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STUDIE/ARTICLES

FLUIDITY OF MUSEALITY: EXPERIMENTING IN THE MUSEUM PRACTICE

NIKOLA KRSTOVIĆ

<https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2025-2-1>**ABSTRACT/ABSTRAKT:**

This paper explores the evolving concept of museality through the case study of the project Heritage (in a) Supermarket which, on the other hand, examines the fluid nature of museum objects within interpretative frameworks, challenging traditional museum roles by introducing participatory and performative elements. Through a dual-character narrative and a marketplace-inspired approach, the experiment raises questions about the relation between the professional and the intuitive approach to heritage, heritage commodification, intergenerational conflicts related to heritage, and the role of museums in contemporary society. This study situates the project within broader theoretical discussions on museology, participatory experiences, and the transformation of objects into museum artifacts and vice-versa. It also aims to refer to the underappreciated and neglected term of museality as one of the main concepts of museology as a science and reinterpret it in the context of a metamodern approach.

Proměnlivost muzeality: experimentování v muzejní praxi

Tento článek nahlíží na vývoj konceptu muzeality prostřednictvím případové studie projektu Heritage (in a) Supermarket, který zkoumá proměnlivou povahu muzejních objektů v interpretačních rámcích a zpochybňuje tradiční role muzea

zavedením participativních a performativních prvků. Prostřednictvím dvojího narativu a přístupu inspirovaného trhem experiment nastoluje otázky týkající se vztahu mezi profesionálním a intuitivním přístupem ke kulturnímu dědictví, komodifikace kulturního dědictví, mezigeneračních konfliktů souvisejících s kulturním dědictvím a role muzeí v současné společnosti. Tato studie řadí projekt do sféry širších teoretických diskusí o muzeologii, participativních zkušenostech a proměně objektů v muzejní artefakty a naopak. Klade si také za cíl poukázat na nedoceněný a opomíjený pojem muzealita jako jeden z hlavních konceptů muzeologie jako vědy a reinterpretovat jej v kontextu metamoderního přístupu.

KEYWORDS/KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

*heritage commodification – performative interpretations – museum object – museality – metamodernism
komodifikace kulturního dědictví – performativní interpretace – muzejní objekt – muzealita – metamodernismus*

The experiment: Heritage (in a) Supermarket

The 2016 project *Heritage (in a) Supermarket*¹ held at the Open

¹ KRSTOVIĆ, Nikola and BOGDANOVIĆ, Bojana. *Baš:ti:na (na) rafu (Heritage (in a) Supermarket)*. Sirogojno: The open air museum “Old Village” in Sirogojno, 2015, p. 6.

air museum “Old Village” in Sirogojno challenged conventional museum practices and “old-new” museology theoretical frames by questioning how heritage is valued, interpreted, and consumed. This section examines the projects’ main focuses in order to establish a foundation for further theoretical argue.

Title

The project’s title “Baš:Ti:Na (Na) Rafu”, when broken down into its components in Serbian language, reveals layered meanings related to ownership, identity, and commodification. The Serbian word for “heritage” is *baština* (“Баштина”, in Cyrillic). When broken down syllabically as *baš-ti-na* (баш-ти-на) it produces a playful and layered reinterpretation: *baš* meaning “exactly”, “precisely”, or “only” (The examples would be: “This is exactly what I need / You are the only person missing”, *ti* meaning “you”, and *na* meaning “in”. Together, they suggest the phrase “Exactly – You – In”. Considering that the ideas about market and trade, prices and values of heritage, evaluation and appreciation were the project’s backbone, the word *supermarket* (in English version) appeared as a “proper”. This linguistic nuance sets the stage for an in-depth analysis of its experimental structure and themes. Why? Middle-aged people still remember completely empty shelves in the supermarkets, hyperinflation and

total devaluation of currency during the 1990s in Serbia, while younger generations have grown up mostly in an environment of consumer abundance, albeit marked by credit, interest rates and debts. The older ones remember all of that plus former Yugoslavian period (pre-90s), long lasting socialist experiment whose bright sides were domestic goods on the stores' shelves, travelling around the world, big borderless country, free education and health programs... The basic question for all museum visitors was: what kind of supermarket do they recall or imagine?

That's the reason the catalogue's text starts with provocative remarks regarding post-modern paradigms of shattered metanarratives and global neoliberal philosophy, which tends to relativize all values: *"Everything is for sale! therefore, 'everything has a price'. It is possible to calculate how much we must pay for someone's life, freedom, love, friendship, loyalty, memory, identity ... These claims are disturbing, aren't they? Any 'normal' person would instinctively disagree, believing that certain things are inherently priceless. But most economists might argue otherwise and could even demonstrate such valuations in practice. Perhaps they would replace the noun 'price' with a bit more digestive one – 'value' and your resistance could soften to a certain extent. 'Everything has its value' – now, it does not sound as though everything is for sale or belongs in a marketplace. But let us try not to understand 'market' merely as a place of sale, a supermarket, or a stock exchange. If we replace the concept of market with the word 'compromise' where one value is modified for another, aren't we still trading?"*²

² Ibid, p. 5.

Characters

The project's structure is difficult to label as an exhibition, installation, nor can it be simply described as a concept of living history. It is even difficult, in terms of project planning, to separate its activities. They are often parallel, evolving and frequently improvised. Yet, one could say it is a concept developed to foster the understanding of the relationships of individuals and institution in relation to heritage. Let's begin with the individuals involved. Serbian version of the title, and the word *baština* (broken into *baš-ti-na* – Exactly-You-In) raises the question of *Who the "You" in the title refers to?* The most obvious layer, following the project idea, is based on two characters.

The first character was Ivona, a character who "inherited" the main house in one of the museum households officially recognized as cultural heritage. This "comes to grips" with the notion of inheritance in its broadest sense. The ways in which the character succeeds or fails to distinguish the personal from the public interest, the difference between rights and obligations, the way she understands the position of responsibility in the system of inheritance through daily role-plays and in the first- and third-person interpretations were essential for the development of the project's structure. Furthermore, the character represented a common visitor profile at the Open Air Museum "Old Village" in Sirogojno – one that is often uncritically inclined towards an idealized image of the past and rural life at the turn of the twentieth century.

The other person, Nana (a common nickname for "grandmother" in Serbia), was a woman from the local community. She frequently

served as a museum demonstrator and as the housekeeper of one of the main houses in the museum's craft household. Considering her life experience marked by difficult experiences while being married in Kosovo, and where she lived in family patterns similar to those portrayed in the "Old Village" Museum, she became inspiring and provocative counterpoint to Ivona and her pseudo-contemporary perspectives on the rural life in the past: living memories and real life in village were confronted to false vision of "new age" usages of the past, rurality and heritage.

It's important to emphasize that the real-life backgrounds of "performers" are also quite different. Irena Molnar (32), aka Ivona, holds an MA in ethnology and cultural anthropology from University of Belgrade and Athens. She is the president of an organization dealing with youth rights, drugs-related issues, and is collaborator in several museum programs. Milena (67), aka Nana, is a local woman, and her life story is mostly incorporated into the character's narrative which has been briefly explained. Nevertheless, both maintain strong and genuine connections to the museum and to heritage. Irena (Ivona) embraces a philosophy centered on inventing and renewing heritage, leaning towards experimental, alternative, and informal interpretative tools, while Milena (Nana) is rather for preservation of the objects and presentation in a rather traditional manner. Their interactions reflected tensions inherent in visitors' negotiations of past and present: *"The doing of the visit and the being at the sites, even at places like Beamish where material had been moved to its location rather than being in situ [same as OAM Old Village], were important in providing a 'theatre*

of memory' where remembering and commemoration could not only be done, but also be marked as legitimate and of significance and validity".³ Thus the project created space for heritage interpretations by contrasting generational, ideological, and public-private perspectives that go in accordance with Harrison's dialogical heritage and thinking and doing beyond dichotomies such as culture–nature or mind–matter, that is, to go beyond limits framed by modernity.⁴ It also goes in line with his, and others', ideas that heritage should be understood as something constantly created and recreated, as "a set of attitudes to, and relationships with, the past".⁵

Ivona and Nana were in or around the house every day from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 – 5 p.m. Two scenarios were "official": either Ivona personally inherited the house and came (with her mother, Nana) to spend her summers there, or she had married Nana's son, and the family inherited the house.

The division of the house into two sides (west of the hearth – continuously renewed part, and east of the hearth – remaining an "old" museum section) reflected many of the contrasts between the two main characters: generational and ideological gaps, differences in class affiliation, attitudes towards traditions and past, and, most significantly, the difference between inheritance and heritage, and gap between personal and collective approach to heritage. These symbolic divisions were mirrored in characters' daily routines, activities, and conversations, allowing them to inhabit roles while simultaneously integrating their personal identities into the performances.

³ SMITH, Laurajane. *Uses of Heritage*. New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 235.

⁴ HARRISON, Rodney. *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 240 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.



Fig. 1: Ivona and Nana, the first week of their role-play setting. Ivona has already made some changes in the house interior: an armchair, (fictional) family portrait photo (between the characters), diverse fruits at the coffee table, black (Turkish) coffee porcelain cups, even the bookshelf with the empowering titles (mostly fiction). The setting is (still) discreet, yet intentionally curated, to make a visual innuendo of the changes to follow. Photo: Milica Šolajić / The open air museum "Old Village" in Sirogojno

So, the platform was created and characters and even visitors could initiate numerous topics. Furthermore, switching between different models of living history (role-play, first- or third-person interpretations, sometimes even reenactment of elements of life of one or other) the characters performed every day during the summer of 2016. Yet it wasn't only performative. The younger character "enthusiastically" redecorated west half of the house space, while Nana was in charge for maintaining the traditional aesthetic. Over the time, the living history methodologies evolved into more experimental forms that museum professionals began mocking as "reality show-ing". As more (new) "reality" appeared, more social and cultural anthropology experiment tone of the project started to reveal itself.

Rearranging the main house. And perspectives...

Ivona began rearranging the traditional interior setting according her "own needs" and "ideas". During the process, she continuously explained the reasons of her choices to Nana and to visitors. The differences were reflected not only in their performances but also in the appearance and atmosphere of their living spaces. Ivona's "half" of the house appeared quite different from Nana's "half", but also distinctly different from what should museum visitors expect. Ivona purchased some of the things in the cheap Chinese stores, some dishes in specialized stores, furniture and house decorations at flea-markets, food supplies from supermarkets. Not rarely, Irena contributed her own belongings to "sophisticate

Ivona's interior": books, magazines, exercise equipment, cutlery, decorations.

Access of new elements meant that some "old" artefacts had to be "thrown away". In fact majority of these objects were stored in the depot following the museum procedures. But, few were selected to continue the narrative from the title: they were displayed in the museum's shop being labeled as "old enough to end up in a museum". As the transformation of the house interior progressed, the characters began to focus on themes such as the way of living in the (fictional) past and present, what should be considered as commodities, life conditions improvements – mostly how the changing the habitat influence the inhabitants. But, as soon as Ivona's part of the house visibly diverged from Nana's, more socially profound themes emerged portraying generational and even ideological gaps: roles of genders, position of children in family, domestic violence, employment opportunities. Actually, these themes reflected the same debates the society deals with nowadays: public policies and politics in general, social values and their changes, connections between past and present, corruption etc. During a discussion about the difference between the values back then and nowadays, Ivona and Nana started the charity action – organized in advance with the local humanitarians – that raised quite decent funds for the local hospital's maternity department. Topics inspired by the action, such as planning family, maternity leave, parenthood and adoption, were very inspiring and discussed not only by Ivona and Nana. Visitors became actively involved, often aligning themselves with one character or the other, or navigating between the diverse values. It frequently happened

that visiting family or a group mirrored the same ideological or intergenerational divides represented by two characters.

Being often present in order to document performative aspects as much as possible, curators engaged in these discussions, sometimes incognito, to moderate or facilitate the debates. Audience participation and interaction with the characters is central and vital to the project because its experimental nature underscores the museum's potential as a space for dialogue rather than imposing singular, and often authoritative, interpretations: *"It is prompting the museum sector to revisit the museum space and question its identity, role, and social worth. Encouraging community participation in museum activity is often linked to the idea of democratizing history and the museum space. It is linked with bringing in new voices, new histories, and new people – an approach that is challenging the established authority of the curatorial and research expertise of museum staff"*.⁶

Through the adaptive reinterpretation of the half of the main house's interior which is also, worth to be mentioned, the part of the museum permanent exhibition, the Irena's character reacted to the visitors' feedbacks, sometimes embracing their inputs, sometimes distancing from her own vision of functions and behavior patterns. At the same time, she kept a personal diary to document her experiences (both as Irena and Ivona) in this fluid simulacrum, and daily evaluates her own views and visitors' attitudes. The entire concept structure explored the limits of compromise of heritage values commodification and the roles and possibilities of museum

in consumerist environment where "Everything is on sale".

"Up to my eyeball in heritage" – Media criticism

It is important to remember that the character of Ivona is pre-developed more than the character of Nana, not only in psychological realms, but also in terms of media exposure. This disparity reflected the general superficiality of media coverage of any phenomena, usage of stereotypes and quick sensationalist information. From its inception, the design of the *Heritage (in a) Supermarket* addressed the ways media select, transmit and deviate information. That critical stance is recognizable in project's visual designs and directly refers to the most popular media network with national coverage "TV Pink". By employing its specific magenta color and parodying its small-stain TV logo for the project's catalogue cover, the idea was to be both ironical and auto-ironical. "Pink magnifying glasses" are the tool for distorting past and history, social and human interactions into simplified, banal, and even bizarre narratives. In order to create the new values museum must use its own tool to start the debate about these narratives.

Irena gave an interview for a local weekly magazine as Ivona, "clarifying" her position in the museum and in the project. It was tendentious role-play or calculated "abuse" of the character for the purpose of the public "values (product) placement": Ivona's relatively well-educated and her intentions are best. However, during the interview, her logic (deliberately) faltered, her knowledge appeared as suspicious one, her good intentions were overshadowed by her consumerist impulse. The best way to illustrate this position is to quote some parts

⁶ CROOKE, Elisabeth. Museums and Community. In: MACDONALD, Sharon (ed.). *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006, p. 183.

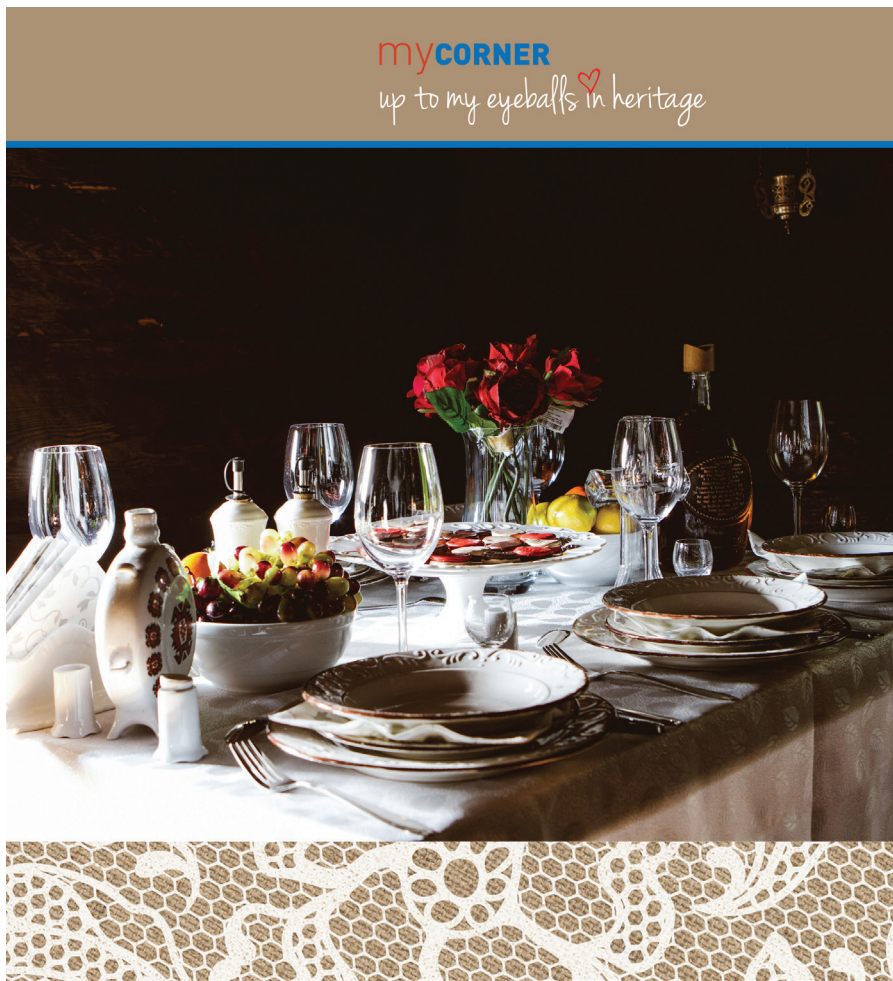


Fig. 2: The photo from the column “My Corner” in the Weekly Magazine with several images illustrating the changes Ivona made in the house. The table setting for the Family Saint Protector’s Day (“Slava” – UNESCO Intangible heritage) is decorated by the newly bought items – none of them belongs to the authentic table set up that the Museum tries to represent. Photo: Milica Šolajić / The open air museum “Old Village” in Sirogojno

preservation expertise thereby positioning herself in a grey area between aspirations and legitimacy, rights and obligations. The Irena’s character was actually further developed through media criticism highlighting how heritage and history are often sensationalized. A fictionalized yet plausible interview’s scenario echoed broader concerns about representations of past and superficial historical narratives. Moreover, following Peter Fowler’s “when we have discovered and revamped a past, it is never what it was or even what we thought it was going to be. Our mere intervention transmutes it”,⁷ one can come exactly in the zone where museum mission is coming to its best. Common places shouldn’t be forgotten – museums hold a unique position of being trusted, unlike the government or media, at least in Serbia. Yet, during the *Heritage (in a) Supermarket* the “absence” of overt museum authority paradoxically represented the most profound museum presence. It was up to the characters and visitors to discuss diverse topics in societies of past and present. The process of how they did so was far more important than conclusions they offered.

Real museum – Museum Shop

One of the project’s most provocative elements is the transformation of discarded objects into high-priced museum artifacts. Unexpectedly for visitors, it was in the form of glass-case exhibition located in the Museum Shop where, expectedly, visitors could buy replicas of the traditional crafts’ products and souvenirs. Selected artifacts removed from the house through Ivona’s rearrangements are labeled, displayed, and assigned deliberately exaggerated market

⁷ FOWLER, Peter. *The past in contemporary society*. London: Routledge, 1992, p. 5.

of her interview, annotated with [F] to indicate problematic claims. In defining her position after “inheriting the heritage” she stated: “I’m fascinated by the idea that in the past, people lived healthy[F] and long[F] lives and had the knowledge that we lack today; everything was quieter, more pleasant [F], people respected and revered each other more – in a word, there was order in everything [F].” When asked: “You’ve already turned one part of the kitchen/house into a small corner for pleasure and leisure?”, Ivona replied: “That’s right! This is my vision, my perception of antiquities. If we add a little something new, something of our own, every space becomes unique. I found some things

in the house – the old photos and such – and some of them I bought...” To the question: “Since you spend the summer months here and slowly adapt the house to your own modern needs, do you ask experts for advice, instructions?”, she answers: “Well, no [...] I think it’s more about feeling, a personal sense of belonging to something greater, a kind of heritage and wider culture [...] I think I carry that knowledge inside me, that sense of responsibility and duty. And frankly, private heritage is a private matter, isn’t it? What I’m trying to do is to enrich and modernize it, to refresh and preserve it...”

So, the character assigned herself a questionable level of heritage



Fig. 3: The project's Heritage (in a) Supermarket catalogue cover in Serbian Cyrillic: the background is in magenta (Media mockery), the golden leaves letters with the bar-code referring to the project's title. Photo: Milica Šolajić / The open air museum "Old Village" in Sirogojno

price of each item. As it was by far higher than the similar or even identical items that could be regularly purchased in the shop, the question of values and prices was opened: Does value correspond to price? How the object's biography enhances the value of the object? Can institutionalized heritage be priced, or is it inherently priceless?

Making visitors intentionally discomfort by the presence of the museum artefacts on "sale" in the Museum Shop was balanced by a tongue-in-check disclaimer: "All figures mentioned in the shop or exhibition catalogue of Heritage (in a) Supermarket that could be connected with potential price tagging of Ethnographical collection's artifacts of the Open Air Museum Old Village are calculated based on the formula: the age of artifacts multiplied by salaries of those in charge for them divided by total number of collection artifacts." This pseudo-economic disclaimer is in line with the Kirshenblatt-Gimblett doubts whether heritage is for sale, engaging with economic and ideological perspectives on valuation.¹⁰

Its purposes of education and promotion of the museum mission and are authors' and curators' expression. Also, connection to the media and TV station(s) was accented by the ironic note of the exhibition (and project) catalogue: "Any similarity to popular media or real creatures that walk, fly or grovel on this planet is purely accidental and has no intention to offend or belittle anyone. The text as well as the whole content of this publication is aimed for and adjusted to all ages, genders, social and economic classes, races and ethnicities, professions, confessions. However, it's not recommended for those with

values. This staging prompted visitors to question how cultural value is constructed but also underscored the tension between authenticity, commodification, and institutional authority. It also mocks the relativization of the idea: "To the degree that they operate in the public interest and with public funds, museums have a responsibility to their 'product'".⁸ In the visually overwhelming environment – with signs shouting *Sale!* and *Discount!* – there were eight white museum cubes with the glass boxes above with the authentic museum exhibits. The items were

now presented with complete curatorial care: labels that place artifacts into historical contexts of the crafts or trades, personalized by photos of manufacturers, biography of the object, followed with the inventory number assigned in the Ethnographic collection of the Museum. Ivona's "garbage" became labelled following the museum standards. This shifting role of objects within and outside museum spaces is central to the project, aligning with Hein's notion of multiple object meanings.⁹ The only and tiny "distraction" in this neat exhibition setting was a surreal

⁸ KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Oakland: University of California Press, 1998, p. 171.

⁹ HEIN, Hilde S. *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective*. Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2000, p. 32.

¹⁰ KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Oakland: University of California Press, 1998, p. 149.



Fig. 4: The detail from the Museum Shop (the first set up) and the exhibition of eight museum objects from the ethnographic collection that Ivona “has discarded during the process of house renovation”. The detail of the socks (image from the project’s catalogue) representing the “biography of the object and the overinflated fictional price”. The price is also visible at the bottom of the exhibit’s label in yellow. Photo: Milica Šolajić / The open air museum “Old Village” in Sirogojno

thin nerves when it comes to pseudo-economic/financial games, suspicious ethics, or those overly comfortable with mixing light entertainment and culture.”

**Theory (in a) heritage
A while after the experiment
ended**

“There is, really, no such thing as heritage.”¹¹ Aware of the fact that this statement being decontextualized, one might say – believe me on this – there is no such thing as love or air, either. They “can factually be identified as” a combination of cheesy gestures, emotional attachment, or surge of oxytocin in case of love, or a bit of nitrogen, oxygen and pinch of argon and carbon dioxide in case of air. Heritage, much like love or air, can be either undetectable or overwhelming, depending on discourse(s). Like almost everything around us. The issue with heritage – or, more precisely, with remembering – is that it must always be in the process of production. Similar

applies to the delayed analyses of a heritage project – new (post-project) knowledge can emerge that did not exist originally during the project production. Back then it was intuitive (professional) skill. Now it has the characteristics of creation of new layers of knowledge similar to adding new layers of meanings during remembering.

Let us begin the discussion from a personal, yet professionally articulated, standpoint. A notable comment made during a conference on future of heritage in Paris stated: “You placed dialogue as the central activity of the museum project”.¹² This observation underscored a broader conversation at the event, where it was discussed that the projects based on such principles position the entire institution as both an activist and an agent of debate. Later that year, an

additional layer appeared. During the completely different research fellowship program – *Museum OFF Boundaries*,¹³ conducted at Colonial Williamsburg (Virginia, USA) – the *Heritage (in a) Supermarket* was presented to local professionals. It became apparent that its methodology and conceptual framework closely resembles the concept of *devised theatre* due to its incorporation of participatory performances. Interestingly, neither the creators nor the participants had previously considered the terminology or the conceptual parallels. These principals resulted in the paper for ICOM-ICOFOM conference, again in Paris during 2018.¹⁴

11 SMITH, Laurajane. *Uses of Heritage*. New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 11.

12 Mark O’Neil’s comment after the presentation *Heritage as Act(ion): Inevitable challenge to the public adherence*, Culturalbase Project (Horizon 2020) Conference *Which museums for the European heritage for 21st century?*, the Institute for the advance studies, Paris, February 2017. During the same project conference event, the lecture *Heritage and Realities: Curatorial shaping of the world with the Heritage [in a] Supermarket* as a focal point was held to the Ph.D. heritage students of Sorbonne 1 in Paris.

13 The paper is a result of a month-long research project granted through the fellowship of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and EXARC. Article on web site: KRSTOVIĆ, Nikola. *History in Motion*. Online. *EXARC Journal*. 2018, no. 2. Available from: <https://exarc.net/issue-2018-2/aom/history-motion-colonial-williamsburg>. [accessed 2025-05-20].

14 KRSTOVIĆ, Nikola. *Museums ‘off’ boundaries. Museums through devised theatre, heritage as contemplative performance*. In: GARCIN-MARROU, Flore; MAIRESSE, Françoise and MOUTON-REZZOUK, Aurelie (eds.). *Des lieux pour penser: musées, bibliothèques, théâtres*. Paris: ICOM-ICOFOM, 2018, pp. 186–192.

East of West

In light of the researches that have been conducted in Bratislava and Krakow during 2024, which focused on the so called East European scientific school of museology, I revisited to project again – this time from the different perspective. There's little doubt that the theoretical foundation developed from Stránský's notion of museality on the one hand, and ideological framework that existed prior to 1989 on the other hand, are still reflected in the principals of heritage protection. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, these are still reflected in the heritage professionals' education. By placing museum artefacts into starting point of analysis, we may dive deeper into the concept of museality and its potentially neglected possibilities. For example, a pair of knitted socks produced at the end of 19th century had rarely been displayed until they were selected as one of the exhibited artifacts "for sale" in the Museum Shop at the "Old Village". Prior to this, they were mostly stored in the museum depot, due to unsuitable conditions for permanent exhibiting in the open-air museum environment. The same applies to all the items in the Museum Shop exhibition during the project *Heritage (in a) Supermarket*. These socks are part of the museum's ethnographic collection from the mid-1980s. Their provenance is well documented: originally they were part of the dowry of a local bride and they remained as a family property until the museum acquisition. Being musealized – included in the museum collection – they became the source of inspiration for the design of highly successful Sirogojno village knitting production which products were exported globally until early

1990s.¹⁵ There are several reasons to justify their institutional musealization: *aesthetic* – namely the pattern, colors, and attention to details; *technical* – craftsmanship, distinctive knitting techniques employed; *historical* – the unusually early production date for a knitted accessory, along with the clear biography of the object; and, probably the most important, *social* – the socks are a symbol of a traditional customs, family values and relations, as well as transformations of culture and everyday life of the village throughout the 20th century.

Museality – a neologism characteristic of what is often referred to as the East European school of museology, merits renewed examination in contemporary contexts. The values ascribed to museum objects, and to heritage more broadly, have been significantly discussed and redefined in recent decades, as museums have shifted from static repositories of artifacts to dynamic spaces of engagement.

As Hilde Hein suggests, the meaning of objects is shaped through intersubjective experience rather than by inherent value. Museums nowadays are less focused on objects themselves and more on their interpretative presentation, meaning to whom they are *speaking*, and, more important *how* and *why*. Hein further states: "*History museums strive to 'recreate' the past in the idiom accessible to the present. But accessibility itself is a matter of interpretation. Today it is understood affectively and empathically, as well as cognitively and physically, and is ment to extend democratically to all segments of public.*"¹⁶ However, the

15 BOGDANOVIĆ, Bojana. *Tradicija kao simbolički resurs. Modna produkcija Sirogojno stil*. Sirogojno: Muzej na otvorenom „Staro selo“, 2016.

16 HEIN, Hilde S. *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective*. Washington:

subtle line may be easily crossed raising the issue of presentism¹⁷ which could, in its radical forms, undermine the very foundations of historical relevance of/and heritage protection.

When consulting the foundational concepts of East European museology and museum theory, the first names under the the spotlight Zbyněk Z. Stránský and Wojciech Głuźniński with their theoretical postulates followed by (or being contemporary to) Georges Henry Rivière's practical, and afterwards, theoretical solutions. Stránský defined museology as the science concerned with special relation between man to reality¹⁸ – let's add through memory and museum as an idea, not necessarily institution. Głuźniński developed this idea further advocating the conceptual distinction between the museum as an idea and the museum as an institution.¹⁹ Despite their different emphases both scholars broadly agreed on the notion of museality as a set of values associated with the (museum / heritage) object.

In quoting what now appears to be a quite progressive in its (and our) time – "*Museality: the value of a sense-specific aspect of reality*"²⁰ that is so cognitive and valuable to society that it is in the objective

Smithsonian Books, 2000, p. 33.

17 BISHOP, Claire. *Radical Museology*. London: Koenig Books, 2013, pp. 13–14. Referring to the ideas elaborated in SMITH, Terry. Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity. *Critical Inquiry*. 2006, vol. 32, no. 4 (Summer 2006), pp. 681–707; or OSBORNE, Peter. *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. London and New York: Verso, 2013.

18 STRÁNSKÝ, Zbyněk Z. Temelji opće muzeologije. In: BAUER, Antun (ed.). *Muzeologija*. 1970, no. 8, pp. 37–74.

19 GLUŹIŃSKI, Wojciech. *Osnove muzeologije*. Beograd: Muzej nauke i tehnike, 2023. (From the original: GLUŹIŃSKI, Wojciech. *W podstav muzeologii*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1980.); or GAJEWSKA-PROROK, Elżbieta. Wojciech Antoni Janusz Gluźniński (1922–2017). In: *Muzealnictwo*. 2017, vol. 58, pp. 292–295.

20 This term will be the subject of the further argument, later in text.

common interest to preserve its bearer against the nature of change and decay and apply them in terms of this new quality in scientific knowledge and culture”²¹ – Jan Dolák comments: “If we were to adopt this ambitious concept, then no theory of protecting any kind of heritage would be needed. Bratislava Castle and Lake Baikal also have their museality, so it is not just three-dimensional items”.²² If expanded to performative arts or intangible heritage, it is not about the items at all. Dolák continues by referring to Pavel Šopák who claims “the core of the museum phenomenon is museality, a specific quality that is the result of an intellectually-reactive reflection on an item and its contextual transposition. The process of musealization itself is key”.²³ One might, surely, question the term *item*. Or broaden the discussion by asking why museality is limited to the museum phenomenon, when it could logically be applied to anything element of heritage or memory. Actually, such discussion has had its ups and downs over last forty years.²⁴ For the sake of clarity and practicality, we might agree that the museum is the most effective laboratory for testing the hypothesis – museality is a specific

quality that is the result of an intellectually-reactive reflection on an item and its contextual transposition.

The “specific quality” might be challenging part due to its singular form – were museum practices managed like banking product lines, this *specific quality* might be reduced to a fix percentage of something absolute. I’ll illustrate this with an example of my colleague Milan Popadić who like to “bother” our students with the quality of the chocolate they eat:²⁵ Chocolate is considered chocolate only if it contains certain amount of cocoa in it. But these percentages vary in different parts of the world. And yet, the chocolate museums exist all around the globe and I feel confident claiming the percentage of cocoa isn’t the main criteria for their establishment and existence.

This leads us to the second part of the hypothesis: “intellectually-reactive reflection on an item and its contextual transposition.” Let’s just briefly go over the authority. It is important to recognize the role of societies and communities, shareholders and constituencies and their involvement in all stages of museum work through participation and co-creation. Nevertheless, at its core, this reflection demands the expertise and competences of museum professionals. Historical examples exist where the amateurs have made significant contribution while some professionals remained confined within sterile, overly academic mindsets. That is either institutional past or institutional condition where the critical studies or good polices can help. Conversely, generations of museum professionals have increasingly embraced diverse influences from civil or private sectors, expanding

their fields of expertise mostly by adopting the skills and knowledge about mediation, communication, and use of interpretative tools.²⁶ With recognizing the existence of creative and enthusiastic professionals we return to the concepts of *reflection* and *contextual transportation*. Both terms suggest a process through which the quality of museality can be recognized, or developed in a particular object (or phenomena). That is why Šopák, among others, claim that “musealization is key”.

The medical status of museality

The status of museality is, of course, a convention, merely a moment within the constant evaluation of the object. It’s similar to a group of doctors telling you at a medical systematic check-up that you’re healthy at a doorstep of your adulthood. That statement holds at that particular moment and in front of that group of competent people. Yet, health itself is also a personal, expert-driven, and even political or ideological construct. The thing is, in the case of the medical examination, your health status is verified with the signature and stamp, and by those who acquired legitimacy for the claim through their education and mandate. You can’t be healthy based on the opinion of a neighbor, a city council, or even a thousand doctors at a conference lacking the specific procedural framework. The same logic applies to the status of museality: the sets of procedures and specific contexts are necessary. Thus, a phenomenon becomes musealized by undergoing initial research (could last for ages), being removed from its original context (not necessarily physical) to the museum, and crucially by acquiring foundational documentation that

21 STRÁNSKÝ, Zbyněk Z. *Úvod do studia muzeologie*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1984, p. 39. According to: DOLÁK, Jan. *Museology and its theory*. Online. Brno: Technical museum in Brno, 2022, pp. 36. Available from: https://www.tnbrno.cz/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Museology-and-Its-Theory_e_book.pdf. [accessed 2025-05-20].

22 Ibidem.

23 ŠOPÁK, Pavel. Co je muzeologie (What is museology)? In: KNAPÍK, Jiří; VÁHALA, David; OLSOVSKÝ, Jaromír and ŠOPÁK, Pavel (eds.). *Vademecum of museology*. Opava: Slezská univerzita v Opavě, 2012. pp. 9–10. According to: DOLÁK, Jan. *Museology and its theory*. Online. Brno: Technical museum in Brno, 2022, pp. 36. Available from: https://www.tnbrno.cz/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Museology-and-Its-Theory_e_book.pdf. [accessed 2025-05-20].

24 ŠOLA, Tomislav S. *Mnemosophy. An essay on science of public memory*. Zagreb: European Heritage Association, 2015; or ŠOLA, Tomislav. *Heritology: A contribution to a possible definition of museology*. Online. In: *ICOFOM symposium “Interdisciplinarity in Museology”*. Paris, 1982. Available from: <https://www.heritology.com/index2.html>. [accessed 2025-05-22].

25 POPADIĆ, Milan. *Kako da razgovaramo sa spomenicima?* Beograd: Univerzitet u Beogradu, Filozofski fakultet (Centar za muzeologiju i heritologiju), 2025, p. 29.

26 KRSTOVIĆ, Nikola. *Devet života kustosa. Od muzeologije do muzeografije*. Beograd: Centar za muzeologiju i heritologiju, 2022, pp. 91–103.

justifies its place among other collections' items. Being musealized doesn't mean the museality is achieved in its totality – there is no such thing as absolute museality, just as there isn't such a thing as absolute health, or 100% cocoa chocolate. This reflection brings us back to the theoretical proposal by Smith. Surely, there is such thing as heritage, we just constantly negotiate the specific quality. We might claim we are neither healthy or ill, we are just moving from the (verified) relative position towards one of the binary codes. The status, though verified at one point, actually remains fluid, shaped by context, interpretation and institutional authority.

As Šopák mentioned – musealization is the key. But what kind of musealization? What must be a holistic approach in theory of museum as an idea, in reality of museum as an institution is verification that some of components of museality construct are in place. The process has been therefore criticized as selective and ideological. In many cases, institutional musealization concludes with the object's entry into museum collection – arguably the fate of most objects. In rare instances, musealization continues through re-evaluation and reinterpretation within performative events, such as commemorations, significant anniversaries, specialized exhibitions. Some are organically enhanced by interest and involvement of the communities facilitated by creative contexts, and some are artificially boosted or strategically supplemented to increase institutional portfolio through massive visitor numbers or soft power in cultural diplomacy.

More issues are open when the process of musealization is analyzed solely from the institutional perspective, or when there's an aim

to be defined through the lenses of culturology, sociology, psychology, political science, economics, or area studies. Similarly, the concept of health can be viewed from multiple observation and research points – how the hospitals operate, historical development of drugs, the culture of health... All these perspectives are valuable when there's medical sciences and the following practice. But, if we consider the processes of musealization from within museology as a (potentially autonomous) scientific discipline, it may offer a clearer insight into the theoretical and practical development of effective methodologies about why and how we remember as societies. This shift in perspective might relocate the debates focused solely on the museum as an institution with its role in the society, or heritage as a construct, and surpass the usual binaries of modern – post(-) modern or internal of traditional museology – new / critical / reflexive / radical museology. To where, one might ask?

Recalling the *Heritage (in a Supermarket's* shifts in objects' meanings and values evoke Hein's: "As texts, objects are notoriously polyvalent and less rigidly fixed than language with semiotic systems. Moreover, unlike language, things require force to be excised from one or another functional or natural environment where a particular significance is to be made evident. They are not arbitrarily constructed de novo out of neutral shapes or sounds but have an antecedent material life in a material world with prior meaningful histories."²⁷ So, even being the testimonies of the physical realities, the museum objects used in the project were also the tools for creation a certain mental pathways. It

was actually a simulation of the provocative shift: from everyday items to a symbolic and semiotic representation of a past as a part of museum collection, and then "desacralised" to mundane, almost generic "product" in a shop. New levels of musealization were not exclusively created by the objects themselves, but by the way people respond to and interact with them as a symbol. Although the general public may not use the term musealization or musealia, they believe in the power of institution to recognize the power of objects and use it in certain ways. Hein is offering the argument again: "The meaning of objects oscillates wildly from user to observer and between distinct communities, regardless of museum's endeavors to exert a standardizing control... Elevated from the one hand to the status of 'things that tell a story', rather than secondary reinforcement of verbal documents, the objects are demoted on the other hand from 'realia' to 'media', a degradation from intrinsic to instrumental value."²⁸ This observation holds true unless the process itself becomes a form of positive manipulation, wherein the boundaries between instrumental and intrinsic value are intentionally blurred in order to serve a broader purpose. In this context, performative aspects of the project cease to be merely interpretative within the field of museography, and enter the domain of museology, functioning almost as a laboratory experiment on musealization and museality.

There were other objects used in the project performative aspects that were not institutionally musealized, but were nonetheless employed by Ivonaa to "redecorate" the house. These items were also researched, selected, and documented to some extent. While they might be considered props,

²⁷ HEIN, Hilde S. *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective*. Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2000, p. 35.

²⁸ Ibidem.

they were also extracted from physical reality of contemporary everyday life, in much the same way as museum objects themselves. This seems to be a fitting moment to reflect on the musealization and its purpose. If we favor the narrative of instrumentalisation, then the entire project might be seen as a staged therapy-like sessions focused on the importance of memory in peoples' lives. Conversely, if we adhere to the narrative of intrinsic values, we can rely on the idea of museum objects (musealia) as powerful testimonies of diverse realities. Taken together, these perspectives resonate with François Mairesse's reflections on museology (translated from French to English by the author of this paper) in the book *Extended Museum in Its Milieu*: "If the museology is a science, then the museum represent the laboratory that enables us to understand the reality through the study of its fragments. Contrary to the general perception that reduce the museum to the collection of objects, this stand isn't about the representation of nice objects, but rather the desire to understand their essence. In that sense, the act of musealisation puts the museum in the perspective of place of knowledge and research far beyond a place of pleasure or temple..."²⁹

Though being general, Mairesse's reflections highlight two important aspects. The first one is of museology as science and museum as a laboratory where the study of fragments enables understanding of the reality. Yet, it leaves us with an open question – what reality? If we equalize the reality with the life itself, the answer isn't more

²⁹ MAIRESSE, Françoise. Sur trois néologismes liés aux Musées: Muséal, Muséalite, Muséalisation. In: FOLGA-JANUSZEWSKA, Dorota (ed.). *Extended museum in its milieu*. Muzeologia, Tom 18. Warsaw: Universitas, National Committee ICOM Poland, Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów, 2018, p. 43.

promising: "Perfection, in the form of the ambition of objectivity, and eternity, through the mechanism of preservation, are two legitimate ambitions of the museum and two inevitable sources of frustration. Only life is perfect, and it is nothing other than the ironic fact that at the end of the museum's development path lies the museum-life."³⁰ What is chemistry without its laboratories? Does it still exist as a science?

The second is often exaggerated distinction between the roles of the museum. In the post(-)modern atmosphere – both the notions of research and knowledge – as well as the museum as temple (with its quasi-religious, reverential character) and as a site of pleasure (associated with consumerist battle for clients) have been challenged. Yet, the origin of these doubts mostly originate outside the museum/museology sphere. The 2022 ICOM's Museum Definition adopted as a consequence of a highly participatory involvement of museum professionals, doesn't hesitate to emphasize the terms research, knowledge, pleasure. Both modern and post(-)modern discussions could be observed as ideological perspectives that penetrated the museum / museology world. No wonders there. However, they have not significantly changed the museum as an idea concept, rather just the ways the institution operates and, consequently, its social purpose. That aligns closely with Głuziński's thoughts what museology is about.³¹ When his countryman, Piotr Piotrowski presented the idea of *Critical*

³⁰ ŠOLA, Tomislav. *Prema totalnom muzeju*. Beograd: Centar za muzeologiju i heritologiju Filozofskog fakulteta, 2011, p. 62.

³¹ GLUZIŃSKI, Wojciech. *Osnove muzeologije*. Beograd: Muzej nauke i tehnike, 2023, p. 236. (Translated from the original: GLUZIŃSKI, Wojciech. *W podstaw muzeologii*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1980).

*museum*³² the only component applies he seemed to challenge was the selection of objects. Everything else concerns the museum's positioning in the society, the role in sparking the public debate about sensitive social and political issues of a time, representation and the external image of the institution, all rounded up in the museum-as-a-forum concept. That trajectory was established and developed decades earlier – both theoretically and practically – by Georges Henry Rivière in his *Nouvelle Muséologie*, yet it was regrettably trivialized in Peter Vergo's Introduction to *New Museology*.³³

Fluidity of the metaxy-processes

We might conclude that the modern metanarratives – post(-) modern bricolage conflict surrounding museums, museology, heritage, and memory is the one taking place in the realms of narratives production – more precisely, within other disciplines or epistemological centers, rather than within museology itself (assuming we acknowledge its legitimacy all). Yet, if we agree to "play the game" within these binary (or even trinary, perhaps quandary) codes – assuming such codes are still relevant – it may be worthwhile and trustworthy to think in meta-like perspective again. Following this perspective, and considering the conceptual shifts of objects' meanings and values in the *Heritage (in a) Supermarket*, which arguably reflects the "natural" biography of things in real life, we may be speaking of „a sensibility that stresses

³² PIOTROWSKI, Piotr. *Krytyczki muzeji*. Beograd: Centar za muzeologiju i heritologiju i Evropa Nostra Srbija, 2013.

³³ KRSTOVIĆ, Nikola. Colonizing Knowledge: New Museology as Museology of News. *Prace Etnograficzne: Revisiting new museology*. 2020, vol. 48, no. 2, 2020, pp. 125–139.

engagement, affect, and storytelling through ‘ironic sincerity’³⁴. In an effort to comprehend the post-post(-)modern condition of the generations that was born and raised after post(-)modern pastiche, deconstruction, criticality, contemporaneity, cultural theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker introduced the concept of metamodernism in their 2010 essay *Notes on Metamodernism*.³⁵ Here, he prefix *meta* does not refer to a reflective stance or repeated rumination, but to Plato’s *metaxy*, which denotes a movement *between* (meta) opposite poles as well as beyond (meta) them making thus the binary codes (modernism-post(-)modernism) insufficient for the articulation. Vermeulen and van den Akker describe *meta* as “an oscillation, a swinging or swaying with and between future, present and past, here and there and somewhere; with and between ideals, mindsets, and positions. It is influenced by estimations of the past, imbued by experiences of the present, yet also inspired by expectations of the future. It takes into account and affect the here, but also the there, and what might or might not happen elsewhere. It is convinced it believes in one system or structure or sensibility, but also cannot persuade itself not to believe in its opposite. Indeed, if anything, meta intimates a constant repositioning”.³⁶

34 KOVALOVA, Mariia; ALFOROVA, Zoya; SOKOLYUK, Lyudmyla; CHURSIN, Oleksandr and OBUKH, Liudmyla. The digital evolution of art: current trends in the context of the formation and development of metamodernism. *Amazonia Investiga*. 2022, vol. 11, no. 56, pp. 114–123.

35 TURNER, Luke. Metamodernism: A brief Introduction. Online. In: *Notes on Metamodernism*. January 2015. Available from: <https://www.metamodernism.com/2015/01/12/metamodernism-a-brief-introduction/>. [accessed 2025-05-17].

36 What meta means and does not mean. Online. In: *Notes on Metamodernism*. October 14, 2010. Available from: <https://www.metamodernism.com/2010/10/14/what-meta-means-and-does-not-mean/>. [accessed 2025-05-23].

This resembles some of the more challenging concepts in physics, isn’t it – like, whether the cat is in the box (Schrödinger), or elusive position of an electron within an atom. Troubled by similar existential dilemma museum is constituted from everything everywhere all at once (deliberate reference to Kwan and Scheinert, Daniels’ 2022 film). The puritans could hardly agree claiming there are historical and geographical restrictions That brings us back to the museality and musealization. Museality is institutionally achieved by including the item and its documentation in the constitutive structure of a museum collection. One might use the word *thesaurus*. However, epistemologically, museality remains beyond full grasp, relying instead on an ongoing, constantly performative hermeneutic process. Thus, museality is a utopian concept, making musealization a never-ending process. But, if we include metamodernism’s characteristics into the formula of blurred practice of *Heritage (in a) Supermarket* – neo-romanticism, educated naivete, new sincerity, performativism, erasure, revival of the myth, oscillation, humor, ethics of authenticity, reconstruction, utopian twist, new sensuality³⁷ – the theoretical insights that revive Stránský’s concepts in a fresh light become more comprehensible and even compelling (again).

Moving to... conclusion

Almost all of these characteristics can be traced in the *Heritage (in a) Supermarket* as a whole, but also across its various levels – performance, narrative, marketing, and movement of objects, both physical and metaphorical. On this

37 *Metamodernist // Manifesto*. Online. Available from: <http://www.metamodernism.org/>. [accessed 2025-05-19].

metaphorical level, with museality in mind, the project reveals itself in a distinctly metamodern essence. The object is not what it is or was in any reality, but what it means and represents in the realities of people’s comprehension while it moved from hands to hands and performative and exhibiting modes. I have used the term movement (of object and its meanings and values) few times in this text to describe the importance of dynamic, as the object’s shifting uses constitute further its museality. This construction of museality is inherently performative – ongoing throughout the museum’s engagement with the object, before its institutional musealization and, especially, after this point.

The act of “selling” the object in the Museum Shop raises the question of de-musealization (instrumentalisation) – not as an act of forgetting, but not creating any new (professional or social) connections to the object’s metaphorical or symbolic values. Yet this, too, was part of the game, in line with metamodern characteristics such as erasure, oscillation, but also humor, ethics of authenticity, and even utopian (or dystopian) twist. This doesn’t necessarily mean the object is instrumentalized in the sense Hein warns against; rather, its intrinsic values now lie in discovering new forms of metaphorical sensuality and sincerity. To be remembered and metaphorically evoked, it is not enough for any object (or phenomena) to be merely institutionally musealized. It must swing among the values of the present and the pasts, navigate among the truths and their challenging and denials; to revive, adapt to or create a completely new myth(ology). In a word, to be moved towards its utopian museality.

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the ICOM Serbia Chair (2019–2023). He is currently a member of the advisory boards of couple of national museums in Belgrade and Novi Sad, as well as the member of the state curatorial exam commission appointed by the Ministry of Culture. In 2021 he was a member of the new national museum act working group. He is author of numerous museum exhibitions and projects, scientific articles and two monographs about museums and curatorship. He was also awarded by several international research fellowships in USA, Poland, Slovakia, and France.

Nikola Krstović v posledních osmi letech působí jako docent na Filozofické fakultě Bělehradské univerzity, v Centru pro muzeologii a studium kulturního dědictví. Předmětem jeho odborného zájmu jsou teoretické přístupy v muzeologii,

strategie související s kulturním dědictvím, interpretace kulturního dědictví, muzea a každodenní život. Před svým vstupem na akademickou půdu působil 12 let jako muzejní kurátor, přičemž dosáhl nejvyšší kurátorské hodnosti muzejního poradce. Byl oceněn ICOM Srbsko jako muzejní odborník roku 2016 a později se stal i předsedou ICOM Srbsko (2019–2023). V současné době je členem poradních orgánů několika národních muzeí v Bělehradě a Novém Sadu a také členem státní kurátorské zkušební komise jmenované ministerstvem kultury. V roce 2021 byl členem pracovní skupiny pro nový zákon o muzeích. Je autorem řady muzejních výstav a projektů, vědeckých článků a dvou monografií o muzeích a kurátorství. Získal také několik mezinárodních výzkumných stipendií v USA, Polsku, na Slovensku a ve Francii.



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