



National Museums in Slovakia: Nation Building Strategies in a Frequently Changing Environment

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Summary

The concept of Slovak nation building in the 19th and 20th centuries was influenced by various loyalties, pragmatic political decisions and changing ideologies. The crucial stages in the development of Slovak museums are closely connected with frequent changes affecting the Slovak territory and its inhabitants. Four such key periods can be defined:

1. The Hungarian chapter (till 1918) - In 1895, resulting the activities of Slovak political leaders, the Museum of the Slovak Museum Society was established. It had a clear political and nation-building pattern opposing the official idea of state and national unity of the Hungarian Kingdom.
2. First Czechoslovak republic (1918 - 1938) - Rivalry between two nation-building strategies. One promoted the existence of a Slovak nation; the other one was based on the idea of a Czechoslovak nation.
3. Communist Czechoslovakia (1948-1989) - Museums were state controlled ideological institutions used for propaganda and indoctrination of the population. Historical exhibitions about national history had to legitimize the communist rule.
4. Post-communist Slovak republic since 1993 - After the fall of communism, museums ceased to be strictly ideological or political institutions. They were adapting to the new conditions and searching for the new themes.

It is usual for multi-ethnic and multi-religious regions like Central Europe to provide competing identities. The Slovak case of nation making is characterized by ambiguity and ambivalence of national identity concepts. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Slovaks defined themselves in the process of confrontation with two national groups: Hungarian and Czech. This confrontation fundamentally influenced the development of Slovak museums aspiring for national status. Until 1938, two states Slovakia was a part of (the Kingdom of Hungary and the first Czechoslovak republic) did not officially acknowledge the existence of a separate Slovak nation. This caused lasting antagonism between nation-building strategies of Slovak museums and the official state ideas enforced by the ruling political elites.

Since 1948, the ideologists of the ruling Communist party considered the national questions only a tool for strengthening the official Marxist-Leninist ideology. Communists considered themselves the heirs of progressive national historical traditions, which should justify their rule. Slovak museums had to document the struggle for national independence but at the same time they had to promote the official state policy of Czechoslovak socialist patriotism. On the other

side, this era brought massive growth, systematization and professionalization of the museum network and their exhibitions.

The fall of communism brought fundamental changes for the Slovak museums. Democratization brought considerable de-ideologization and de-politization of museums. New economic and political realities offered more flexibility, but also new (mainly financial) challenges. After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Slovak National Museum became the central museum of the newly created state in need of a state-building narrative. However, Slovak museums demonstrated skepticism regarding the appeals for a more patriotic and primordial presentation of Slovak history. The Slovak National Museum laid aside the controversies accompanying the nationalization of Slovak narrative. At the same time, its representatives focused on uncomfortable themes of modern Slovak history. These topics, together with the reinterpretation of the past regarding the common Central European history and European project were reserved for the central museums. These were, in the first place, the Slovak National Museum and the Museum of Slovak National Uprising.

Summary table, Slovakia

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
Slovak National Museum +	1928	1895	Civil society till 1948, Parliament till today	Private association till 1948, State till today	Ethnology, Archeology, History, Culture, Natural Sciences	Slovak history and culture in European tradition	Slovak territory from prehistory till today	Functionalist style Central Martin
Slovak Homeland Museum	1930 (one institution 1961)	1924						Neoclassicist style Central Bratislava (central building of the SNM)
Museum of the Slovak National Uprising	1955	1953	Parliament	State	History	Anti-Fascist struggle in Slovak territory	Slovak territory, WWII, anti-fascist struggle (1938-1945) in the European context	Brutalist architecture Central Banská Bystrica

Introduction

The institutional and ideological development of Slovak museums aspiring for national status is closely connected with the nation-making process. The current Slovak National Museum is a relatively young institution created in 1961 by merging two competing institutions. One of them was established at the end of 19th century during the existence of the Hungarian Kingdom. The second one was opened in 1924, shortly after creation of the Czechoslovak republic.

The region of Central Europe is characterized by a complex, fragile and constantly changing intersection of state, ethnic, national, linguistic, religious cultural borders and contexts, producing various competing collective identities. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the concept of a Slovak national identity was defined primarily in confrontation with Czech and Hungarian visions. Its development was influenced by various loyalties, pragmatic political decisions and ideologies. Museums reflected the changing nation-building strategies or official state policies and transmitted them to the population.

The crucial periods in the development of Slovak museums were overlapping with the changes of boundaries and ideologies affecting Slovak territory and its inhabitants. The very concept of a Slovak national museum was largely influenced by the fact that two states Slovakia was part of until 1938 (the Hungarian Kingdom and the first Czechoslovak republic) did not officially acknowledge the existence of a separate Slovak nation. As a result, the nation-building purpose of the institution evolving into the Slovak National Museum was, for a long period, in opposition to the actual official state idea. This had, of course, significantly affected the interactions with the state administration of both the Hungarian Kingdom and the first Czechoslovak republic. However, until 1948, Slovaks museums were private societies and the political elites did little to regulate and/or support their activities. This initial development can be divided into two periods:

1. Slovakia as part of the Hungarian Kingdom (till 1918) - In 1895, as a result of the activities of Slovak political leaders, the Museum of the Slovak Museum Society was opened with a political and nation-building plan opposing the official idea of state and national unity of the Hungarian Kingdom.
2. First Czechoslovak republic (1918 - 1938) - Museum of the Slovak Museum Society adopted the name Slovak National Museum. Because of its opposition towards the official state idea of the Czechoslovak nation, the ruling political elite indirectly supported the creation of a rival institution. This caused a long time tension between two museums, aspiring for the position of the central Slovak museum.

The war-related changes between the years 1939-1945 regarding the state's form, its borders and the regime had only minor impact on the framework of Slovak museums. On the contrary, the communist takeover in 1948 is probably the most significant turning point for the functioning and management of the museums. The era of socialist dictatorship was the third, main period in their development.

3. Communist Czechoslovakia (1948-1989) - During the communist regime, museums became state owned and controlled institutions used for propaganda and indoctrination. Historical exhibitions about national history, legitimizing the communist rule became

essential. The post-war republic was officially a state of two nations, Czechs and Slovaks. However, during the first 20 years of its rule, the Communist party strongly objected all forms of Slovak nationalism. Despite the political and ideological limitations, in this era a massive growth, systematization and professionalization of the museum network occurred. In 1961, a single Slovak National Museum was established by merging two competing institutions. The Slovak National Gallery was created in 1948. In 1954, the Museum of Slovak National Uprising (SNU) was opened in order to provide the official interpretation of a historical event marking the beginning of the socialist era of the Slovak nation. The last relevant period is marked by the fall of the communist regime in 1989 and dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993.

The Slovak National Museum became not only the central national, but the central state museum as well.

4. Post-communist Slovak republic (since 1993) - After the fall of communism, museums ceased to be strictly ideological and political institutions. However, the relatively strong supervising state control over the central museums persisted. They had avoided deeper engagement in the controversies regarding state and nation-making process. Representatives of the national museum stayed skeptical towards appeals for a more patriotic and primordial presentation of Slovak history. Most of the museums concentrated on preparing new exhibitions, which would attract most visitors. Uncomfortable themes of the Slovak past were reserved for the central museums. These were, in the first place, the Slovak National Museum and the Museum of Slovak National Uprising. The Museum of SNU remained a political institution, a guardian of the correct interpretation of the key component of the national narrative. After 1989, the museum started to also pay close attention to the Holocaust of Slovak Jews.

National museums and cultural policy in Slovakia

Kingdom of Hungary

In the 19th century, the dominant state of Central Europe was the Habsburg Empire. It was a heterogeneous formation of territories, with considerable ethnic, religious, economic and social differences. The main unifying force was the loyalty to the ruling dynasty. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Monarchy consisted of two main parts: the Kingdom of Hungary and Austrian hereditary lands together with the Bohemian Kingdom. In the process of national revival, political, territorial and cultural demands of particular linguistic and/or ethnic communities started to appear. This inevitably led to nationalist tensions. In 1867, with the signing of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the state was changed to a loose confederacy of the Austrian empire and the Kingdom of Hungary. The Habsburg Empire existed for the next 51 years until the results of World War I caused its dissolution into smaller, supposedly more stable and homogenous, national states.

In the 19th century, the territory of Slovakia was an inseparable part of the Kingdom of Hungary, and it had been so for 900 years. Until the 18th century, the Kingdom was considered a multi-ethnic state. However, at the beginning of the 19th century, the political elite of the state planned to transform the feudal segmented society into a homogenous, mono-linguistic

Hungarian/Magyar political nation. (I'm using the term Magyar as a synonym for ethnic Hungarian nation.) However, this idea was opposed by the elite representing the other language communities in the Kingdom. (Notably Rumanian, Slovak, Serb, Ruthenian, Croatian and to certain extent German as well.) According to the Hungarian national liberals, the Hungarian political nation consisted of individual citizens and not nationalities. This seemingly civic concept gradually acquired a clear Magyar nationalist dimension. In the official perception of the Hungarian political nation since the late 1870s, loyalty to the non-Magyar nationality became incompatible with the loyalty to the Hungarian state idea (Vörös 2009: 84).

The opening of the first public museums in the territory of Slovakia during the second half of the 19th century was connected with the nation-building strategy of the Kingdom of Hungary. According to historian Ľubomír Lipták, in the 1860s there was a positive political and ideological constellation for such endeavors:

Historiography in Kingdom of Hungary experienced a period of enormous expansion. During the second half of the 19th century, it went through the fastest development among all the social sciences, because it had closest ties with politics and had the strongest capacity for mobilization of the population. (Lipták 1987a: 274)

New museums should have been a vital part of this mobilization:

National museums made a substantial contribution towards the process of gaining awareness of cultural differences between neighboring nations and ethnic groups. This understanding of the unique nature of particular ethnic groups played a decisive role in the formation of modern nations. (Vlachovič 1979: 194)

Museums in general, and especially the national ones, should have contributed to the official state nation-building politics. In behalf of this plan, the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture asked the state organizations and institutions for help in establishing museums promoting the Hungarian state idea (Mruškovič, Darulová, Kollár 2005: 44). This concept openly advocated the existence of only one Hungarian political nation, which started to be associated with the Magyar nation.

The official historiography had a prominent role in this process. Historical arguments had to justify and explain the dominance and superiority of the Magyar culture and civilization over the culture of other ethnic groups in the Kingdom of Hungary. The Hungarian master narrative became nationalized: "Only that which was authentically Magyar was important, interesting and valuable." (Lipták 1987a: 274). The rest should have been marginalized or adapted in order to maintain the Hungarian state idea. This was a task for museums located in the non-Magyar territories. Appeal of the ministry caused a growing interest in the regional museums. This resulted in these institutions becoming included in the political and national struggles in the Kingdom of Hungary.

The new situation after 1867 can be demonstrated in the cases of two museums. The first one was the museum of the organization Matica Slovenská (Slovak Mother) established in 1863. At that time, it was the central Slovak national, cultural, scientific and educational institution.¹ Part of this institution served as a Slovak national museum. Slovak representatives were aware how a systematic collecting and evaluating of cultural and historical sources could determine the national consciousness of the population (Vlachovič 1979: 195). That is why they actively

supported the opening of a Slovak museum. However in 1875 when the Hungarian authorities directed their attention towards the organizations undermining the official state idea, Matica Slovenská was closed. The official reason was the accusation of Panslav propaganda endangering the state integrity. The real motive for its closing was the fact referring to the existence of a nation other than Magyar was in direct contrast with the Hungarian state idea.

On the other hand, in 1872, the Museum Association of Upper Hungary established the Upper Hungarian² Museum in Košice (today's eastern Slovakia). Besides its obvious educational and scientific value, the exhibition of the museum accentuated the Magyar national ideology. Because of this, the museum gained financial support from the state and, in 1909, it became the first state-owned museum on the Slovak territory (Mruškovič, Darulová, Kollár 2005: 48).

In order to be successful, the political elite supporting the official politics of Hungarian/Magyar nationalism had to suppress the rival nationalist movements. This was done in two steps: by destroying the institutional bases capable of producing the alternative national narratives and through control of the education system. In the Slovak case, together with closing of Matica Slovenská, the Slovak gymnasia (high schools) were suppressed. By the beginning of the 20th century, the same also happened to elementary schools with Slovak as a language of education (Kováč 2011: 131).

However, the two aforementioned museums represent the most extreme examples. In the activities of the majority of small local museums, the national ideology usually only played a marginal role. Their founders were usually enthusiasts and amateurs interested in their local history, art or flora and fauna. Promotion of the state and national unity of the Kingdom of Hungary was not the first concern of people struggling to maintain their museums. Active promotion of the state idea was often the result of rational calculation. People providing care for museums expected subventions from the state authorities. Museums had to prove their usefulness and loyalty to earn support. In general, there were two main tendencies influencing the activities of regional museums:

1. Ideological aspect embodied in the promoting the state and national unity of Hungarian Kingdom.
2. Scientific effort aimed at the preservation of natural, historical and cultural relics, documenting the development of the region and contributing to the education of the local population.

(Mruškovič, Darulová, Kollár 2005: 50)

In the last decade of the 19th century, the first inclination was getting stronger as state interest in the functioning of the museum was growing. It was because in this decade the Kingdom of Hungary officially celebrated the 1000 years of Magyar arrival to Pannonia and the political elites wanted to demonstrate the Magyar character of the state. In order to classify which institutions should get support, the Ministry of Culture and Education created a specialized agency in 1897, The Central Country Inspectorate of Museums and Libraries. Shortly before the beginning of World War I, this organization was supervising 19 regional museums in the Slovak territory. Inspectors working for this agency were professionals experienced with museum work. Their task was to deliver the newest information and practices from the central National Museum in Budapest to the regional museums. These people made periodical visitations and helped with the

expositions and catalogues. Museum employees also attended specific training, usually in the National museum. The activities of the Central Country Inspectorate of Museums and Libraries significantly contributed to the development and professionalization of museums.

Although cooperation with the Inspectorate was not compulsory, it was particularly beneficial for the survival of local and regional museums and not only because of the (rather humble) financial subventions. It was perceived as a demonstration of agreement with the official state ideology and acceptance of state control. State authorities evaluated museums according to this aspect and the refusal to cooperate with museum inspectors caused distrust of the central and local elites. This often resulted in various administrative obstructions. On the other hand, museum inspectors were renowned scientists, able to recognize the qualities of museums, irrespective of their ideological background. In this aspect, the Central Country Inspectorate of Museums and Libraries and the Ministry of Culture and Education acted with more pragmatism than the local administration.

In the Slovak case, the central political authorities enabled the establishing of the Slovak Museum Society in 1895. It was the only “Slovak national” scientific and education organization till 1918. The museum operated by this association had better relations with the central ministry than with the local administration. Although the inspectors expressed dissatisfaction with the Slovak national revival purpose of the museum, they also appreciated its ethnographical collections and educational activities (Lipták 1987a: 275). In 1901, the Ministry of Education and Culture approved donation of the collections and library of the former Museum of Matica Slovenská to the Slovak Museum Society. However, the Inspectorate informed the Ministry that the local authorities did not agree with this plan, so it would be better to abandon it. Central institutions had to respect the wishes of local authorities. If the Inspectorate wanted to be successful in its work, it had to act more accordingly to the demands of the local authorities than those of the central Ministry. This was the main reason why the Slovak Museum Society decided to end cooperation with the Inspectorate. The greatest problem was not the Ministry, but the hostility of the local administration, which strongly influenced the activities of the Inspectors towards the museum.

At the time of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1918, there was a network of regional museums, with different status and ownership, in the Slovak territory. Only one of them was state-owned, but the majority recognized the leading role of the National Museum in Budapest and cooperated with the Central Country Inspectorate of Museums and Libraries. Apart from this scheme, there was the Museum of the Slovak Museum Society, aspiring for the role of the Slovak national museum. Although officially there could not be words Slovak and national in its name it was perceived as such among the members of Slovak society. This was demonstrated by individual donations coming from the whole Slovak territory and Slovak enclaves in Austria-Hungary or abroad (mainly USA and Russia).

In fact, only the few most respected central museums in the Kingdom of Hungary could rely on substantial support from the state authorities. The fate of local museums was almost entirely in the hands of the local administration, whose members were in their majority supporters of the most radical interpretation of the Hungarian state idea. The small regional museums, even when they actively promoted the Hungarian state ideology, had to struggle with chronic financial problems. Of all the museum employees in Slovakia, only the director of the Upper Hungarian

Museum in Košice was paid by the state while the rest of the museums were maintained by members of local intelligentsia, priests, teachers, office clerks or archivists (many local museums were established as parts of the archives). This, of course, influenced the preparation and maintenance of exhibitions and collections.

Slovak museums between the years 1918–1948

The situation regarding Slovak museums during the Hungarian era strongly influenced the overall development in the next period. The creation of the Czechoslovak republic in 1918 enabled general development and modernization of the Slovak society in virtually all aspects. However, in the case of Slovak museums, these changes were not particularly noticeable (different development in the Czech case is explained in the next chapter). In comparison with state policy regarding other Czech and Slovak cultural institutions and organizations of education, the disinterest in the museums was even more apparent. In general, museum politics of the Czechoslovak state was not favorable towards their further development. The Republic was not able (or did not want) to make full use of their potential. Museums lacked the definition of their place in the framework of cultural, educational and scientific institutions and the state did almost nothing to achieve any significant impact in their functioning.

Immediately after 1918, the main problem was the legislative vacuum due to complications with enforcing the authority of the new Czechoslovak government over the Slovak territory. Nearly all the regional museums still considered themselves to be a part of the Hungarian museum network, with the National museum in Budapest as the central institution. When it was clear that Slovakia would become a part of the Czechoslovak state, the directors of many museums considered it their duty to send the most valuable collections to Hungary. The newly-emerged Czechoslovak government had no means to stop them. The situation could only be stabilized in 1920.

In the Czechoslovak republic, all the museums were assigned under the control of the Museum Department of the central Ministry of Education and National Culture. However, there was no juridical base defining the rights and competencies of this department. The Museum Department had no executive powers over the museums operated by private associations, cities, districts or individuals. The museum collections were considered personal property and acceptance of the Ministry decisions depended on the goodwill of the museum owners (Palárik 2008: 296). Enforcing a general concept of the museum network development was more or less impossible. The majority of experts regarded as the main problem the missing Museum law defining competencies, duties and overall status of the museums.

The Ministry of Education and National Culture could only establish the Union of Czechoslovak Museums with voluntary membership. The objective of this organization was to solve the problem of everyday maintenance of the museums. It had similar limitations as the Central Country Inspectorate of Museums and Libraries in the Kingdom of Hungary. The union was organizing learning courses for museum staff, helped with the exhibitions and distributed humble state subventions. However, these advantages were not enough to make membership in the Union appealing for Slovak museums. Until 1938, less than half of them asked for it (Lalkovič 2003: 111).

Important limiting factors were also profound differences regarding the development of the Czech and Slovak network of museums. The Czech museums were, in their majority, functioning organizations, some of them with a long tradition. The most notable ones were influential scientific institutions with an established position in society. In addition, the Czech museum network was more stable with the National Museum in Prague as the leading institution. The Slovakia case lacked most of these characteristics.

The effort of the political elites to promote the official state idea of a Czechoslovak nation only complicated the situation. Slovak development between the years 1918-1938 was influenced by the ambiguity in the nation-making process. The fact that the Slovaks were part of a state-forming nation and Czechoslovakia was a liberal democracy enabled a rapid development of the Slovak society (in terms of culture, education, science, political views and the way of life). The Czechoslovak republic enabled the emancipation, national agitation and the formation of the Slovak ethnic community into a modern European nation. On the other hand, the political elite of the state neither expected nor encouraged this process as it went directly against the official state ideology of Czechoslovakism.

The Museum of the Slovak Museum Society strictly opposed the official state idea. It was advocating the existence of an independent Slovak nation. This was clearly demonstrated by adopting the name Slovak National Museum in 1928. Supporters of the Czechoslovak idea reacted by creating a new museum. The Slovak Homeland Museum was approved and indirectly supported by the state authorities. It was formally established in 1924 by the Society for Slovak Homeland Museum in Bratislava. However, its real development occurred only after 1928. This activity resulted in tensions between two museums aspiring for the leading role in Slovakia. The first one was promoting the idea of an independent Slovak nation while those supporting the idea of a Czechoslovak nation directed the second. (This problem is more profoundly analyzed in the chapter about Slovak National Museum.)

The stagnation, or at best slow progress, of the Slovak museums was in strong contrast to the fast changes of the whole of society. In fact, only a few problems from the Hungarian period were solved. According to historian Jozef Vlachovič:

The content and character of museums was negatively influenced by the state politics of public education. In Czechoslovakia, this process was planned without the museums or, in fact, directly against them. (Vlachovič 1979: 204)

According to Vlachovič, there was no pressure to cooperate with the public sphere since Slovak museums were mostly interested in their internal problems and were constantly losing contacts and impact on the outside world (Vlachovič 1979: 204).

The argument concerning the disinterest of the Czechoslovak elite has, however, one notable exception, the Agrarian Museum. The first Czechoslovak Agrarian Museum, the Institute for Research and Development of the Countryside in Prague was established already in 1918. This museum was formally under the supervision of the Association of the Czechoslovak Agrarian Museum. In fact, it was a political project of the Agrarian Party, the strongest political subject of interwar Czechoslovakia. Agrarians planned to open similar museums in the most important cities of the Republic. In 1924, the Minister of Education, Milan Hodža (Slovak politician from the Agrarian Party), donated a considerable amount of money from the state budget for a Slovak

branch of the Agrarian Museum. The museum building in the center of Bratislava was finished in 1928, and the museum was opened to the public in 1930. This institution served primarily as a center for propagation of the Agrarian party and the Czechoslovak state idea (Rychlík 2010: 208). On the other side, it also contributed to the research activities regarding the development of the Slovak country-side and popularized modern farming methods (Junek 2004: 297). Since 1934, the Agrarian Museum shared its building with the Slovak Homeland Museum. Supporters of both museums represented very similar ideological positions. Both institutions were, in fact, political projects of the elite supporting the Czechoslovak state idea.

However, in the 1930s it was clear that the idea of a Czechoslovak nation was not going to prevail in Slovak society. The majority of Slovaks considered themselves members of an independent Slovak nation. Critics of Czechoslovakism associated it with Czech supremacy and strict state centralism. In the mid 1930s, the majority of Slovak political elites admitted that the concept of a Czechoslovak nation was not functioning, and that Czech-Slovak relations have to be based on different concepts. However, at this time the fate of Czechoslovakia was already shaped by the global events culminating in the Second World War. In the year 1939, Hitler's Germany utilized the internal problems of Czechoslovakia in order to force a disintegration of the Republic.

The newly emerged Slovak state and its authoritarian regime tried to use the museums for its own ideological goals and the "strengthening of the Slovak national spirit and patriotism" (Palárik 2008: 298). According to the initial plans, the museums should have focused primarily on the indoctrination of schoolchildren according to patterns used in Nazi Germany. However, during the war, the Slovak state had no time and no means to follow this plan systematically. State propaganda preferred other cultural institutions or ad-hoc exhibitions moving from town to town (Palárik 2008: 301).

The most urgent problems of the museums remained largely unsolved. The most significant change was the merging of the Slovak Homeland Museum and the Agrarian Museum. The new institution, freed from its 'Czechoslovakian' heritage, acquired the name Slovak Museum. However, the Law on museums was still missing, and the duality of national museums remained unsolved. The newly created Union of the Slovak Museums, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and National Culture, was only able to standardize the working process in museums and stabilize the museum network. Lack of experienced and skilled employees became an acute problem. In 1945, there were only 45 people employed in all 25 Slovak museums and only 18 of them were qualified specialists. The Slovak National Museum had only 11 permanent employees (Mruškovič, Darulová, Kollár 2005: 81).

Czech National Museum and the development of Czech museum organization

The framework of Czech museums was developing according to different schemes than the Slovak one. The Czech case in the 19th century was, in fact, more similar to the Hungarian one. The origins of the national museums in many European countries were typically connected with the activities of respected, 'progressive' nobles. Two such people were essential for the birth of the future Czech National Museum. Count Kaspar Maria von Sternberg (1761–1838), a famous botanist, was the Father of the museum idea. An important spokesman of this project was Count Franz Anton von Kolowrat-Liebsteinsky (1778–1861), a steward of Bohemian Lands and future

member of the Austrian State Council. Kolowrat-Liebsteinsky was a prominent admirer and supporter of Czech culture. Despite his sympathies to the Czech national movement, he thought that a national museum could direct its attention towards culture and science instead of politics. In 1818, a document declaring the establishment of a new museum was signed and, in 1820, the Austrian Emperor and government authorized this institution. The newly created Society of the Patriotic Museum (1822) acted as the owner and operator of museum collections.

Since opening, the Patriotic Museum in Bohemia always emphasized its scientific status. Despite the declaration that the museum was interested both in humanities and natural sciences, the latter was clearly preferred during the first two decades of its existence. This was partly because the first museum director Kaspar Maria von Sternberg was a botanist. More significant was that research in the field of natural sciences was considered useful for the state while state authorities saw national history or archaeology as a possible source of political or even worse, nationalist, conflicts. On the other side, the museum was steadily strengthening its position as the heart of Czech nationalist movement. The idea of Bohemian, territorial and Czech-German scope of the museum was never a relevant option.

This process was a direct result of museum development. Museum activities were performed by Czech nationalist intelligentsia with a clear nation-building program although the collections were donated by, nationally, more or less indifferent nobles. The most visible symbol of this process was historian František Palacký (1798–1876). In 1825, he became the first editor of the *Journal of the Patriotic Museum in Bohemia*. He had been a member of the Society of the Patriotic Museum since 1830. Ten years later he became the leading person of this institution. Palacký's program included consistent nationalization of the museum and marginalization of its aristocratic character in favour of its opening to the wider public. An inseparable part of this development was the focus on historical and archaeological collections. Palacký enthusiastically supported the further professionalization and scientific aspect of museum activities. The era between the 1830s and 1840s was, in fact, crucial for the museum's development - it became a Czech national institution. This was symbolized with a new name; the Czech Museum was officially adopted in 1848. The museum was regarded as a Czech institution not only by Czech society but also by the Austrian administration and other ethnic groups of the Bohemian Kingdom. German inhabitants of Bohemian Kingdom established their own museums. The German version of the *Journal of the Patriotic Museum in Bohemia* had ceased to exist after 5 years, due to lack of interest among German speaking population.

The defeat of nationalist revolutions in 1848–1849 could only obstruct but not stop this development. In the 1850s, the most influential personalities had to leave the museum, and it changed its name to *Museum of the Bohemian Kingdom* in 1854. This was a clear attempt to denationalize the institution through accentuation of its territorial status. The museum was under constant surveillance by Austrian authorities and it was struggling with financial problems. Therefore, it could not openly continue in its nation-building politics, but was able to promote it as a part of its scientific activities. Especially in 1860s, the museum formally supervised and supported the establishment of regional museums, which also had their nation-building programs. Although the central museum suffered from a serious crisis in the second half of the 19th century, it was still regarded as the central institution by the (Czech) regional museums. This

position was unshaken, even after a discussion about the degree of centralization in museum organization, regarding the competencies of the Museum of the Bohemian Kingdom.

After 1918, there was already a relatively stable and well-developed museum framework in the Czech part of the new republic, especially in comparison with the Slovakia. The main problem for the National Museum (new name after 1918) was to find its place in the new political reality and define the scope of its activities. Since the last third of the 19th century, it had lost its position in the center of Czech scientific life (in favor of Charles University in Prague).

It was already mentioned that the political elite of the Czechoslovak republic showed only minimal interest in the problems of the museums. However, the National Museum was an exception. This institution was regarded as central and pivotal among the Czechoslovak museums. The state administration was actively participating in its management through the representatives of the Ministry of Education and National Culture in the directorial board of the Society of the National Museum.

In 1928, the territory of Czechoslovakia was divided into four lands (Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia, Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia). In 1934, the Bohemian Land Council undertook full financing of the National Museum. This solved the museum's financial problems and enabled further professionalization of its activities. The National Museum could return to its position of respected scientific institution and strengthen its status as the central museum in Czechoslovakia. A clear trend towards centralization and homogenization during the communist regime only strengthened its position. The National Museum remained the dominant museum in Czechoslovakia until the break-up of the state in 1993.

Slovak museums during the Communist era

In 1948, after the Communist takeover, Czechoslovakia became a communist totalitarian state, part of the Eastern bloc, consisting of vassal states of the Soviet empire. For the next 40 years, Czechoslovakia was a socialist dictatorship, ruled by the Communist party according to the all-encompassing ideology of Marxism-Leninism. The communist regime was able to utilize the capacity of museums for its own legitimization. Museums became ideological institutions defined as "dynamic, fighting organizations presenting the socialist culture and forming the socialist citizen." (Vlachovič 1979: 215) In order to use the museums for its own ideological goals, the communist ruling party took the museums under direct state control. The two most prestigious museums in Slovakia, the Slovak National Museum and Slovak Museum, became state-owned in 1948; the rest in 1950. At the same time, the new laws put an end to the Slovak Museum Society and to the Union of the Slovak Museums.

The total state control enabled a structural reform in the whole system of Czechoslovak museums. They were divided into three groups - central, regional and district. Formally they were under the supervision of the Governmental Museum Commission. However, in the first years of the communist regime the crucial decisions (in a form of direct orders) came directly from the framework of the Communist party. In the early 1950s, the opinion of even a local Party representative was usually more important than the Governmental commission. This has changed at the end of the decade with the new trend based on socialist legality, stressing the importance of legal and procedural norms in administrating the state.

In 1948, one of the communist deputies in the Slovak National Council³ stated: “Socialist states are regarding the museums as an important factor in the process of forming a member of the new [socialist and communist] society.” (Czech and Slovak digital parliament repository 2010) The museums should have been reformed according to Soviet models. According to the contemporary communist newspeak: “The museums had to become political” (Lipták 1990: 248). Activities of the museums were an integral part of the ideological objectives of the ruling communist power. Under the supervision of the Party apparatus, the exhibitions were reinterpreted accordingly. Museums spent the 1950s creating ideologically suitable exhibitions under strict control of the Opinion Commission comprising of Communist ideologists and Marxist scientists.⁴ However, these new exhibitions, in fact, represented discontinuance with the modern European trends of museum management (Prelovská 2005: 220). Instead of education they had to focus on indoctrination and propaganda.

It is a paradox that the intention of the totalitarian regime to use museums for its own needs led to their overall development and improvement. In this regard, the fact that museums became state owned institutions proved to be a beneficial decision. The Communist regime showed a serious interest in creating suitable conditions for the museums, so they could effectively carry out their role in the ideological education of the population. To fulfill this mission, the regime established various ideological museums, devoted to the history of the Communist party and the struggles of the working classes. There was also a museum of scientific atheism as a part of the struggle against the influence of religion on the population.

In 1954, the leaders of the Communist Party of Slovakia approved the opening of the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising. The antifascist Uprising of 1944 was (and still is) regarded as one of the most pivotal events in modern Slovak history, securing the Slovak position among the winners of the Second World War. However, the Communists regarded the Uprising as the legitimating event for their rule in Czechoslovakia. The main task of the museum was to mediate this image of the past to the population.

The most dogmatic and radical phase of communist rule (1948–1953) ended with the death of Stalin. In the new era of the communist regime, trends towards stabilization of the state institutions and definition of their competencies prevailed. In 1956, both the Slovak National Museum in Martin and the Slovak Museum in Bratislava officially received the status of research facilities. This meant a new qualitative position for both institutions, as they started to be more attractive as work places for university graduates.

These tendencies culminated in the Law on Museums and Galleries from 1961. This law finally clearly defined the role and status of museums in society as well as their hierarchy among Slovak museums. Museums were characterized as institutions of scientific research with clearly defined ideological goals:

Education of the population towards the Marxism-Leninism, Czechoslovak socialist patriotism and creating material and intellectual values for the developed socialist society and its transition towards communism. (Law of Museum and Galleries, 1961)

By merging museums in Martin and Bratislava, the new Slovak National Museum was established. Together with the Slovak National Gallery (established in 1948), Technical Museum and Museum of the Slovak National Uprising, they became central museums under the

supervision of the Slovak National Council. Regional museums were subordinated to particular districts or towns. It is necessary to mention, that already in 1959 the National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic passed a similar law, which was valid only in the Czech and Moravian part of the republic. The most fundamental difference between these two laws concerns the definition of central institution. While the National Museum and the National Gallery in Prague were central state institutions, the Slovak National Museum and the Slovak National Gallery were defined as central national institutions. The National Museum in Prague was, at the same time, Czech national museum as well as a central museum of Czechoslovakia, supervising the activities of Slovak National Museum.

Although the Slovak Council for Museums and Galleries coordinated the activities of the Slovak museums, the new law caused a growing gap between central museums and remaining institutions entirely dependent on the local administration. This resulted in a feeling of discontent among the employees of the regional museums. Despite all the criticism and unavoidable ideological attributes of the 1961 law, the museum network in Slovakia was functioning according to that law until 1998. The development of museums in the years 1961 until the fall of communism in 1989 can be characterized by growing quality and quantity, despite the ideological limitations. The most favorable conditions were granted to the central museums, supervised by the Central Administration of Museums and Galleries and the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Socialist Republic (since 1968 Czechoslovakia was a federation consisting of Czech and Slovak Socialist Republics). Especially the Slovak National Museum evolved into a complex, national institution comparable with national museums in neighboring countries. It was becoming national also in the sense that it had its branches and departments over the whole Slovak territory. In 1988, there were 115 museums and galleries in Slovakia with about 2500 employees, one third of them with a university degree, most of them historians and art historians.

Fall of communism and independent Slovak republic

Many communist regimes in Central European countries fell in 1989. Together with its post-communist neighbors, Czechoslovakia became a democratic state. However, the fall of totalitarianism also enabled the rise of nationalism. National identity and inter-national relations were once again at the center of political discourse, and the majority of society perceived national sentiment as a positive value (Podoba 2004: 262). The radicalization of the discussion about Czech-Slovak relations resulted in the final split of the state in 1993. The nationalist-populist political coalition ruled the country until 1998. European political institutions massively criticized its political activities. After changes caused by elections in 1998, the political situation in Slovakia had stabilized. The country became a full member of the European Union in 2004.

The process of democratization after 1989 created an entirely new situation, and the museums had to adapt rather quickly. For 40 years, they had their duties strictly defined by the ruling power, represented by the Communist party. Their mission was clear, and the central apparatus and ideological commissions gave the method of its fulfillment. Individual or independent activities were, at best, tolerated but not supported. Museums did not have to compete for attendants, and their budget did not depend on the number of tickets sold. The most important exhibitions were visited on a compulsory basis and presented to the organized masses of visitors, from schoolchildren to factory workers.

After the fall of communism, museums got significantly more freedom for their activities. In comparison with the totalitarian past, the direct ideological or political influence of the actual ruling power was significantly lower. However, the same applies also for the state interest in the problems and demands of the museums. The greater autonomy was accompanied by reduced state funding. Despite all the plans about connecting on the Western development the essential task was the adaptation to the new reality. The priority was to attract as many paying visitors as possible. “The time-span between the years 1990-2002 can be characterized as an effort to accommodate the rather complicated, traditionalist and fairly conservative field of museums to the changes of political and economic system in Slovakia.” (Kollár 2009: 396) The clearly ideologically-focused museums were closed, and the number of employees in the rest was decreased. In 1998, a new Museum Law was passed, but the state still maintained supervising authority over the central museums. On the other hand, the state administration paid only minimal attention to their activities. Even the openly nationalist political elite governing the Slovak republic between the years 1993-1998 showed only little interest in the promoting of its ideas through museums. In the last decade, the museum system seems to have settled down again. Museums have found their place in the new political and economic conditions. This also means that the majority of them are focusing rather on attractive and politically safe exhibitions. This is especially true in the case of regional museums with strong dependency on regional political elites. Uncomfortable themes of Slovak history, together with the reinterpretation of the common Central European history and European project were reserved for the central museums. These were, in the first place, the Slovak National Museum and the Museum of Slovak National Uprising.

Hereditary wars

The problem of hereditary wars concerning the Slovak museums is related to the issue of cultural heritage ownership of artifacts made or found during the existence of the Hungarian Kingdom (until 1918). The fact is that a great number of various historical artifacts from the territory of today's Slovakia are in the various Hungarian museums. This situation is closely connected with the historical development of both Hungary and Slovakia. At the time when the Hungarian National Museum emerged, the territory of Slovakia was an inseparable part of the Kingdom of Hungary. The Hungarian museums were established in order to collect and preserve the most valuable historical artifacts. In the 19th century, it was considered natural, that the most valuable artifacts, essential for the Hungarian state idea, should be sent to the National Museum in Budapest. The same process was under way also in the church sphere. The precious pieces of church art were sent to the seat of the Archbishop in Esztergom, the location of the Christian museum.

During the preparation of the so called millennium anniversary of the Hungarian Kingdom, the process of gathering the most valuable historical artifacts and pieces of art ‘connected with the Magyar nation development’ from the whole country gained its peak. Formally these objects were only borrowed for the celebration. In fact, they were only rarely given back and were often donated to various museums in the ethnically Magyar territory (iŽurnál 3. 10. 2007). This process continued also later. For example, the most valuable artifacts from the museum of one the most northern counties of the Hungarian Kingdoms were sent to Budapest in 1914 with the argument

that they represent “evidence of the Magyar culture in northern Hungary” (Mruškovič, Darulová, Kollár 2005: 64). However, even the official statistics showed traditionally a negligible number of ethnically Magyar people living in this territory.

However, it has to be stressed that almost all regional museums considered themselves to be a part of the official museum network of the Hungarian Kingdom with the National Museum in Budapest as the central institution. That is why in 1918 many valuable collections were sent to Budapest, with the argument that they are being saved for the Magyar nation. In 1919, the new Czechoslovak government requested the return of all acquired collections and artifacts. The “restitution of Slovak cultural heritage” was also mentioned in the Trianon peace treaty that defined the borders of the new states in the Central Europe (Vároš 2007: 156). Long and numerous negotiations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary did not solve the problem of restitutions. In fact, the Hungarian government never had the intention to return any of the acquired collections, and for the Czechoslovak government this problem was not a real priority. The same situation occurred after the end of World War II. In 1948, Slovak historians prepared a list of 503 artifacts that should have been returned from Hungary to Slovakia. However, when the representatives of the communist governments of Czechoslovakia and Hungary met in 1949, it was clear that their main concern was to avoid all conflicts. The prime minister of the Czechoslovak government, Viliam Široký, labeled the Slovak artifacts in Hungary as church garbage, which can very well stay in Hungary (Vároš 2007: 162). Additional negotiations sporadically took place also in the 1960s, however, without significant results. The Slovak side took offence when the Hungarian Ministry of Culture, instead of claimed artifacts, presented a copy of St. Stephen’s crown of Hungarian Kings to the Slovak National Museum in 1967 (Vároš 2007: 207).

Interesting is the passive approach of the representatives of the Slovak museums towards this problem. Contrary to other research institutions (Slovak Academy of Sciences or universities) the museums did not participate in the struggles over Slovak cultural heritage. After the fall of communism in 1989 and especially after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the Slovak Ministry of Culture reopened this topic. However, it soon became more a part of the populist policy of the Slovak ruling coalition of that era, than a theme for serious discussion by the professionals. A clear example of such practice was the process of the returning of the gothic altar from Prague to the Castle of Bojnice (part of the Slovak National Museum) in 1995. This operation became a political agenda of Slovak government. The altar was exchanged for ten valuable gothic paintings, and the state authorities totally ignored the protests of professionals.

In 1995, an absurd barter was thought out. The representative of the Slovak Ministry of Culture seriously proposed an exchange to his Hungarian colleague: The Slavic sword from the 9th century in the possession of the Hungarian National Museum would be exchanged for the remains of Hungarian national heroes Ferenc Rákóczi and Imre Thököly from 17th century buried in Slovakia (Vároš 2006: 129). This was, however, never realized, partly because the towns where Rákóczi and Thököly were buried rejected such an idea. According to the Slovak nationalist it was because of numerous representatives of Hungarian origin in the city councils of the respective cities. Nowadays the radical requests for the returning of Slovak cultural heritage from Hungary but also from the Czech Republic are typically an agenda for nationalists and their

election programs. Slovak and Hungarian museums rely on cooperation in solving at least some of the long-term conflicts.

The problem of definition in regard to national cultural heritage, as it is currently understood, seems to be unsolvable on the national and state levels. It leads to territorial overlapping. Slovak representatives claim that everything created in the Slovak territory is the property of Slovakia. For Hungarians everything created in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (inclusive of Slovakia) is their national heritage. In Hungary, there is also a significant national level present - everything created and found during the existence of the Hungarian Kingdom is regarded as being of ethnic Magyar heritage. The problem of place and the interpretation of objects claimed by both Hungarians and Slovaks is an inseparable part of the still problematic interpretation of common history of both nations in the Hungarian kingdom.

Case studies in chronological order

Slovak National Museum

The chronological case study of the establishment and development of the Slovak National Museum can explain the role of the Slovak museums in the process of building national identity and historical narratives. The story of the most prominent Slovak museum demonstrates the role of museums in a newly emerging nation-state with a great need to produce a legitimizing national narrative. On the other hand, according to one of the most respected Slovak historians, Roman Holec:

The situation we live [in Slovakia] is in a sharp contrast with the approach to national history in the neighboring states. In the Czech Republic and Hungary, the countries we wish to compare with, the historic consciousness had significantly higher level (...) and the national past enjoys a significantly higher respect. (Holec 2009: 2)

Roman Holec demonstrates his assumption on the example of historical exhibitions of the national museums in the Czech Republic or Hungary. According to him, the popularity and number of attendants of these institutions is unthinkable in the Slovak circumstances. In comparison with the national museums in neighboring countries, the intellectual and institutional authority or influence of their Slovak counterpart seems to be lower. The reason for this situation is in the process of institutionalizing Slovak scientific research and the evolution of a national identity concept as well as in the historical development of a Slovak national museum idea.

For most of the time of its existence, the Slovak historiography produced a national narrative with rather a defensive character, trying to justify the actual existence of the nation. However, the national narrative provided by Slovak scholars was hard to use as a political argument. After several failed attempts in the first half of 19th century, the Slovak political elites ceased to use historical arguments in their constructions of Slovak political conceptions. In the Habsburg Monarchy, the Slovaks were not considered a historical nation with a real historical tradition of state independence. This was the reason why the Slovak elite could not use historical arguments in political programs regarding the Slovak autonomy. Here is the difference from the Hungarian and Czech situation, where the political instrumentalisation of the national past played a much more influential role. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867), the Slovak political elite based their arguments on the 'natural rights of nations'. According to this philosophy, the rights

of a Slovak nation were defined by its mere existence: Slovaks needed only to refer to their national existence and their right for national equality was proven (Daxner 1912: 37). However, even this type of argumentation has its historical element. It was needed in order to emphasize the long-time presence of the Slovak nation on the given territory. This argument constituted the right on the national territory, irrespective of the tradition of former independence or autonomy (Hollý 2011: 105). The main objective of the first Slovak museum with national status was to present evidence for the existence of the Slovak national community and Slovak national territory. The Slovak national museum in its current form is a relatively young institution. It was established in 1961 by merging two institutions competing for the leading role in Slovak territory. Both of them are worth a closer analysis since they represent two basic phases and philosophies of Slovak museum-related activities.

The first one emerged in 1895 as a private museum of the Slovak Museum Society in Martin, one of the main centers of Slovak political life at that time. Creation of the Slovak National Museum predecessor in the 19th century was not a ceremonial act. It was more or less a result of a compromise, marked by disagreements in the ranks of the Slovak intellectual and political elite. Many saw the museum only as an inadequate alternative to the real research institution similar to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Hollý 2008a: 6). Also, Hungarian authorities preferred a strictly scientific association focused on the natural sciences since there was a bigger guarantee that such an institution would be less interested in national and political activities (Mruškovič, Darulová, Kollár 2005: 57).

However, these were unrealistic expectations, because the idea of the national museum adopted by Slovak political leaders had a clear political and nation-building pattern. The programs and activities of the museum were significantly influenced by the ideas of Slovak conservative political leader Svätozár Hurban Vajanský (1847–1916). Vajanský's philosophy was an extreme example of a non-historical construction of national identity, based on the impersonal mass of the nation as the bearer of the national spirit. As this mass is untouched by history it does not have to carry the burden of the past. Therefore, there was no need to study Slovak history because it had nothing to do with the present development of the Slovak nation (Hollý 2009a: 262).

According to Vajanský, the work of the museum should have concentrated primarily on collecting ethnographic material about Slovak folk, which was considered the only carrier of the Slovak national spirit. The museum and its collections should have served the nation building purpose as evidence of the existence of the Slovak nation in Hungary. The institution should have been based on pure ethnography - a science interested even in the smallest and most lonely nation as the representatives of society called it. According to Vajanský, there was even no need to classify or study the material. That could be done in better times (Hollý 2008a: 6). The national scope of the museum was extremely rigid - it was interested only in the activities of the Slovak folk, almost entirely ignoring supposedly non-Slovak and alien high culture, arts and political history. Even the natural sciences were considered contrary to the Slovak aspect of the museum. The argument was that non-Slovaks could also study Slovak flora and fauna. Nature is going to be here forever, while the Slovak nation is decimated by magyarisation (Hollý 2008b: 451).

These ideas have proven out to be long lasting and had determined the overall image of this institution for the next decades. Despite the activities of scholars, which did not agree with the

solely ethnographic and anti-research scope of the museum, it had not evolved into a prominent national scientific center. This trend was supported by the fact that the museum was located on the periphery. The small city Martin was far away from the centers of intellectual life. As it was promoting ideas contradictory to the official Hungarian state idea, it was kept out of the state network of museums in the Kingdom of Hungary and the scientific milieu of the country. On the other hand, the museum developed a tradition of independence; it relied strongly on contributions from its supporters. In this aspect, the museum was remarkably successful and won a fairly large group of supporters from all levels of society. From their donations, two museum buildings were built. The philosophy of independence allowed the museum to act in opposition to the state authorities and the state enforced state ideas. This was the case of both concepts of Hungarian nation in the Hungarian Kingdom and the Czechoslovak nation in interwar Czechoslovakia.

Although prior to 1918, the Museum of Slovak Museum Society was the only Slovak organization of science and education, it failed to become an intellectual center during the existence of the Czechoslovak state. Other, younger institutions soon overshadowed it. The museum still focused mainly on ethnography, with an emphasis on nation-preservation activities. The declared focus of the museum was: "To show Slovakia as a geographically and culturally homogenous unit that always was and will be Slovak." (Vlachovič 1979: 208).

Paradoxically, the end of national oppression caused a decade of stagnation in the museum. The idea that the 'better times' will automatically enable more profound scientific work proved to be false, because the museum had not trained anybody for such work. Without skilled leadership, the institution was unable to adapt to the modern trends in the museology (Mruškovič, Darulová, Kollár 2005: 69). On the other hand, the museum had significant freedom for its activities because it was financially independent. In 1928, the Museum of the Slovak Museum Society adopted the name Slovak National Museum. This act should have stressed and confirmed its position among Slovak museums. This new name also clearly declared a disagreement with the official idea of a Czechoslovak nation.

However, the stagnation of the museum in Martin during the 1920s and opposition to the Czechoslovak idea were serious reasons why the Czechoslovak government was reluctant to accept the Slovak Nation Museum as the official museum representing the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia. On the contrary, state authorities quietly supported the formation of an influential group of Slovak and Czech political and cultural elite, which decided to open a new institution, better suited to the new era in Slovak development. In 1924, the Society for Slovak Homeland Museum in Bratislava was established. It was an activity of the newly emerged liberal intellectual elite of the Republic led by Slovak architect Dušan Jurkovič and Czech historian Václav Chaloupecký.

Establishing a new, modern Slovak museum was part of a plan to create a new 'set' of scientific and cultural institutions in Bratislava, loyal to the ideas of the Republic. The proposed museum had its own nation-building plan. One of its main purposes was the promotion of the state idea of the Czechoslovak nation - thus the name Slovak homeland instead of Slovak national museum. This name implied the territorial scope of the institution. The Slovak Homeland Museum should have been a modern institution comparable to the national museums in neighboring states. Primarily Czech professors from the newly established Comenius

University maintained it. Beside its didactical function, it stressed the importance of a scientific program focusing on archeology, history, ethnology, fine art and natural sciences. Interest in history was one of the most notable features of the new museum. The Czechoslovak idea was based predominantly on historical arguments of the common history of Czech and Slovaks that made the language differences marginal. It was, therefore, no coincidence that it was Czech historians who prepared the first historical exhibition in the Slovak Homeland Museum.

Since the second half of the 1920s, there were two museums in Slovakia, aspiring for the leading position in the territory that could barely support one of them. The museum in Martin referred to its tradition, number of supporters and the promotion of Slovak national interests. It deliberately focused its activities on the rural environment and relied on the help of national intelligentsia from villages and small towns. (Mruškovič, Darulová, Kollár 2005: 70) The fixation on ethnography grew even stronger, because the museum in Bratislava has taken over all the other fields of research.

The Slovak Homeland Museum in Bratislava had a more favorable position in the eyes of ruling political elites. Other advantages were scientific background; position in the center of Slovak cultural and intellectual life, broader orientation of its activities and more finances. It was rooted in the urban, liberal milieu and prepared support to the actual state idea.

Both museums had their nation building strategies. One promoted the existence of a Slovak nation (in opposition to the state idea); the other one was based on the idea of a Czechoslovak nation. One represented the Slovak nation and its national territory; the second one described the territory of the Slovak branch of the Czechoslovak nation. The state authorities demonstrated their preferred museum only indirectly. The transfer of the Homeland Museum's collection into the (state funded) building of the Agrarian Museum in 1934 was a clear sign of support from the highly ranked political elite. The new building of the Slovak National Museum in Martin was paid for with money gathered from individual supporters; the state support of this project was negligible.

According to Jozef Vlachovič, the rivalry of the two museums had positive effects on their work (Vlachovič 1979: 210). It is true that the opening of the Slovak Homeland Museum started the era of renewed activity of the Slovak National Museum. On the other hand, this situation only further complicated the stabilization of the network of museums. None of the two Slovak museums had, by far, reached the status, influence and importance of national museums in neighboring countries. The impact of the Slovak museums on the formation of the historical narrative and the national identity building was only marginal. The Czechoslovak state, otherwise highly active in propagation of its state idea in schools and cultural activities, did not utilize the potential of the museums as possible nation building tools. They were still considered private enterprises and the state did not try to get control over their activities.

The aforementioned duality lasted until 1961, but already during the existence of the Slovak state (1939–1945) a compromise was negotiated. The Slovak National Museum focused primarily on ethnography and the Slovak Museum on nature, archeology and history. After the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1939, when the idea of a Czechoslovak nation was abandoned, the ideological differences between the two Slovak museums ceased to exist. However, the problem of distribution of spheres of influence remained, as well as the question of which of the museums was the central Slovak institution.

Since 1948, when the Communists took power in Czechoslovakia, all the museums had to adapt to the new reality of the state owned institutions, with extremely clear and strictly controlled tasks regarding the ideological indoctrination of the population. The first task of the museums was to reconstruct and reinterpret the collections and exhibitions according to the actual Marxist-Leninist doctrine. This process occurred to be very time consuming and complicated. In the two biggest Slovak museums, it took nearly 10 years. During this time, it became clear that the museums lacked qualified personnel, capable to fulfill the given tasks. The chronic shortage of Marxists with university diplomas was typical for the first half of the 1950s. In addition, the museums suffered from the fact that they were not regarded as research institutions. However, in order to reconstruct the exhibitions, museums needed professional historians, art historians, nature scientists and technicians with experience in museum work. The problem was that formal relations between the museums and the other institutions of science and research were nearly nonexistent. A whole framework of cooperation had to be created. In 1956, the central museums became institutes of scientific research, which made it easier for them to employ university graduates. At the same time, the faculties of Arts started to open chairs of museology, producing much-needed experts on museum work.

The communist regime considered history one of the most powerful tools for legitimization of its own power. The Communists introduced themselves as the heirs of the most progressive national historical traditions. That is why the historical science and historical exhibitions in museums were under strict supervision by the party ideologists. In 1955, the Slovak museum in Bratislava opened its historical exhibition that presented the newly created Marxist Slovak master narrative. It depicted the history of the Slovak territory “from Neanderthal man to the present” (Lipták 1990: 251). According to Marxist ideas, the exhibition focused on the common folk, the makers of history. The second objective of the exhibition was to document the continuity of Slovak history – the existence of a coherent Slovak master narrative. This was a delicate task, especially considering the presentation of Czech-Slovak relations. The exhibition should have documented the struggle for national sovereignty but at the same time it had to promote the official state policy of Czechoslovak socialist patriotism and the historical bond of two brotherly nations, negating any signs of Slovak separatism.

This exposition was also a classic example of museum work in the communist countries. The museum should have functioned as a school of history for the masses (Kollár 2009: 370) and the exhibitions as textbooks, giving the visitors sum of basic knowledge. According to historian Ľubomír Lipták, this resulted in a transformation of the exhibition into the (boring) textbook, where the accompanying text was more valuable than the actual exhibit (Lipták 1990: 251).

It took one more decade until the museums were able to prepare exhibitions respecting the possibilities and limitations of their institutions. In the 1960s, when supervision of the Party ideologist receded, the new generation of professionals with enough experience started to influence the functioning of the Slovak National Museum. Since the 1970s, the museum had its own experts and was not dependent on the help of other scientific institutions. However, being an employee of the museum (even the national one) was still a job with little prestige for scholars. Scientists, which had to leave the Slovak Academy of Sciences or university for ideological reasons, were often sent to the national museum as a form of punishment. The reason for this benevolence was the fact that the museum was seen only as a space for presentation of state ideas

and ideologies and not as an institution where exhibitions were planned. In 1987, there were 156 historians working in Slovak museums, but it took 27 years until the Slovak Historical Society (official association of Slovak historians) mentioned their work for the first time (Lipták 1990: 251).

The fall of communism in 1989 and the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993 brought profound changes to the status of the Slovak National Museum. With the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and creation of the Slovak republic in 1993, the Slovak National Museum became not only the central national, but also the central state museum. The step from narrow ethnical focus towards the representation of the whole state was manifested by exhibitions dedicated to ethnic (and religious) minorities in Slovakia (Hungarian, German, Czech, Roma, Jewish, Croatian, Ruthenian and Ukrainian). Nowadays the museum encompasses 18 museums located in different places throughout Slovakia, which are devoted to history, culture, arts, religion, ethnography and natural sciences. Despite rather strong dependence on the actual ruling coalition (the minister of culture can remove the museum director from his position without giving a reason), the museum avoided deeper engagement in the controversies regarding the state and nation making process. Contrary to universities and the Slovak Academy of Sciences, it did not actively and visibly participate in the discussions concerning the tendencies towards radical nationalization of the Slovak master narrative as requested by the ruling political coalition during the years 1993–1998.

It is possible that the long-time experience with the totalitarian regime was the cause for the cautious politics of avoiding the conflicts. It can be a sign that the other research institutions and state authorities did not consider the Slovak National Museum powerful enough to be a part of their debates. However, this position grants the museum a certain degree of freedom. The representatives of the national museum stayed skeptical towards appeals for a more patriotic and primordial presentation of Slovak history. Instead of supporting the state proclaimed politic of history, based on proving the existence of old Slovaks in the 8th century, the Slovak national museum introduced an entirely different approach. The former director of the museum, Peter Maráky, explained in the following terms:

It does not matter if you like it or not, the Slovaks have formed a nation predominantly in the 20th century, especially during the time of the so called real socialism. Therefore, looking for old and even older Slovaks has no sense. (Maráky 2008)

This focus on modern history proved to be successful. The recent exhibition “How we lived? Slovakia in 20th century” with an emphasis on every day life was the most visited exhibition at the Slovak National Museum until recently. A second exhibition of particular importance was called “Centre of Europe around the Year 1000”. It was created as a German-Hungarian-Polish-Czech-Slovak project. Its declared aim was to demonstrate that the main ideas of the European Union are based on a 1000-year-old common historical tradition. The main importance of this exhibition, which was presented in the museums of all involved countries, was in the mentioned cooperation. Experts from different countries had to overcome the ethnocentric conception of national narratives in order to create an acceptable interpretation of the Central European past.

The Slovak National Museum stood aside from the nationalistic controversies, clearly visible already during the last 10 years of the communist era. This marked its moderate stance in the discussions following the creating the post-Marxist Slovak national narrative in which most

respected institutions of social sciences were involved. However, this neutrality was also a result of stagnation and inner reforms of the first 10 years after the fall of communism. The situation had changed at the beginning of the 21st century, when the museum adopted an active and attractive approach towards the preparing of the new exhibitions. There are more activities and projects for children and young people. Right now it seems that the Slovak National Museum is on the cusp of its own renaissance (Slovakia, Cultural profile 2010). In general, the Slovak National Museum is an accepted and respected institution, gaining popularity after the decline in the 1990s. However, its historical background and institutional development caused its authority and influence to be less evident than in neighboring countries.

Museum of the Slovak national uprising

The Museum of the Slovak national uprising (SNU) is an example of a national museum that is, at the same time, highly specialized. This institution is a combination of museum and war memorial, built to protect and provide the official interpretation of a historical event, which is considered particularly significant for the national narrative and the legitimization of the ruling ideology. The antifascist uprising of 1944 has a prominent role in the Slovak collective historical memory as a heroic-chapter of the Slovak past. Since the end of World War II, the interpretation of uprising was a key element in the state politics of history, especially in the legitimization of the restoration of Czechoslovakia in 1945. The Communist party ideologists considered it the crucial phase in the history of the Slovak nation, the beginning of the socialist era. This construction was based on the statement that the “leading force of the Slovak national uprising was the working class under the leadership of the Communist party” (Holotík 1953: 72).

In order to canonize this interpretation, the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising was established. The first exhibition devoted to the SNU was opened to the public already in 1945 in the Slovak Museum, in Bratislava. In 1954, the Central Committee of the Communist party of Slovakia decided to move the exhibition to the Banská Bystrica (centre of the Uprising) in the form of a permanent museum (Babušíková, Mičev 2007: 389). In 1957, the museum became a key research institution in the field of documenting the traditions of “the nation-liberation fight of the Slovak folk during the World War II and the liberation of our mother country by the Soviet army” (Babušíková, Mičev 2007: 389). From its beginning, the museum had to be, voluntarily or involuntarily, a political institution. The interpretation of SNU was a serious political question done by the high ranked communist ideologists. Especially in the 1950s, the incorrect interpretation could easily lead to the accusation of bourgeois nationalism and imprisonment. At the beginning of the 1950s all most important Slovak communist leaders of the SNU have been imprisoned as „bourgeois nationalists“.

It was no coincidence that the Communist apparatus had to approve all documents and original sources about the Uprising, before they could be given to the museum archives.

During the decades of the Communist rule, the interpretation of the SNU went through various changes. Many of them were ideologically or politically motivated, and the Museum had to reconstruct its exhibitions and interpretations accordingly. In order to fulfill its function, it was crucial that the museum was attended by masses of visitors. Very typical were the excursions of the organized groups of visitors - during the era of communism nearly every Slovak schoolchild went to the museum at least once.

In 1969, the museum became a new monumental building, which even more stressed its significance as a memorial, legitimizing and glorifying the communist rule. The building metaphorically depicts the history of Slovak nation in two asymmetric concrete monuments. They are connected by a bridge representing the idea of the SNU as a radical change in the life of Slovak society - a metaphor of Communist perception of this event as a step from capitalism into socialism.

The space between the two monuments represents a war memorial. There is the symbolic grave of an Unknown Soldier with the everlasting flame as well as a panel with the names of the most famous battlefields of the uprising and places of Nazi repression. Nowadays, the memorial tablets dedicated to victims of the Holocaust from Slovakia and foreign fighters in the Slovak National Uprising are placed here as well.

The construction of the new building strengthened the position of the museum as a multifunctional place of memory. Here the nation-liberating, antifascist struggle was merged with the communist struggle for the oppressed working classes. The building of the museum became one of the most prominent places for commemorative practices in Slovakia, where the communists could present themselves as heirs and guardians of the most positive national tradition - the antifascist struggle. The anniversary of the SNU was (and still is) a National holiday. During the celebration, the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising was the center of commemorative events. It was attended by high ranking Communist party officials and other representatives of the political and intellectual elite of the country.

Close ties with the Communist ideology made this museum highly sensitive to all political changes. This became particularly apparent after the armies of the Warsaw pact crushed the liberalizing tendencies of the “Prague Spring” (1968). The interpretation of the SNU, as the key part of the Marxist master narrative, went through radical changes during the liberalization of the historical science in the 1960s. One of the most significant changes was the official acknowledgement that the demand for an equal status of the Slovak and Czech nation in the renewed republic was a crucial part of the Uprising's political program. These changes were visible also in the museum exhibition. However, in the 1970s the so-called normalization commission supervised the new reinterpretation of the exhibition (Babušíková, Mičev 2007: 390). The commission also dismissed all the members of personnel accused of actively participating in the former liberalization movement.

On the other hand, the Museum of the SNU had apparently easily adapted to the new post-communist reality of 1989. During the time when the ideological museums were closed, the museum in Banská Bystrica retained its position as the central, national institution. It was because also the new, democratic regime considered the Uprising one of the most decisive turning points in the modern Slovak history. The New Slovak republic derived its democratic character from the antifascist struggle in the years 1944–1945. In addition, the museum was able to expand its focus on the previously marginalized themes of the Holocaust. Its employees are dealing with the sensible theme of a wartime Slovak state and involvement of its political leaders and citizens in the tragedy of Slovak Jews.

The employees of the museum successfully and rather quickly prepared new exhibitions freed from Communist misinterpretations. The museum also preserved its status as an important place of memory. The tradition of the annual commemorative events continues today, and has the

same political significance as it had during communist period. In fact, it is one of the few traditions rooted in the communist regime that was not abandoned after 1989. The Museum of the SNU is, to a certain extent, still a political institution, especially as a memory keeper and guardian of correct interpretation of this key component of the Slovak national narrative. The official interpretation of the SNU has strong political connotations. In 2007, Slovak Prime Minister Róbert Fico explained the importance of the SNU in the following terms, the “Slovak National Uprising is the backbone of the modern Slovak history and the government under his lead will not accept any questioning of its importance.” (SME 29. 8. 2007). The Museum of the Slovak National Uprising always had (and still has) closer ties with the state policy of history than the Slovak National Museum - a position which has considerable influence on its functioning.

Notes

- ¹ It was authorized directly by the Emperor Franz Joseph, who also gave this organization a financial donation.
- ² Upper Hungary was the name of northern part of Hungarian Kingdom, more or less the territory of today's Slovakia.
- ³ Assembly of the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia.
- ⁴ This process was especially visible in the field of history, which had to include propagandist exhibitions dedicated to the revolutionary traditions of Slovak folk or Slovakia in socialist Czechoslovakia.

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Annex table, Slovakia

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
Czech National Museum	1820	1818	Aristocrat till 1840, Civil society till 1934, Parliament till today	Private association till 1934, State till today	Ethnology, Archeology, History, Culture, Natural Sciences	Czech history in European tradition	Czech territory and from prehistory till today, history of the Czechoslovak state	Neorenaissance style, Central Praha
Museum of Slovak Mother	1863 (closed in 1875)	1863	Civil society (Slovak national intelligentsia)	Private association	History, Ethnography, Natural Sciences	National and territorial representation	Slovak nation in history	Classicist style, Central Martin
Slovak National Museum + Slovak Homeland Museum	1928 1930 (one institution 1961)	1895 1924	Civil society till 1948, Parliament till today	Private association till 1948, State till today	Ethnology, Archeology, History, Culture, Natural Sciences	Slovak history and culture in European tradition	Slovak territory from prehistory till today	Functionalist style, Central Martin Neoclassicist style, Central Bratislava (central building of the SNM)

Slovak National Gallery	1950	1948	Parliament	State	Fine Arts	Slovak art	Fine arts on Slovak territory from middle ages till today, works of artists considered Slovak	Baroque style, (former seat of city police), Central Bratislava
Museum of the Slovak National Uprising	1955	1953	Parliament	State	History	Anti-Fascist struggle in Slovak territory	Slovak territory. WWII, anti-fascist struggle (1938-1945) in the European context	Brutalist architecture, Central Banská Bystrica