patriotic or cowardly. This act of writing a necessary history does more than simply permitting the audience the possibility of negotiating history.



National museum silences deny citizenship to minorities



Some museum visitors found their stories missing from the national narrative. Minority groups at the museums studied in Estonia, Greece, Ireland and Scotland spoke of what it means to be omitted, both from the nation's past and its present, to live with the expectation that their lives and experiences were of no value to the wider community in which they lived. Even where national museums appear not to engage in discrimination against particular groups, they possess assumptions concerning the cultural and religious backgrounds of their visitors. There is a widespread and implicit assumption that visitors will be Christian and white. These assumptions contribute to the establishment of historically-misformed national stereotypes and actively produce "Others", confirming a false racial and

ethnic homogeneity of the nation. In doing so they seem to deny full citizenship to minorities and perpetuate notions of the Other. Such positioning has had grave consequences for European nations in the past.

The Roma, for example, are long-established in Greece, having lived there for centuries, but participants in the focus group described daily racism and discrimination. They were proud to be Roma and did not want to have to hide it, although some members of the community were more confident than others.

The experiences of ethnic minority visitors to Collins Barracks, Dublin, revealed the consequences of a nation having difficulty coming to terms with its increasing diversity. Irish museum visitors commented on the contrast between

the friendly, outgoing nature of the Irish and the difficulties of integration experienced by those from outside the community. They sensed discrimination: "I don't think it's the 'hundred thousand welcomes.'" "It's easy to have a reputation as a friendly nation when you don't have to deal with people from other countries or other backgrounds coming in."

For those who wanted to belong, who needed support to develop a sense of national identity in which they could be seen to have a stake, the national museum failed to supply answers. It could not show them how they might fit in or how the majority community had been influenced or shaped by immigration in the past. It was far easier for minorities to locate missing histories in national museums than other visitors. These latter visitors tended to bow to the authority of the museum, or at least understand its choices, rather than criticise its absences. National museums that are willing to admit to the historically distant mobility of tribes, armies and cultural influences, and celebrate the spread of Roman culture, are yet unable to acknowledge the contribution of more recent migrants.





Photo: Simon Knell

In Bulgaria, the national story has created 'others' whose own stories have remained silent for at least 650 years. In the Balkan countries, many national museums present ethnicity and religion as immutable national characteristics, inherited from the past and not to be negotiated in the future. Out of respect of forefathers, the past is kept alive; history is not a field of abstract debate but something active in everyday perceptions.

"If my race had a million bad traits, then I might have rejected it. But this is not the case... I am proud of being Roma and I am not hiding it."

"Why am I different?"

"We're part of history, we migrated here, developed businesses, schools... everything that we do should be part of museums as well."

"It could help by making the Gypsy conscious of his past... The museum could help our work as intermediaries... It can create positive images [not] stereotypes."

"Many Roma were killed by the Nazis. They are not here. Why? Maybe because of ignorance, maybe they do not want to mention it."

"You live in a society that has got a new reality; the new reality of Ireland is that as a multicultural society, it's no longer you and I. We are the people who live here. And the government, the highly placed people, should encourage and tell people that."

"[I am] not friends with Irish people really...even if you live long here, they're still like asking you where are you from."

"You try to integrate ...but... all the time the same [question:] Where are you from?"

"Being European means that it doesn't really matter in what country you are, you still find a bit of common grounds with other people from other countries... one basic one is Christianity [where] theoretical reason and backgrounds are known and shared by everybody. Even if you are not a believer." Medieval Christendom in the V&A in London.



Photo: Simon Knell

In post-colonial France, political rhetoric framed around indigenous rights abroad pushed museums to be sites of cultural dialogue and understanding, effectively contradicting French cultural policy. President Jacques Chirac's speech at the inauguration of the musée du Quai Branly intended to turn the page on the colonial past by finally "granting justice to the infinite diversity of culture" and celebrating the "genius of people of the civilisations of Africa, Oceania and the Americas... societies that are today often marginalised, fragilised and menaced by the unstoppable machine of modernity". Academics and immigrant associations responded by attacking government hypocrisy. Meanwhile, France's illegal immigrants seized the museum space of the new Cité de l'immigration, designed to show how France's population has developed from the influx of migrant communities, as a forum for political contestation – as though they were challenging the museum's official role as an agent of multicultural recognition.



National museum narratives play on empathy and emotion

National museums often produce narratives and philosophies that adopt a moral position and test the ethical beliefs of visitors. They also seek to develop particular responses, such as empathy, a sense of good and evil, and justice. Visitors can perceive these as intellectual arguments, but they are supported by objects, images and narrative choices that exploit the visitor's emotions.

Victims and trauma

A commonly adopted position is that of victim, which immediately establishes, on the one side, the morally good oppressed and abused, and, on the other, the aggressor and exploiter. This moral positioning serves to manipulate sentiment and circumvent the difficulties of violent and contested histories.

Nations with complex war records that are unlikely to promote national harmony and pride tend to focus on the trauma of conflict and ally their suffering to that of other nations and peoples. On the whole French museums ignore the war but recently have begun to focus on memorials that embrace more than the war itself. The Caen Memorial Centre for History and Peace was constructed as a way of exorcising an experience of trauma and grief by extending its geographical and chronological coverage to include the Cold War and international peace movements. The museum dedicated to the First World War of Péronne circumvented

this problem by adopting a European perspective. The French still avoid a national museum narrative of the Second World War, preferring instead the less explicit external memorial which, by its very nature, does not explain or justify the past but merely acknowledges its existence.

Martyrs and enemies

Particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, and especially where the nation retains an active sense of national struggle, national museums have become locations where the bodies (in photographs) of martyrs are evidential. Here enemies are identified, atrocities documented and the moral case is made for the actions of groups seen as formative in the production of the nation or active in defending it from aggressors. Heritage in all its forms - photographs, memorabilia, historical paintings, military hardware, instruments of torture, and so on - is used to give these histories strong political resonance today.

At the Military Museum in Istanbul, the historical narrative adopts a strong position in relation to the occupation of Cyprus and identifies the Armenians as responsible for modern atrocities against Turks. The Struggle Museum in Cyprus uses the visual vocabulary of martyrdom in order to present the suppression of the Greek Christian population of the island by the British, but also the struggle

between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The struggle of independence is also the theme of the history museums in the new nation-states of the Balkans. In the National Museum of the Macedonian Struggle in FYROM the narrative is of assassination and political murder, which identifies those enemies that slowed or prevented the formation of the state. Delivered in the first person by a guide, receipt of the message is not left to chance.

Empathy

Claims for the return of heritage objects may be based on historical and legal arguments but they are at their most powerful when calling upon the audience to respond ethically. Here each side attempts to develop a sense of ethically-based empathy in the audience. In some cases this has relied upon fundamental shifts in the nation's imagining of itself, as has been the case with the recognition of the Sami people and of Sápmi as a nation. As one of Europe's only indigenous cultures, the Sami have actively influenced policy making in Norway, Sweden and Finland, and in the area of restitution have made claims affecting countries and communities in Southern Europe. Acts of giving or returning material became a basis for increased intercultural understanding, institutional dialogue and the reparation of past wrongdoings.

The British Museum, in recent years, has responded to such claims by adopting a deep moral and ethical position in relation to its possessions, claiming these treasures for all mankind. This post-nationalistic attitude, which can be read cynically as an attempt to protect itself from claims of repatriation, gives the museum

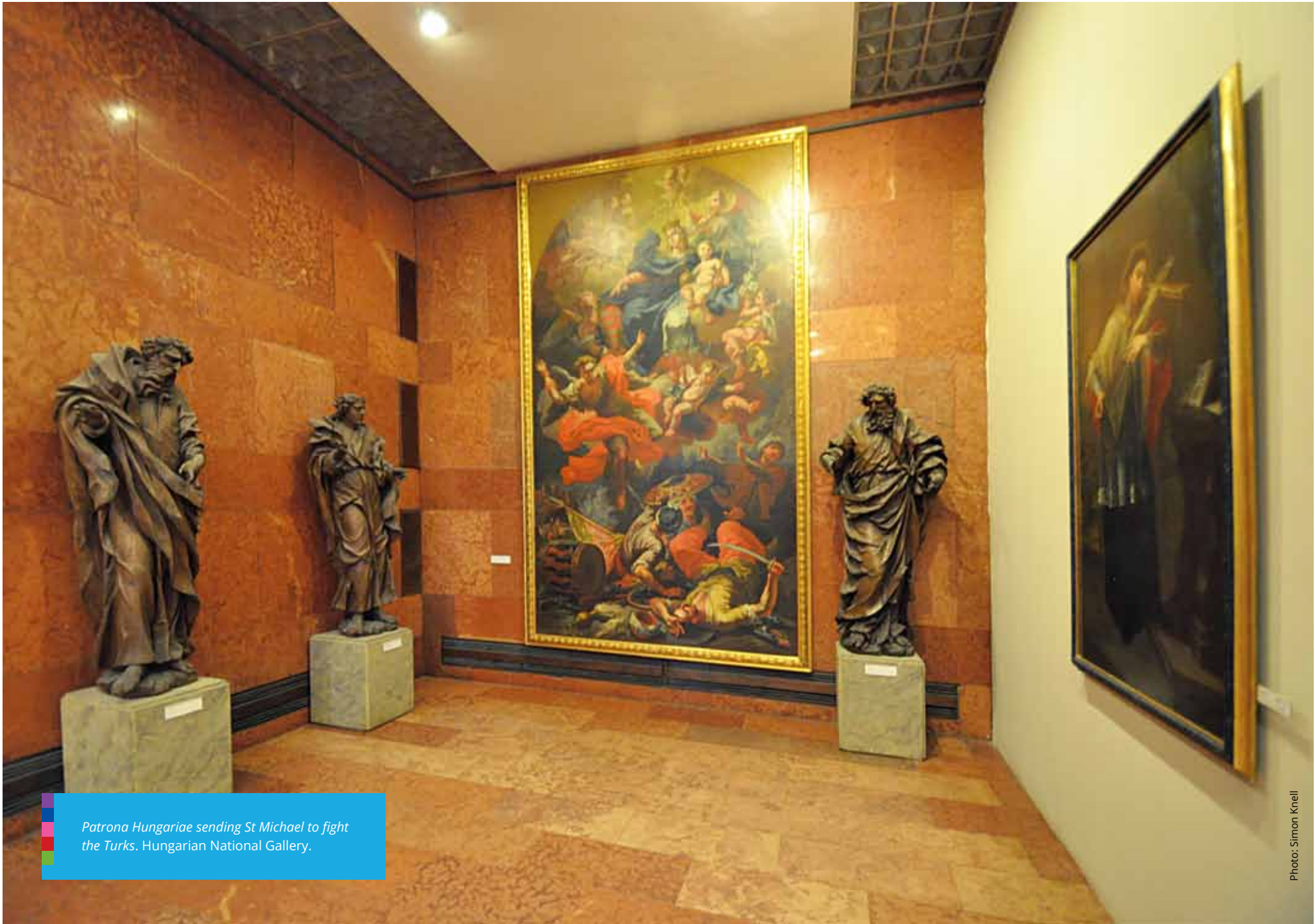
an almost unassailable ethical position, certainly as strong as the voice of national politicians seeking to use the loss of these treasures for their own ends. This attitude combined with the status of the institution permits the British Museum to engage in a kind of cultural diplomacy on behalf of those nations whose treasures it possesses. This has been recognised by individuals who might otherwise support repatriation. This is, however, a re-imagining of this museum – an institution that in part owes its wealth to its economic, diplomatic and, to a lesser extent, military power during the Golden Age of Empire. Perhaps a little perplexingly, the constancy of the British Museum has, particularly in the last two decades, relied upon its ability to change in quite fundamental ways.

National galleries as political spaces

National galleries in Europe have long been spaces in which identification of enemies, martyrs and heroism has been given romantic meaning. Paintings documenting the heroic overthrow of the Ottoman Turks are found in national galleries across Central and Eastern Europe and keep alive not just a historical moment in painting but also of essential difference between the national population and an Other. Ethnic and religious difference still figures strongly in the national conscience and in national museums in these countries, where the centuries-long occupation by the Ottomans is treated as a silence or with indifference. Paintings of Turkish defeats, which represent the historical expulsion of Islam from national territories, have renewed resonance in an era of Islamic radicalisation.



One Greek academic observed, a little playfully, that the Acropolis Museum in Athens, which opened in 2009 to display the Parthenon Marbles held by the British Museum in London, could be considered a site for national trauma and loss, which is more effective because of the absence of the actual marbles.



Patrona Hungariae sending St Michael to fight the Turks. Hungarian National Gallery.



Poland's great historical painter Jan Matejko's *Sobieski's Liberation of Vienna* (1883), perhaps the largest oil painting on display in the Vatican Museums and occupying a prominent position. A depiction of the defeat of the Ottoman Turks, the frame carries, in block capitals, 'Non nobis, non nobis, Domine Sed nomini tuo da gloriam' (Not to us, not to us, O Lord, But to thy name give glory), a phrase particularly associated with the Knights Templar and the Crusades.



Counterpoint from the Military Museum in Istanbul: a Roman (Byzantine) emperor humbled by Turkish armies (detail, panoramic painting). Istanbul Military Museum.



The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle uses waxworks, commissioned large-scale historical paintings and tailored first person narrative of often violent struggle for national existence.



National museums narrate reconciliation

The post-Apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa had a profoundly positive effect on global expectations for reconciliation in conflict zones. In Europe, the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, which led to cross-border collaborations to establish reconciliatory historical narratives centred on key historical moments in the development of the north and south of the island, demonstrates the potential for narratives that are critically balanced.

The capacity of museums to contribute to the handling of conflicts is a vital capability, though one rarely exploited in institutions centred on nation-building. Conflict resolution requires selective or necessary histories of a particular kind, which can offer plural perspectives and narratives whilst simultaneously encouraging cross-community empathy.

The museum response to conflict today can be placed along a continuum, from efforts that add to conflict to efforts that seek to neutralize it to efforts that aim at genuine reconciliation.



Reflecting on the Holocaust
at the Jewish Museum, Berlin.



Photo: Simon Krell

<p>ADDING TO CONFLICT</p>	<p>Museums that represent to mobilize present current hostilities from a partisan perspective, making museums partners in political conflict and increasing tensions as well as damaging professional credibility.</p>
<p>NEUTRALIZING CONFLICT</p>	<p>Museums that naturalize the status quo ignore/obscure contentious issues. This is a dominant mode for national museums seeking to be nonpartisan, but only works within a strong national consensus--diverse audiences can question its deflections.</p>
	<p>Museums that orchestrate diversity acknowledge difference but domesticate it into "united in diversity". This approach is commonly used by exhibitions on national popular culture to represent regional and class differences and, today, new immigrant groups.</p>
<p>PROMOTING RECONCILIATION</p>	<p>Museums that frame community consensus appeal to values of democracy and human rights as universal goals actively promoted in the democratic world. Within a certain culture this is more or less regarded as impossible to deny, and is the approach used in promotions of a "modern" European identity.</p>
	<p>Museums that distance for a new future attempt to put the past behind in order to encompass a future free from it. However, too rapidly creating history as distance silences needed voices and can make the past return in destructive modes.</p>
	<p>Museums that promote working through past atrocities openly address conflict with the goal of understanding historical trajectories, acknowledging questions of guilt, and accepting repercussions for the present to move into the future.</p>



European histories are faceted and hegemonic

If national cohesion requires the performance of particular histories – acceptable histories which a public might sense as meeting their desire for “accurate” histories – then a pan-European historical narrative must be polyvocal and faceted by different national authorial positions. These voices do not simply represent different national positions but also diverse means of representation, particularly the selection of different categories of object, the perspectives of different kinds of historians, and so on. However, large and empowered nations have also had the greatest influence in the establishment of normalised continental histories. This is seen particularly in the development of the Western canon of art.

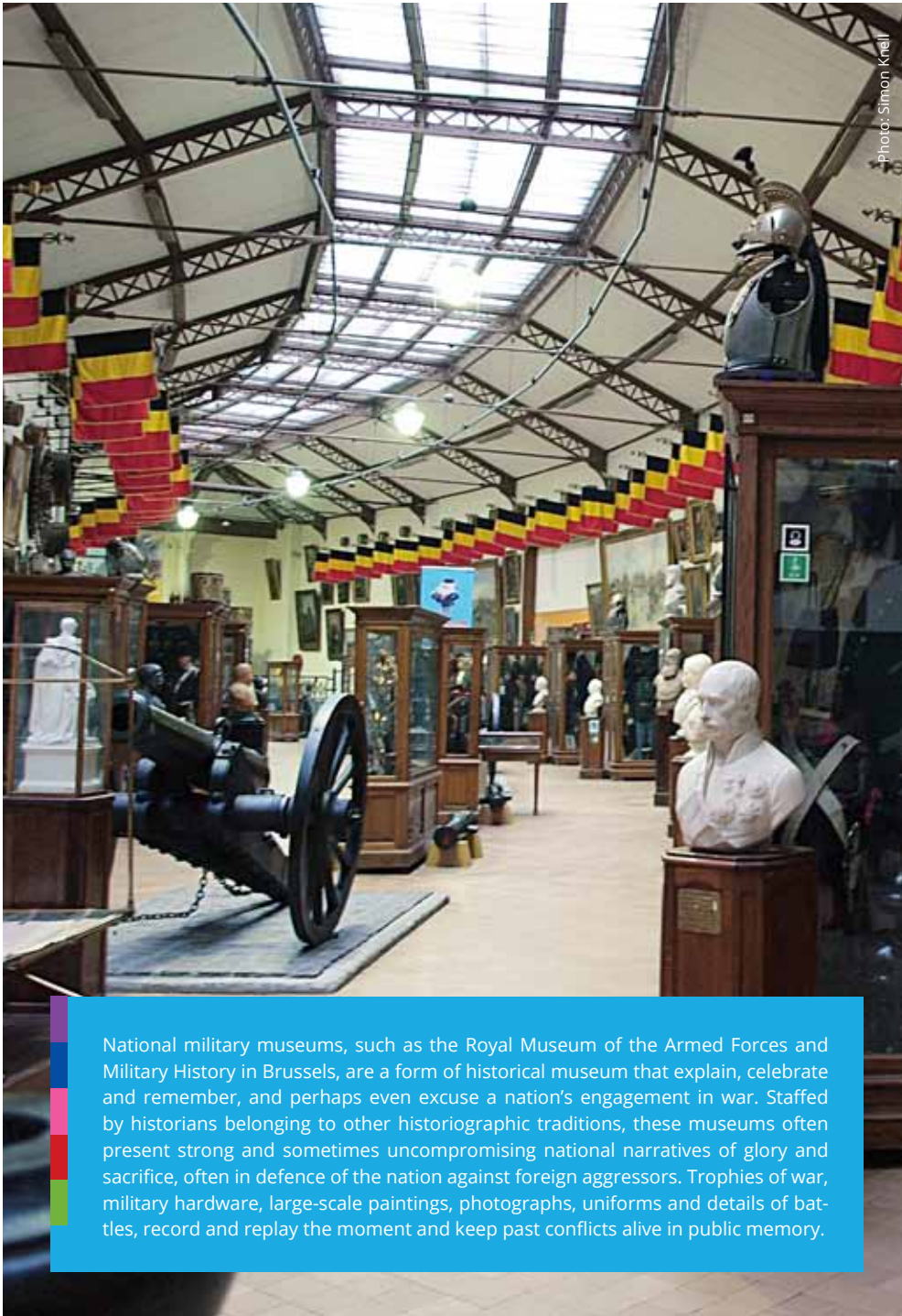
The implication of such histories is that the voices of small nations can be silenced; balanced history then becomes drowned out by the powerful voices. Those silenced are by such means disempowered as “Others”. This can occur if circulating exhibitions, for example, only focus on elite art as a representation of European creativity. Key to the successful portrayal of the European experience of the past in all its aspects (art, politics, conflict, innovation, industry and so on) is polyvocality that recognises, respects, and empowers as authors representatives of Europe’s diversity in all its forms (ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender, working lives, geography, etc.).

A fundamentally different challenge comes with the building of a House of European History in Brussels. Its work plan argues that “the key message of the mu-

seum will be that the European Union is a peaceful, civil and freedom-promoting product sprung from the rejection of nationalism, dictatorship, and war”—canonised goals that predetermine the narrative. The experiences of national museums beyond Europe, which have sought to represent the full ethnic complexity of a country as a means to achieve intercultural understanding, are helpful in understanding the difficulties of such projects. They have sometimes found themselves challenged in terms of spatial allocations and the consequent balancing of topic and authorship. Projects which seek to empower can so easily be read as projects through which to impose control.

A form of representation centred on Western Europe, and traditionally exemplified by the art of a narrow band of key nations and periods, the art of national galleries is, nevertheless, in constant negotiation. Here, the great national galleries of Europe have huge power.

National galleries have a greater capacity than other historical museums in being able to re-invent themselves and their narratives. In 2012, the Norwegian National Gallery redisplayed its collection, constructing a new and comprehensive linear narrative that took full advantage of the collection’s strengths. Working with galleries in Helsinki, Stockholm and Copenhagen, this gallery has also been part of a project to establish Scandinavian art as a subset of the European tradition.



National military museums, such as the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History in Brussels, are a form of historical museum that explain, celebrate and remember, and perhaps even excuse a nation's engagement in war. Staffed by historians belonging to other historiographic traditions, these museums often present strong and sometimes uncompromising national narratives of glory and sacrifice, often in defence of the nation against foreign aggressors. Trophies of war, military hardware, large-scale paintings, photographs, uniforms and details of battles, record and replay the moment and keep past conflicts alive in public memory.



The Hungarian National Gallery and the Museum of Fine Arts continue to promote the Hungarian Fauves and The Eight as being of international significance. It does so through major retrospectives in Budapest but also by travelling these works to those parts of Europe.


 Berlin Wall.



Photo: Simon Knell



Conclusion:
National Museums, History
and a Socially Cohesive Europe



The research conducted by Eunamus over the past three years has yielded a number of implications for considering how historical representation in national museums might contribute to greater European cohesion.

National museums need to be autonomous creative institutions

There is no “one size fits all” solution to the production of histories in national museums that might promote greater social cohesion. Nation-states experience on-going change that test their inherent security – within the past few decades alone Europe has seen the breakup of the Soviet Block, internecine wars, the post-colonial re-imagining of power in society, economic migration and demographic change, the rise of ethnic and religious terrorism, global economic restructuring and crisis. If national museums are to be either partners in change or play a stabilising role then they require institutional resilience and adaptability.

It is also vital that they operate at a distance from government. Direct political interference in the operation of museums, whether in Paris or Berlin or the former totalitarian systems of Eastern Europe, causes the national museum to lose the trust of its audience, which can recognize political instrumentalisation at work.

Nevertheless, national museums are at their most effective when working in harmony with the government agenda, and politicians should expect national museums to play an active role in future society.

The most successful national museums, now and in the past, are distinguished by visionary professional leadership committed to the museum and to creativity: confident, empowered, intellectually youthful and internationally networked. Expertise from other sectors can also contribute to the increased social relevance of national museums.

National museums need to understand and be open about their performances

Only Historiska Museet in Stockholm openly discussed the contingent, culturally produced nature of intellectual authority. Other national museums in that city were, however, open about myth-making and the methodologies used to construct knowledge. As one former director of Moderna Museet recently observed, the Stockholm audience is perhaps more sophisticated. It is perhaps more true

that Swedish museologists and museum-makers have greater respect for the intellect of their audiences. This can be achieved in an accessible manner; this is not about presenting or expecting arcane knowledge but rather about intellectual honesty. Across Europe, nearly all other national museums conceal the constructed aspects of knowledge and the performative aspects of the museum.

The challenge for national museums is, however, to maintain a performance that instils wonder and belief. Again, these aspects of the performance have not been sacrificed in the Swedish museums.

National museums need to overcome national constraints

Visitors overwhelmingly agree that national museums of all kinds, not just nationalistic ones, are key institutions in representing national values. Reflection on the manner in which national confidence and security controls and constrains national narratives may permit new performances of these values. Many national museums, particularly in South Eastern Europe, have struggled to think beyond essentialising and othering narratives and consequently have failed to see how national museums can present the nation as a modern democracy.

National museums need to develop and share tools for establishing bridge-building narratives

The necessary, politically contingent, histories of national museums can incorporate reconciliation and plurality without sacrificing control of the narrative. Internal reflection on the performance of national museums and how the repertoire of tools is deployed to have an effect on audiences will permit greater understanding of the manner in which ‘necessary’ histories are produced. Some national museums have demonstrated a propensity to build bridges in highly conflicted settings. Developments in museums in Ireland provide one useful model that needs to be more widely disseminated.

National museums need to review their impact on perceptions of citizenship

National museums remain essentialising institutions imbued with ideological positions in relation to knowledge, ethnicity, lifestyle and history. The impact on the perceptions of minorities can be profound and contribute to a sense of denial of

citizenship. This act of denial affects not only modern immigrants but also the disabled and other social groups. Issues of gender, sexuality and religion have been tackled by a number of national museums, but again inactive museums can be viewed as establishment institutions actively embedding discrimination in society. Despite often ephemeral attempts by some national museums to engage with excluded audiences (low-income families, ethnic minorities, the disabled), national museums continue to appeal to the educated elite.

It is clear that visitors to national museums draw reassurance from the constancy and integrity of the objects on display. In some respects the static and unchanging aspects of the museum are as vital to its contribution to social stability as is its willingness to be more inclusive. In difficult times, national museums act as repositories of past glories and hold the potential for their re-ignition. National museums need to be wary, however, of static values that implicitly discriminate and disempower.

National museums need to reach new audiences

National museums are restricted by a number of factors in the audiences they can reach. While many are major sites of tourism, which opens up particular opportunities for bridge-building, many others are not. Without action to change this, national museums work in favour of the status quo and implicitly act against change.

Some states, such as UK, have engaged in the decentralisation of national museums through the building of branches. Others engage in internal loans and travelling exhibitions. Pioneering work was undertaken in this area by the Council of Europe after the Second World War. Much of Europe's elite material culture is little travelled, but this can inject confidence in a continent of beleaguered nations. However, greater consideration might be given to the circulation of non-elite culture. The ethnographic approach to society displayed at Nordiska Museet, for example, offers one model for building connections on the basis of human experience.

Regional and local museums hold great potential for international bridge building

The national museum, of course, is not the only space where the nation is developed and performed. The museological repertoire used in building social cohe-

sion might usefully incorporate a wide range of institutions, objects and media (architectures, city spaces, landscapes, regional museums, broadcasters, authors, artists and so on). Regional and local museums contribute as a mosaic to a more nuanced understanding of the nation that interlocks with or provides alternatives to the representations of nationhood found in national museums. Local museums merge into landscapes littered with "objects" that resonate with the past and with identity, and thus they contribute a layer of place-bound community solidarity, identification, and well-being from which national resilience can be built.

With the technological opportunities of glocalism, it is no longer necessary to engage internationally through national institutions, thus community museums permit transnational connections without acts of homogenization. One means of bridging the gap between the mosaic of local museums at different levels of musealisation is offered by Sweden's Samdok, whose network of community museums established a succession of coordinated, rigorous and thoughtful engagements with contemporary society.

National museums can act as forums for contested issues

National museums can become institutionalised arenas for developing new understandings of the nature of the nation and its external relations. Open debate of matters of unity, difference and conflicts, threats and hopes can help the nation negotiate stability and change. This role has not been extensively developed in Europe's national museums. The Deutsches Historisches Museum is an example of a national museum adopting this role; it negotiates a difficult past and the more recent transformation of the modern state. There are opportunities in other parts of Europe, where international and regional tensions and concerns continue to prevail, for national museums to act as forums negotiating new, pluralistic – rather than essentialised – understandings.



Authorship

This research was jointly conceived, directed and performed by partners in Eunamus consortium: Linköping University (Peter Aronsson & Bodil Axelsson), University of Leicester (Simon Knell, Sheila Watson, Andrew Sawyer, Ceri Jones & Jocelyn Dodd), University of the Aegean (Alexandra Bounia), Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne (Dominique Poulot & Felicity Bodenstein), University of Tartu (Kristin Kuutma), University of Oslo (Arne Bugge Amundsen & Lill Eilertsen), University of Bologna (Ilaria Porciani), Central European University (Constantin Iordachi & Peter Apor). With thanks to Gabor Ebli (Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design) and to visiting scholar Elizabeth Weiser (Ohio State University) who joined the project in its final stages. This report was coordinated by Peter Aronsson, who led the Eunamus project, and Simon Knell, who led this work package. Design by Tove Andersson.



Eunamus publications

- Aronsson, P. and Elgenius, G. (eds). (2011) *Building National Museums in Europe 1750–2010. Conference proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Bologna 28-30 April 2011* (EuNaMus Report No. 1), Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press. Available online at http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=064
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Eunamus – the project

European National Museums: Identity politics, the uses of the past and the European citizen

www.eunamus.eu

EuNaMus research project explores the creation and power of the heritage created and presented by European national museums. The focus in our project is on understanding the conditions for using the past in negotiations that recreate citizenship as well as the layers of territorial belonging beyond the actual nation-state.

This project is one of the few humanistic projects supported by the Seventh Framework Programme, run by the European Commission. It has grown out of collaboration between university partners connecting starting with a network of young and senior cultural researchers supported by the Marie Curie programme, and will for three years (2010–2013) proceed by a series of investigations beyond the stereotypical ideas of museums as either a result of outstanding heroic individuals, exponents of a materialization of pure Enlightenment ideas or outright ideological nationalistic constructs disciplining citizens into obedience.

The research is pursued through multi-disciplinary collaboration between eight leading institutions and a series of sub-projects studying institutional path dependencies, the handling of conflicts, modes of representation, cultural policy and visitors' experiences in national museums. Understanding the cultural force of national museums will provide citizens, professionals and policy makers with reflexive tools to better communicate and create an understanding of diversity and community in developing cultural underpinning for democratic governance.

The major results will be available via Open Access, but a series of books will also come out of the efforts. The best way to keep up is to follow www.eunamus.eu.

Areas of research:

Mapping and framing institutions 1750-2010: national museums interacting with nation-making

Uses of the past: narrating the nation and negotiating conflict

The museology of Europe: the language of art, the local nation and the virtual Europe

Museum policies 1990-2010: negotiating political and professional utopia

Museum citizens: audience identities and experiences

National museums, history and a changing Europe

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This is the summary policy report of the Eunamus project. Drawing together findings from all of the other project reports and conferences, it reflects upon the way histories are constructed and deployed in Europe's national museums. It sets out to address two questions: In what ways do national museums, and the histories they display, contribute to social division and cohesion? How might national museums be a force for greater social cohesion in Europe in the future? The report discusses how national museums perform, interpret and narrate meaningful pasts and how these acts of communication are perceived by visitors and citizens. The report concludes with eight policy implications:

- National museums need to be autonomous creative institutions
- National museums need to understand and be open about their performances
- National museums need to overcome national constraints
- National museums need to develop and share tools for establishing bridge-building narratives
- National museums need to review their impact on perceptions of citizenship
- National museums need to reach new audiences
- Regional and local museums hold great potential for international bridge building
- National museums can act as forums for contested issues

The three-year research programme, EuNaMus – European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, is coordinated at Tema Q at Linköping University (www.eunamus.eu). EuNaMus explores the creation and power of the heritage created and presented at European national museums to the world, Europe and its states, as an unsurpassable institution in contemporary society. National museums are defined and explored as processes of institutionalized negotiations where material collections and displays make claims and are recognized as articulating and representing national values and realities. Questions asked in the project are why, by whom, when, with what material, with what result and future possibilities are these museums shaped.