Museums as Agents of Memory and Change

Conference

Programme
Abstracts

24–26/04/2019
Tallinn, Tartu / Estonia

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

ESTONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM
The conference is organised by the Estonian National Museum and the University of Tartu, Department of Ethnology

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Kirsti Jõesalu, University of Tartu
Kristel Rattus, Estonian National Museum
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The Estonian History Museum

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I am pleased to welcome all participants in the Museums as Agents of Memory and Change conference. The conference marks the Estonian National Museum’s 59th Annual Conference and it takes place in the museum’s 110th anniversary year.

We are fortunate to join forces with our good partner the memory research group at the Department of Ethnology, University of Tartu, to organise the conference.

Memory and museums have been in a reciprocal relationship since the advent of the museum. In the 3 days of the conference we will analyse different aspects of this relationship from different contexts. We will hear the latest research on how museums influence memory processes around the world and analyse the complexities and interpretations behind remembering – issues that affect millions of museum professionals, researchers and visitors every day. We are happy to announce that the conference has attracted 120 delegates from more than 25 countries.

These questions are also faced by the Estonian National Museum, which has been one of the most important displays of Estonian culture in different eras. The Estonian National Museum was founded in 1909 and the history of the museum bears many similarities in development to other museums in the region.

The Museum is situated in the multi-layered Raadi area, which is a former Baltic German manor complex; it then housed the museum in the 1920s and 1930s, becoming an important national symbol. After WWII the territory of the museum became a Soviet military airbase and the whole area was cut off from the urban space of the city. From the 1990s, after Soviet military forces left Estonia, the area was abandoned and became a deserted socio-psychological wilderness. In 2016 the museum was opened in a new building designed by DGT Architects, called Memory Field, and inspired by the surrounding landscape and its former uses, this bringing together different meanings and perceptions.

The production of new permanent exhibitions triggered a rethinking of the museum’s identity. One of the museum’s goals has been to support a feeling of belonging in the contemporary borderless world, as well as to rephrase traditional national narratives for contemporary needs. The exhibitions show the everyday life of various cultural and social groups throughout the history of settlement. Visibility has been given to the stories and artefacts of common people. The Encounters exhibition deals with Estonian everyday life from first settlers to the present day, while Echo of the Urals looks at the traditional life of Finno-Ugric peoples. Creating these exhibitions brought together hundreds of people from different backgrounds, with their life stories and worldviews, while at the same time allowing the Estonian research community to introduce their newest research results. After 2 years and more than 550 000 visitors, it is now important to analyse the Museum’s role in memory construction.

I would like to thank University of Tartu for cooperating with the Estonian National Museum and welcome you to Estonia on behalf of the Conference Team. Inspiring days are ahead, with open debate, knowledge sharing and fruitful discussion.

Alar Karis
Estonian National Museum Director
Welcome from Ene Kõresaar, 
Associate Professor of Ethnology 
University of Tartu

This conference aims at problematizing the role of museum institutions, museum practitioners and museological representations in dealing with contested pasts in contested present. In an era of rising global demands on history and culture institutions museums are increasingly embedded in the field of (trans/national) politics of memory and heritage, diverse, often disparate group interests, and power relations. While expanding their work from collecting and preserving to supporting, educating and empowering communities, museums negotiate between emotional, ideological, political, and commercial interests. More than ever, dealing with the past is full of impediments and challenges for museums.

This conference tackles with the diversity of responsibilities, roles, practices and challenges of and for museums from three angles.

The first range of questions deal with how museums negotiate politics and policies of memory when dealing with difficult and contested pasts:

what is the role of museums during political transformations; how can museums address legacies of colonialism, dictatorships, genocides, warfare, forced migrations; do museums have a power to break established memory narratives and build new ones; how are museums embedded to global memory culture; how should museums relate to activism?

Another major set of problems to be discussed in this conference touch upon the politics of collection, curation and representation: how to revise collections vis-à-vis changing societies; how to represent inconvenient and conflicting pasts; how to tell stories about the future with collections from the past; what are the limitations and relevance of museum collections and what challenges they present to the curator in making heritage(s) and empower visitors?

Last but least, the conference critically revisits the ideals and practices of participation and collaboration in the museum: what does it really mean to give authority over museum content to the citizen; how to target multiple groups and to discuss complex subjects with visitors; what characterizes the visitor involvement on site; how to successfully encourage debate and find new ways to engage communities; how to assist museum professionals when engaged in tension-creating discourses?

The conference is organized by the museums and memory research group at the Department of Ethnology, University of Tartu, and by the Estonian National Museum on the occasion of the 110th birthday of the ENM. We are happy to welcome an international body of more than a hundred registered participants, academics and museum practitioners from a vast variety of countries to join in discussion over the past, the present and the future of museums in the contested field of history and memory.

Ene Kõresaar
Associate Professor of Ethnology
University of Tartu
**Wednesday, 24/04/2019**

**Location:** Estonian History Museum Maarjamäe History Centre

**15:00 Registration:** Film Museum

**16:00 Opening and Welcome Address:** Cinema and Conference Hall

- **Alar Karis,** Director of the Estonian National Museum
- **Merilin Piipuu,** Ministry of Culture Undersecretary for Cultural Heritage

**16:15–17:30 Keynote 1:** Cinema and Conference Hall

**Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.** Museums and the Politics of History

*Chair Pille Runnel, Estonian National Museum*

**Discussion**

**17:30–19:00 Session 1:** Cinema and Conference Hall

**Panel 1: Memory Regimes I: Breaking Old Narratives**

*Chair Maarja Kaaristo, Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Tartu*

- **Vikki Hawkins.** The Imperial War Museums’ Second World War Gallery Regeneration Project
- **Natalia Romik, Justyna Koszarska-Szulc.** Beyond Autonomy. The Curatorial Struggles Against Contemporary Anti-Semitism. The Case of the Exhibition Estranged. March ‘68 and Its Aftermath
- **Janicke Kernland.** Fiction as a Means to Help Change the Established, Collective Way of Remembering the Past Discussion

**19:00–21:00 Opening Reception at the Estonian History Museum:** Summer Hall

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**Thursday, 25/04/2019**

**Location:** Estonian History Museum Maarjamäe History Centre

**9:00 Registration:** Film Museum

**9:15–11:15 Session 2AB**

**Panel 2A: The “Specific” Past – Global Futures:** Fireplace Hall

*Chair Kristel Rattus, Estonian National Museum*

- **Valeria Pica, Ilenia Atzori.** Remembering and Forgetting: How Memories are Taken for Granted
- **Kirstie Jamieson, Marta Discepoli, Ella Leith.** The Deaf Heritage Collective: Collaboration and Critical Intent
- **Clara de Massol.** The Climate Museum: Preserving the Past and Constructing the Future at a Time of Ecological Catastrophes

**Panel 2B: Involvements and Collaborations:** Cinema and Conference Hall

*Chair Agnes Aljas, Estonian National Museum*

- **Aleksandra Kubica.** Engaging with Difficult Memory about Jews in Collaborative Museum-Making: Museum on Wheels on Tour in Rural Poland
- **Jakub Jareš.** Czech Museums as Agents of Uncontested Memory
- **Alisa Maximova.** Small-Town Local History Museums in Russia: Participation, Agency, and Survival

**Discussion**

**11:15 Coffee Break:** Fireplace Hall and Estonian Film Museum Cafeteria

**11:45–13:45 Session 3AB**

**Panel 3A: Critical Museum and Global Narratives:** Fireplace Hall

*Chair Siobhan Kattago, University of Tartu*

- **Kristin Josvoll, JoAnn DiGeorgio-Lutz.** “Memory Words” and Museums: Promoting Never Again in Post-Conflict Societies, a Look at Guatemala and Bosnia
- **Pin-chia Feng.** Revisiting the Past and Reconfiguring Transformative Changes: “Anne × Ama – Girls Under Fire in WWII” at Taipei’s Ama Museum
- **Margaret Helen Freeman.** “Don’t Touch, I Am Very Monumental”: Museums of American Indian Culture and History as Sites of Ongoing Colonialism
- **Thomas Overdick, Sven Klomp.** “Rum, Sweat, and Tears”. A Change of Perspective in Curating and Displaying Colonial History

**Panel 3B: “Difficult” Collections:** Cinema and Conference Hall

*Chair Kristina Jõekalda, Estonian Academy of Arts*

- **Kersti Tainio.** Old Masters Meet Russian Revolutions
- **Lea Grüter.** Le Musée du Louvre and the Orphan Art Works of Salle 804 – A Lieu de Mémoire in the Discourse of Nazi Looted Art Restitution
- **Anita Ilieva Nikolovska.** Placing Museum Collections in Context: Historical Collections and Their Contemporary Cultural and Social Relevance

**Discussion**
• Marina Valle Noronha. No Longer Artwork
  Discussion

13:45 Lunch: Estonian History Museum Restaurant

14:45–16:45 Session 4AB

Panel 4A: The Politics of Collections, Curation and Representation: Fireplace Hall
  Chair Kirsti Jõesaalu, University of Tartu
  • Kathryn A. Hoffmann. Negotiating Inconvenient Pasts: Repurposed Objects and New Histories in Museums of Anatomy, Anthropology, and Natural History
  • Annika Kirbis. Changing Collections: The Two-Sided Story of ‘Turkish’ Objects in Vienna’s Museums
  • Hannah Wilson. The Materialisation of Sobibór Death Camp: Artefacts, Narratives and Representation
  Discussion

Panel 4B: Museum Practices Workshop: Cinema and Conference Hall
  Chair Mary-Ann Talvistu
  • Jari Harju. Our City, Our History
  • Emelie Höglund. Disarmed by Drama-Methology
  • Lise Johnsen. ‘Museum without Cabinets’
  • Tehmina Goskar, Emmie Kell. Who’s in Charge? Collaborative Leadership and the Democratisation of Curation
  • Nina Robbins. Museological Value Dialogue and Memory Institutions
  Discussion

17:00 Exhibition Tours at the Estonian History Museum (optional)
  Tour 1: Curators’ tour of the My Free Country exhibition. Curator Krista Sarv
  Tour 2: Memorial Walk tour (2 km). Guide Rainer Viiluma
  Tour 3: (In Estonian) Ekskursioon näitusel “Vali paarem minevik”. Guide Anne Lassmann

Friday, 26/04/2019

Location: Estonian National Museum, Tartu

7:30 Bus from Tallinn to Tartu
  The conference bus will leave promptly at 7:30 Friday 26 April from the car park in front of the Viru Hotel and will return to the same place in the evening

10:00 Welcoming Coffee at the Estonian National Museum: by the Jakob Hurt Hall

10:30 Keynote 2: Jakob Hurt Hall
  Silke Arnold-de Simine. Confronting Difficult Pasts – Challenging Museums
  Chair Ene Kõresaar, University of Tartu
  Discussion

11:45 Coffee Break: by the Jakob Hurt Hall

12:15–14:15 Session 5AB

Panel 5A: Memory Regimes II: The Role of a Post-Communist Museum: Jakob Hurt Hall
  Chair Terje Anepaio, Estonian National Museum
  • Maria Kobielska. Mapping the Boom. “New Museums” in Poland as Memory Devices
  • Linara Dovydaitytė. Between Representation and Activism: Museums as Agents in Post-Soviet Memory Culture
  • Olga Zabalueva. Contested Memories Then and Now: The Institutional Regimes of Exhibiting “Difficult Issues”
  • Anna Yanenko. Ukrainian Museums and Soviet History: Remember or Forget? (Experience of the National Kyiv-Pechersk Historical and Cultural Preserve)
  Discussion

Panel 5B: Curators’ Perspectives: Aliise Moora’s Auditorium
  Chair Liisi Jääts, Estonian National Museum
  • Therese Quinn. Urgent Presents, Oppositional Memory Practices and the Preparation of Museum Workers
  • Anu Kannike, Ester Bardone. Memory on the Plate: Museums as Agents of Food Heritage
  • Kristel Rattus. Mediating “Dialogues” at the Estonian National Museum’s Core Exhibition Encounters: Methods and Challenges
  Discussion

14:15 Lunch: Restaurant

15:00 Tours of the Estonian National Museum (optional)
  Tour 1: Curators’ Tour of the Encounters exhibition. Head Curator Kristel Rattus
  Tour 2: Curators’ Tour of the Echo of the Urals exhibition. Curator and Professor of Ethnology at the University of Tartu Art Leete
  Tour 3: Behind the Scenes Museum Tour

18:00 Closing Reception at the Estonian National Museum: Restaurant
  Arrival at Viru Hotel around 22:00
Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is Professor Emerita of Performance Studies at New York University and Chief Curator of the Core Exhibition at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Her books include Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage; Image before My Eyes: A Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland, 1864–1939 (with Lucjan Dobroszycki); They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust (with Mayer Kirshenblatt), winner of two book awards, The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times (with Jonathan Karp), and Anne Frank Unbound: Media, Imagination, Memory (with Jeffrey Shandler), among others.

She was honoured for lifetime achievement by the Foundation for Jewish Culture, received the Mlotek Prize for Yiddish and Yiddish Culture, honorary doctorates from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, University of Haifa, and Indiana University, and the 2015 Marshall Sklare Award for her contribution to the social scientific study of Jewry. She was decorated with the Officer’s Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland for her contribution to POLIN Museum. She was recently elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She serves on Advisory Boards for the Council of American Jewish Museums, Jewish Museum Vienna, Jewish Museum Berlin, and the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow. She also advises on museum and exhibition projects in Lithuania, Ukraine, and Israel.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett
POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Poland)

Museums and the Politics of History

As institutions of public history, museums must navigate a minefield of divergent narratives, stakeholders, and goals. Steering a steady course, independent of political pressure, is an unrelenting challenge, especially in post-Communist Europe. Even when museums are relatively free to chart their own course, the histories they present are not without their politics. How is the politics of history playing out in museums today, especially in light of efforts to legislate what can and cannot be said about the most painful events in a country’s history?
Silke Arnold-de Simine
University of London (UK)

Confronting Difficult Pasts – Challenging Museums

How do we deal with the memory of traumatic violence, loss and death in the twenty-first century? In the aftermath of painful histories and on-going legacies of colonialism, dictatorships, genocides, warfare, forced migrations and (environmental) destruction, it falls to institutions such as museums to shape and consolidate collective narratives and facilitate encounters in which visitors from a wide range of backgrounds can come to terms with these events and their repercussions. Museums provide audiences with liminal and yet safe spaces where this emotionally and ethically fraught memory work can be conducted in a public and communal setting. They generate social practices of mourning in which audiences can come face to face with contested memories of violence, guilt and loss, enabling the opportunity to work towards resilience, restitution and reconciliation.

Silke Arnold-de Simine is Reader in the Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. Her research is located at the interface of museum, memory and media studies with a special interest in collective processes of remembering and commemorating difficult pasts and dissonant heritage and their ethical, political, psychological and aesthetic implications. In her monograph, Mediating Memory in the Museum. Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia (2013), she probes the shifts in exhibiting practices associated with the transformation of historical museums and heritage sites into ‘spaces of memory’ with a particular emphasis on the role of different media and art forms in that process. In 2018 her co-edited volume Picturing the Family: Media, Narrative, Memory has been published with Bloomsbury.
Panel 1: Memory Regimes I: Breaking Old Narratives

Vikki Hawkins
Imperial War Museum (UK)

The Imperial War Museums’ Second World War Gallery Regeneration Project

In 2021, the Imperial War Museum in London will open new Second World War Galleries which will seek to reposition IWM’s traditional remit of Britain and the Empire within a broader, global context. We want to make the story of the Second World War more relevant to twenty first century visitors and deliver a new, international narrative that explains how the war shaped our modern world. Our aim is to create an accessible and engaging space for our visitors by drawing out individual stories from people in diverse communities as they interacted with the bigger picture of the war’s strategic conduct.

However, IWM has not traditionally collected objects from areas such as China, Japan, Russia, India or America, so they have not been represented in a substantial way in our previous Second World War Galleries. This paper will discuss the difficulties of collecting contemporaneous material from across the globe, and the agency of curators in the process of facilitating donations or loans. It will also suggest that despite efforts to build a more international narrative, we anticipate that our core audiences will be expecting the galleries to be focused on the cultural memory of national experiences such as the Blitz, rationing, and the theatres of war in which mainly British troops participated. Therefore this paper will also examine how tensions between national and international narratives will be mitigated through creative design, imagery and language.

Natalia Romik
POLIN Museum (Poland)

Justyna Koszarska-Szulc
POLIN Museum (Poland)

Beyond Autonomy. The Curatorial Struggles Against Contemporary Anti-Semitism. The Case of the Exhibition Estranged. March ’68 and Its Aftermath

We curated the Estranged. March ’68 and Its Aftermath, a temporary exhibition on view in the POLIN Museum from March till September 2018, as a narration about Jewish experience of plight during the events of March ’68 in Poland. The exhibition attracted almost 120,000 visitors, being the most attended historical exhibition in Poland after 1989. Widely reviewed and commented both in mass media and in scholarly discourse, it was noticed also by Polish politicians. Polish prime minister critically referred to its title, criticising its supposedly anti-Polish character. This narration was amplified by the right-wing journalists and nationalist politicians.

But the exhibition itself was designed in anticipation of such possibility. The historical narration was matched with the reflection on current forms of hate-speech. The examples probed from the right-wing media were juxtaposed with the anti-Semitic propaganda employed by the communist party during the 1968 anti-Semitic campaign and purge. We gathered and displayed the evidence testifying to the continuity of anti-Semitic tropes, which resurface in the Polish mass media and social media of 2010s, both directly anti-Semitic and more broadly employed in the xenophobic migrant-bashing.
During our presentation we will discuss the complexity of political situation in. We will reflect upon the role of a curator, who shapes the exhibition as a public message, while working on its concept, researching, selecting, partaking in the process of architectural and graphic design. We will argue against the superficial notion of curatorial autonomy, as curators are never independent from their political context and should not avoid responsibility for shaping it.

In our speech we will discuss the curatorial techniques we employed in this undertaking, details regarding visual display and narrative building, which combined oral history, archival materials, historical objects, historical art works and contemporary artistic interventions. We will discuss how this multiplicity of voices constitutes the curatorial medium.

Janicke Kernland
Helgeland Museum (Norway)

**Fiction as a Means to Help Change the Established, Collective Way of Remembering the Past**

After having spent my entire professional life designing exhibitions outside of Norway, I moved back last year to join the management of Helgeland Museum. One of the projects I took over is “Traitor” to be opened on April 9th 2019 at the former German coastal fort Grønsvik – a WWII monument. The history exhibition “Traitor” is built around a comic. Having worked on WWII projects in Germany and the Netherlands, it struck me how different the same war is remembered in Norway. Whereas in Germany a general understanding has formed of how the sensitive issues should be tackled and they moved on to process their more recent history of the fall of the wall, enabling a diversified view on the past, Norway is still stuck in their role of the “underdog” and the freedom fighter. Time is ready for Norway to take a more self-critical position. Here is where the museum’s job lays: to show a diversified past.

Especially in small communities who were directly involved, a change of view can be challenging. Shame and names are still relevant and the collective memory is strong. To show the different roles locals played during the war, we decided to create avatars combining real, local stories and presenting them in a comic, we use fiction and illustration in museum storytelling. The stories of individuals display the nation. It proves to be a much softer way of presenting an uncomfortable reality. At the same time, it is very direct, as the visitor can recognise the locations in the comics and the objects can bee seen in the exhibition. It is clear that the story told happened here and is “real”. The comics has a great plus as it can be understood without the use of language.
**Panel 2A: The “Specific” Past – Global Futures**

Valeria Pica  
ICOM Committee for Education and Mediation,  
American University of Rome (Italy)

Ilenia Atzori  
Independent Researcher (Italy)

**Remembering and Forgetting: How Memories are Taken for Granted**

Heritage and museums represent a ‘selection of the past’ constructed through an accurate review of what has to be remembered to create a shareable narrative for a specific collective identity. Although they represent both sides of memory, forgetting has been thus far considered a failure, whereas remembering seems to be the primary subject for academic research and cultural institutions.

The recent fire that destroyed the National Museum of Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro, has however posed some urgent concerns, not only within the sphere of conservation and disasters’ prevention: what can museums and the heritage sector as a whole do to heal the social wounds left by a disaster? In which ways would remembering a catastrophic event help the communities involved to overcome their trauma and move forward with their lives?

The city of L’Aquila experienced a sudden and tremendous interruption in its life when on April 6th, 2009 an earthquake almost destroyed it together with palaces, monuments, relationships, and families. A different narrative started and until today it is harder to restore stories rather than buildings. The city is still under reconstruction, what were supposed to be temporary buildings are permanently marking the landscape, and numerous people decided to move and look for a better chance elsewhere. Places, stories, and people have been so deeply affected that they cannot but talk about the earthquake.

Two years after the tremors, a small museum opened to give and share with the community a space for remembering and preserving those memories. The collection of photographs recollects moments and places people were used to experience. What is it allowed to remember or to forget? How the selection of images from the past influence perception and reflection? How a curatorial choice can affect the memory of the cultural and human landscape?

Kirstie Jamieson  
Edinburgh Napier University (Scotland)

Marta Discepoli  
Edinburgh Napier University (Scotland)

Ella Leith  
University of Edinburgh (Scotland)

**The Deaf Heritage Collective: Collaboration and Critical Intent**

Deaf people refer to themselves as a minority and also as an ethnicity (Lane 2011; Ladd 2003), a cultural designation that has been underwritten by the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 which formally recognises the linguistic and cultural lives of Scotland’s Deaf communities. The Act presented a mandate to the museum and heritage sector to consider Deaf Culture not as a disability, but as a lived culture, whose history and heritage has remained marginalized through institutional, medical and political bias.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 presented a critical moment, wherein curators, and heritage professionals are asked to revise categories of disability, inclusion and participation to think instead of representation as a right, marginalization as oppression and to see heritage through an ethical frame. The paper reflects upon the Deaf Heritage Collective (a Royal Society of Edinburgh funded project) and its aims to create a working relationship between Scotland’s Deaf community and museum and heritage professionals.

The paper reflects upon two curated workshops and the cultural dilemma of not being Deaf-Led. By analysing the collaborative aims and structure of the workshops the paper critically reflects upon how the Collective’s outsidersness relates to questions of authenticity, agency and authorship. The historic juncture provided by the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 is contextualised by a further backdrop, that of the prevailing ‘museum as activist’ discourse. The paper concludes by asking if this critical vantage point is crucial to progressing how Scotland’s museums might assemble a future Deaf Heritage.
Clara de Massol  
King's College London (UK)  

The Climate Museum: Preserving the Past and Constructing the Future at a Time of Ecological Catastrophes

In 2012, after Hurricane Sandy, it became painfully clear to civil rights litigator Miranda Massie that public discussions around climate change were largely overdue, these discussions, according to Massie were to focus on global warming not only as an environmental phenomenon but also from the perspective of social justice. In 2014, Massie left her job to found the Climate Museum in New York City, a community-focused interdisciplinary non-profit organisation dedicated to discussing climate change in the public and institutional spheres.

This presentation explores the ways in which the Climate Museum, as a new and developing institution, fills in a gap in the museum landscape. Museums have the potential to bring the past, intangible and tangible traces, ruins and historical artefacts into the present, for the future. Climate change does not only jeopardize the present and future, it compels us to rethink the past and commemorative practices. In an age of global warming and ecological catastrophes, selecting and preserving traces from the past implies responding to deep scale decay as well as formulating narratives that prepare communities for future loss. How can museums and cultural institutions respond to and anticipate anthropogenic climate change? In what ways can museums remember and preserve the past at a time of extinction and drowning?

The Climate Museum intends to explore those questions, concretize the changes populations and cultures are going through, provide a space for public debate as well as a repository for collective mourning. This presentation reflects on the capacity of museums, and in particular the Climate Museum, to represent, commemorate and formulate climate change for communities. Thinking heritage, memory and museums at a time of ecological catastrophes is about preserving the past while acknowledging its discontinuity and responding to the disruptions of climate change.

Kelly Diaz  
University of Pennsylvania (USA)  

Queer and Trans Museums: Successes and Limitations in Reach, Audience, Place, and Experience

This paper will explore the role, audience, content, and aims of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) museums. While the focus will be global, museums of this nature are generally found in places where the LGBTQ community already has a relatively high degree of civil rights and social acceptance. Examples include: Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, Schwules Museum, GLBT History Museum, the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria, and many others.

I will also analyze the void: which narratives and experiences are Queer museums excluding? What Queer art and history are “mainstream” museums missing? How does the stark contrast between the geopolitical settings of these museums (New York City, Berlin, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, for example) and the contexts in which LGBTQ people are still lethally persecuted make the museums limited in scope? I will explore the way in which Queer history is told on a singular timeline, when it reality there are hundreds of simultaneous timelines. While in cosmopolitan areas of the United States the queer timeline moves through stigma during the AIDS crisis, the Stonewall Riots, the Supreme Court’s decision to legalize same-sex marriage, etc., other nations’ present timelines still include imprisonment and death for homosexuality and are likely generations away from legalization of same-sex marriage or pride parades.

This paper ties into the “Museums as Agents of Memory and Change” conference themes in many respects. First and foremost, I argue that these Queer museums and exhibits do promote social change, despite their shortcomings. Moreover, the paper addresses how museums connect to transnational memory processes and the variations in group-specific experiences. Lastly, I will explore the question of how contemporary museums can acknowledge the past and shape debate on the future while accounting for the extreme versatility of Queer narratives across the globe.
Educating audiences, as in many projects run by museums which seek to be agents of social change (Boast 2011) remains at the core of the project’s mission. Yet, even if MoW is not presented explicitly by POLIN Museum as a project which engages with difficult memory, this paper shows that exploring how locals engage with MoW reveals the importance of difficult memory for this collaborative museum project. The concept of vernacular memory labour is developed here to shed light on the locals’ contributions, and more broadly to demonstrate one of the ways in which visitors’ involvement into shaping collaborative projects can be researched. Examples of engagement of visitors and local activists with MoW are discussed to argue that a museum project that mobilises difficult memory to provoke social change should recognise affects, vulnerabilities and resistance in how various actors engage with that museum.

Panel 2B: Involvements and Collaborations

Aleksandra Kubica
King’s College London (UK)

Engaging with Difficult Memory about Jews in Collaborative Museum-making: Museum on Wheels on Tour in Rural Poland

The attempts of memory museums to increase their social relevance and community-orientation rely on interactions with other agents and this can be demonstrated by exploring collaborative museum projects. Up to date there is little academic literature on the topic, and collaboration in the museum sector is studied mainly using examples of collaborative exhibitions’ making (see for instance: Boast 2011; Harrison 2005; Kahn 2000; Morse, Macpherson, and Robinson 2013; Schultz 2011). This paper rectifies this gap by revealing the importance of diverse needs in collaborative museum projects, particularly developing the concept of vernacular memory labour to bring attention to the involvement of visitors, activists and any other actors who engage in collaborative museum-making. It explores a case study from Poland, an itinerant project run by the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, POLIN, called Museum on Wheels (MoW), which has been touring around Poland since 2014, visiting mostly villages and towns of up to 50 000 inhabitants. MoW engages local activists to co-create the ephemeral visits of the museum, and local visitors are invited to explore history of Jews in Poland and in their town.
Jakub Jareš  
The Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (Czech Republic)  

Czech Museums as Agents of Uncontested Memory  

My current research concentrates on presentation of the contemporary history in Czech local museums. The examination of over 20 exhibitions from regional to town level has shown, that very different kinds of Czech museums use similar presentation strategy: they are presenting mainly the national narrative, which they localize into vernacular scenes and circumstances. The history of respective town or region is therefore mostly reduced to the illustration of the dominant national history. One of the consequences is the flattening of local histories, which could be due to specificity of local minorities and interdependence of people living in small community reservoir for more complicated, intertwined, diverse and conflicting history.  

The reason for this reduction is to be searched on higher level, in the central national museums, leading institutions shaping the whole museum environment. The exhibitions of the National Museum and its numerous branches are dominated by national master narrative based on language and partly ethnic concept of the nation. The history of the country (exemplarily in the 20th century exhibition in Vítkov National Memorial) is reduced to the history of Czechs with only limited notions of Slovaks, Germans, Jews and Roma. The story of these “others” is presented from ethnographic and cultural perspective in specialized museums (Jewish Museum in Prague, Roma Museum in Brno) and resigns to present complementarity of Czech-Jewish, Czech-Roma or Czech-German history. Moreover, the planned Museum of Czech Germans in Ústí nad Labem, which was designed to present intertwined history of Czech and Germans, underwent in last years both financial and personal restrictions and it is still unclear, whether it will be opened at all.  

In my presentation, I will try to explain both from synchronic and diachronic view this dominance of Czech ethnocentric national narrative in the Czech museums and its consequences: lack of competing perspectives and public debates related to museums and dominant role of museums as agents of (national) memory rather than history.

Alisa Maximova  
National Research University Higher School of Economics (Russia)  

Small-Town Local History Museums in Russia: Participation, Agency, and Survival  

The study is based on annual short ethnographic fieldwork trips to Russian small towns in 2013–2018. Dwelling on in-depth interviews with museum professionals, amateur local historians, cultural managers, and activists, I analyse how memory is constructed within museums of local history. I focus on museum workers’ and local community members’ perception of what museums are capable of and what challenges they face. On the one hand, in many historical towns museums are almost the only thing to become the new town-forming enterprise, after most factories and communal farms shut down in post-soviet years. Developing tourism based on cultural heritage today is a chance to make a living. On the other hand, founded in soviet times, a system of local history museums in Russia is closely connected to the state memory politics, and today it is fundamentally dependent on state funding. Local history museums inherited old soviet exhibitions, and it often is quite difficult to update museum space, collections, and exhibition contents. Consequently, for many institutions their work is a question of survival (maintenance of buildings and collection, paying staff, etc.). They hardly feel that they are able to either change or bring about change, as far as the state does not help them. In the paper I elaborate these discourses of lacking agency. However, some cases demonstrate how particular people and museums regain agency and attempt to overcome challenges by turning from national “grand” narratives to local history, navigating funding sources, collaborating with independent activists and other institutions to build community-oriented projects. Small-town scale makes this possible, largely because institutional boundaries are blurred, and people can participate in activities of museum, local newspaper, town administration, or cultural center while not having official status of a professional or being employed. Whether a memory project becomes successful – in terms of being truly collective/participatory – depends on its content, form, and its initiator.
**Panel 3A: Critical Museum and Global Narratives**

Kristin Josvoll  
Texas A&M University (USA)  
JoAnn DiGeorgio-Lutz  
Texas A&M University (USA)  

“Memory Words” and Museums: Promoting Never Again in Post-Conflict Societies: a Look at Guatemala and Bosnia

Memorization has moved away from celebrating a nation’s glorious past to one in which commemoration accentuates the atrocities committed by the state, often against its own nationals. Genocide memorials, and museums in particular, serve multiple purposes including honoring the memory of victims, as symbolic forms of reparations, sites of healing, a place to bear witness, and even as aids in truth and justice initiatives. Museums are not neutral. In their foundation, museums exist because their collections, their stories, their objects, their cultures matter. In the area of human rights, they can serve an educative function to aid in the prevention of further violence through awareness and education. As museums have evolved through time from being institutions that collect and exhibit antiquities to educational epicenters, their functions to serve the public have also evolved to encompass more narratives for the progression of societal change. Modern museums have embraced these educational opportunities and branded themselves so that the masses can experience all they have to offer. In conjunction with museums as agents of memory, we examine two case studies to measure how well, and if, museums perform an educative function of “never again” in post conflict societies. Our study examines The Casa de la Memoria in Guatemala City and the Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide in Bosnia. Both are public educative museums exhibiting experiences for visitors to learn of their respective mass atrocity crimes and to spread awareness and the message of never again. In our model, we measure their educative efficacy using content analysis of guest logs, archived visitor engagement, and submitted public reviews in correlation with anticipated improvement in their respective human rights records, progress toward holding perpetrators accountable and greater movement toward liberal democracy.

Pin-chia Feng  
National Chiao Tung University (Taiwan)  

**Revisiting the Past and Reconfiguring Transformative Changes: “Anne × Ama – Girls Under Fire in WWII” at Taipei’s Ama Museum**

In 2004, Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation (TWRF) began planning for a museum dedicated to the memory of Taiwan’s former “comfort women”; it took the foundation twelve years, overcoming numerous frustrations, to finally settle on renting a townhouse in one of the oldest commercial districts of Taipei. Since the volunteer workers of TWRF call these elderly women grandmothers, or “amas”, in Taiwanese dialect, this newly established museum is thusly named the Ama Museum. In addition to introducing the Ama Museum as an agent of remembering the victimization and courage of those former Taiwanese “comfort women,” this paper wants to discuss one of the museum’s most recent special exhibits entitled “Anne × Ama – Girls Under Fire in WWII,” which is a joint venture of the Anne Frank House and TWRF with the intention to explore the shared fate of young women as victims of war. As an emblematic figure of the Holocaust, Anne Frank speaks to different generations of people around the world, via her diary, about how the Jewish people suffered from racial persecution and violence. Unknown to many people outside of Asia, however, during the Second World War in the Asia-Pacific region women of Anne’s age or even younger were forced into military sexual slavery by the Japanese army. Unlike its German counterpart, the Japanese government to this day refuses to acknowledge this hideous war crime. By linking the story of Anne Frank with the amas, the curators of this special exhibition specifically post the following questions: “how can we prevent the misfortune of Anne and the Amas from happening again? Could the victims, the perpetrators and bystanders have chosen different paths? But more importantly, when you encounter the pain inflicted by prejudice and discrimination that currently exists in the world and in Taiwan, which side are you on?” No matter what the answer we may have come to, this unique exhibit has successfully created a connection for female victims across national and racial boundaries to prompt us to review the unsightly history in order to think about possible changes for the future.
Margaret Helen Freeman  
University of Copenhagen (Denmark)

“Don’t Touch, I Am Very Monumental”: Museums of American Indian Culture and History as Sites of Ongoing Colonialism

In Europe, North America, and other colonizing countries, a tradition exists of museums as institutions that reflect, serve, and perpetuate the ideologies of a cultural elite. Museums are storerooms of a nation’s treasures, housing material evidence of the colonial achievements of Western cultures.

I examine American and Canadian institutions of Indigenous art, history, and culture, especially federal institutions such as the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, in light of post-colonial theory and theories of ongoing colonialism. Even those museums intended to promote awareness and knowledge of Native American peoples and issues act as sites of ongoing colonialism; in the words of theorists Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, “being consigned to a mythic past or the “dustbin of history” means being precluded from changing and existing as real people in the present.” Museums filled with appropriated, often illegally acquired Native American artifacts are one facet of the violent systems of land theft, policing, and suppression which Indigenous peoples continue to experience.

Museums provide a living example of what happens when colonizers claimed for themselves vast areas of Indigenous land and classify that land as terra nullis. Museums are one important institution which perpetuate the myth that Indigenous peoples and cultures have died out as a result of this settler colonialism, and that the struggles of Indigenous peoples are no longer worth fighting for or even acknowledging.

I discuss ways in which these museums carry out ongoing colonial projects upon living Native Americans by relegating them to the dustbin of the past; and how museums mythicize Native American history, rendering Native American peoples in the present invisible. I will also present examples of Native American communities who are undertaking their own ways of reclaiming and representing their arts, cultures, and histories.

Thomas Overdick  
Hamburg Ministry of Culture and Media (Germany)

Sven Klomp  
Impuls-Design GmbH & Co KG (Germany)

“Rum, Sweat, and Tears”. A Change of Perspective in Curating and Displaying Colonial History

The decolonisation of museums has become a major issue in today’s museological discourse. President Macron’s announcement of the restitution of African art objects to the former colonized societies and countries has raised critical questions about moral ownership and the accessibility of memory culture. The development of the Humboldt-Forum in Berlin has questioned the dominant Eurocentric claim of “World Cultural Heritage”. As a reaction the German Museum Association has published guidelines on dealing with collections from colonial contexts that are currently supervised by museum experts from the Global South. Colonial contexts do not only concern collections and their provenances but also the practice of curating and displaying. According to postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Achille Mbembe or Frantz Fanon the process of decolonisation affords a radical change of perspectives that gives voice to the descendants of the formerly colonized. In order to open up an Afro-Caribbean perspective on Flensburg’s colonial trade with sugar and rum during the 18th and 19th century the Flensburg Maritime Museum had invited the Jamaican cultural anthropologist and Black activist Dr. Imani Tafari-Ama to curate the exhibition “Rum, Sweat, and Tears”. During her 18 months residency she introduced issues of colonial amnesia and African agency that had never been addressed before by the local historiography. Her new approach to a seemingly “old story” was transferred by the scenographer Sven Klomp to a radical exhibition design that physically challenged the visitor to discover a shared colonial legacy.

In our paper and video (https://youtu.be/6Emy_1j7zAg) we will outline the theoretical assumptions for the necessity of an Afro-Caribbean-European dialogue in dealing with colonial history and show how the intended change of perspective can be translated into the exhibition design.
Panel 3B: “Difficult” Collections

Kersti Tainio
University of Helsinki (Finland)

Old Masters Meet Russian Revolutions

I am currently working on a doctoral thesis (The University of Helsinki) the subject of which are the art works that ended up in Finnish museum collections in the aftermath of the Russian Revolutions in 1917. The topic has not been properly discussed earlier, although the museums are aware, at least to some extent, of the provenances of the works of art in their collections that are related to the Russian Revolutions. A probable reason for indifference to the subject is the turbulent history of Finland in the 20th century including two World Wars, the Civil War and the Cold War. The art works I am discussing may also raise ethical questions: in what kinds of conditions were they acquired and how? What happened after the October Revolution to those Russian collectors who had sold art to Finnish dealers? Did the Finnish dealers take advantage of the extreme situation in Russia in a way that should worry us today?

From my point of view it seems necessary to take into account the legacy of the Russian Revolutions when dealing with the cultural heritage directly related to them. The historiography of the Russian Revolutions is deeply political and rooted in the sharp division between the right and left wing politics. It is thus impossible to concentrate solely on the events that took place in 1917 or slightly later, but instead one has to analyse the use and abuse of these events. It is important to understand what kinds of memory politics and collective memories have been embedded in the context of the cultural heritage related to the Russian Revolution. Furthermore, how to present this “revolutionary heritage” today? What is the relevance of it from the point of view of collective memory or identity politics? What is this heritage like in the post-Soviet world?

Lea Grüter
Rijksmuseum (Netherlands)

Le Musée du Louvre and the Orphan Art Works of Salle 804 – A Lieu de Mémoire in the Discourse of Nazi Looted Art Restitution

Aleida Assmann, one of the leading figures in the field of memory studies, argues that almost 80 years after the end of the war we arrived at a major societal turning point of Holocaust memorization within the 21st century in Europe. Witnesses are dying and soon the now still living social memory of the past will be completely mediated through educational institutions such as museums and media.1

It is at this point in history that the main national museum of France, the Louvre introduces a permanent space, salle 804 with 31 selected art works from the National Museum Recovery. The so called MNR collection consists of objects returned from Germany to France by the allies after World War II. Their original owners were probably mostly persecuted Jews dispossessed by the Nazis or the Vichy Regime. The declared aim of the display is the return to the original owners or their heirs: restitution.

So, what does become present of the subject, when the Louvre decides to install a permanent “restitution space” calling it a lieu de mémoire?2 In what ways can the concept of restitution function as a medium of memory politics in the main national Museum of France? What is the potential of the MNR display in the year 2018, when the connected subjects of nationalism, migration and identity politics are core subjects of transnational societal discourse? What are the difficulties?

1 Aleida Assmann. Das neue Unbehagen an der Erin-
nerungskultur: Eine Intervention. C. H. Beck, 2016; see also:

2 Interview conducted in the context of my Master thesis with Vincent Delieuvin, conservator for Italian paintings at the Louvre and curator of the MNR display, 22.06.2018.
Anita Ilieva Nikolovska
Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Republic of North Macedonia)

Placing Museum Collections in Context: Historical Collections and Their Contemporary Cultural and Social Relevance

The paper gives a critical reflection on the agency involved in the collecting practice of museums and making of meaningful entities that were visualized in the past and how they work today. The museums relation to the past, which is a key part of the process how they convey the image of the past to audience, that is, how they present their own view of history, covers the issues what history is kept, which narratives are constructed in the museum mechanism, on which way they are transmitted and to whom they are addressed. If we are accepting that museum collections are created in specific socio-historical contexts and for that reason when considering the drivers for their formation it is necessary to take into account the processes that generate those contexts in order to understand the nature of the practice, then it should be accepted that the practice itself can have a profound influence on the shaping of that same context. Highlighting the notion of museum collections as a field of meeting and negotiation between museum and society, the paper gives insight of the paradigms shifts of museum collecting in the Republic of Macedonia, its responses to specific social demands, since 1945 until today. Examining present strategies to bring out the historical collections to the public, and how museums deal with the challenges of their contextualization in the institutional program today, especially regarding the memory task, the paper proposes that if we are considering museums as a critical instrument for substantive change of society, then providing an important public impact can be brought by a clear vision of their future direction, which means that investigations of the contemporary cultural and social relevance of the historical collections must take place within the intellectual framework of the museum and its aims in society.

Marina Valle Noronha
Aalto University (Brazil/Finland)

No Longer Artwork?

In this conceptual paper I speculate on a time – not far from now – where artworks no longer exist and museums have to rethink their current engagement with artworks. The alarming current situation that museums face in terms of finance and storage space opens up the ground for a new approach to collecting and curating, which takes into account that the act of collecting cannot be understood primarily as accumulation. But for that it needs a paradigm shift on how we think of art objects and engage with them. The overall goal here is to propose curatorial ways of engaging with artworks / cultural heritage that has been – for different reasons – lost. A recent fire that earlier this year had destroyed almost in its entirety the collection of Museu Nacional do Brasil (National Museum of Brazil) in Rio de Janeiro is used as a reference to an urgent need to tackle the engagement with art in the absence of objects in collections. I introduce other ways of thinking through collections and curating, with emphasis on the lifespan of objects, what constitutes their presence in a collection (including absence) and different notions of time. Speculative realist theorist Tristan Garcia’s writings offer a very relevant perspective to contemporary curating and collecting through notions of presence and time. And the posthumanism thinking of Karen Barad has been revising our current relationship with objects, through concepts of causality, diffraction (interference), and intra-action, offering, in my understanding, a contemporary approach to collection curating and artworks management. My work has theoretically focused on human relationships to objects in museums and different notions of time that influence not only how we talk about art (and artworks) but that can also lead to other forms of engagement with artworks.
Panel 4A: The Politics of Collections, Curation and Representation

Kathryn A. Hoffmann
University of Hawaii (USA)

Negotiating Inconvenient Pasts: Repurposed Objects and New Histories in Museums of Anatomy, Anthropology, and Natural History

Bruno David, president of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, criticized what he viewed as the message of the comparative anatomy display: “The message delivered by the gallery of comparative anatomy is false. It puts Man at the head of creation!” Many anatomical museums, including France’s largest – moved into storage after decades of neglect – have become a silent, invisible patrimony. The Musée de l’Homme, in its newest post-ethnology reincarnation, explains its current social engagement: “It stands in line with the commitments of the Muséum National d’Histoire naturelle: to safeguard biodiversity and raise public awareness about the challenges involved in preserving the planet we call home.” Under France’s Ministry for an Ecological and Solidary Transition (Ministère de la Transition écologique et solidaire), Paris museums declare their will to transition to the future, with new lessons for a museum-going public on biodiversity and preserving the planet.

To accomplish often massive shifts in display and message-making that abandon or refute older discourses, museum objects may undergo processes of de-messaging and re-messaging. Collections left in storage remain a preserved but non-communicating heritage. Museums contradict earlier messages, returning phrenological models to display as “errors”, or re-staging and re-messaging ethnological busts as artworks capturing the diverse beauties of humanity. A parade of taxidermied African animals seems to have extricated itself from less-palatable pasts of colonialism, game hunting and zoos that built collections. Scenographers design multi-million-euro settings for “voyages” with pauses for contemplative, ludic, and sensorial activities, and revived cabinet-of-curiosity effects.

Whether museum objects with problematic pasts can/should be abandoned or re-messaged, whether notions of social agency come to override other desirable museum aims, whether scenographies enhance or obscure messaging, how to document museums as forms of visual history, and whether museums can fashion enduring visions of “man” will continue to provoke scholarly debate. To look at some of the problems, the paper would use examples from my own research in museums of anatomy, pathology, anthropology, ethnology, criminal anthropology and natural history in France, Italy, the U.S., Australia, and the Netherlands, with emphasis on museums that have been recently restructured/reopened or warehoused, and approaches by Lorraine Daston, James Clifford, Stéphane Martin, Steven Engelsman, Bernard Sergent, Benoît de l’Estoile, Peter Naumann, Karl-Heinz Kohl, and others.

Annika Kirbis
Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Germany)

Changing Collections: The Two-Sided Story of ‘Turkish’ Objects in Vienna’s Museums

The presence of ‘Turkish’ objects in Viennese museums is long: with the Siege of Vienna in 1529 and 1683 objects left behind or captured from the Ottoman army formed the basis for representing a powerful, versatile narrative on the city’s alleged ‘historical enemy’. Part of the permanent exhibitions of a variety of museums in Vienna, these objects, displayed with varying degrees of critical distance, transport and mobilise memories that merge feelings of threat as well as a triumphant superiority. While this reductive enemy image of the ‘Turk’ had been flexibly adapted throughout the centuries and applied to any external influences deemed as undesired, since 9/11 migrants from Turkey and Muslims in general have been increasingly conflated with these narratives.

In 2014 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the recruitment agreement with Turkey as well as former Yugoslavia, Vienna’s municipality announced the funding of the project “The Migration Collection” (Migration sammeln) in cooperation with the Wien Museum, a significant place for the city’s collective memory. Embodying a highly participatory approach, the project collected objects from the migrant communities of former ‘guest workers’ in order to finally acknowledge (symbolically) migrants’ constitutive impact on the city and include their (hi)stories in the historical narratives. Engaging with the practical and ethical challenges this approach encountered, this article critically addresses the tensions arising between established and newly generated object collections that are employed to narrate conflicting (hi)stories. How can we understand the increasing interest in and hence musealisation of the (hi)stories of former ‘guest workers’ from Turkey in Vienna, while simultaneously witnessing increasing islamophobia and electoral successes of right-wing populist parties outside the museum walls? Can their memories be represented in a museum and settle into Vienna’s history without revisiting the narratives on the Siege? Can new participatory methods be applied in museums not only to collect (hi)stories, but also to challenge exclusive narratives?
Hannah Wilson
Nottingham Trent University (UK)

The Materialisation of Sobibór Death Camp: Artefacts, Narratives and Representation

Holocaust archaeology has arguably become one of the most crucial aspects within contemporary memory and museum studies. In my PhD investigation, I examine the impact of the recent archaeological findings at the site of Sobibór (a former Nazi Death camp in East Poland), looking specifically at the types of artefacts that have since been uncovered there. I aim to explore the international materialisation of Sobibór through the representation and contextualisation of the artefacts in museum collections, exhibitions and media publications (the new memorial museum at the site of Sobibór is currently being built). Furthermore, the uncovering of certain objects has led to wider international interest in the site of Sobibór, creating a series of debates surrounding ownership of memory, and how each participating country in the future commemoration of Sobibór remembers its victims (Israel, Slovakia, Poland and Holland). This approach has not yet been explored in academic research, whereas studies have been conducted on artefacts in the more well-known Holocaust memorials and educational centres. Moreover, the continuous unearthing of objects at the site of Sobibór has also led to further instances of worldwide commemoration, for instance in 2017, Stolperstein were established Frankfurt for Karoline Cohn, a victim at Sobibór whose pendant was uncovered in the archaeological excavations in the previous year. Thus, I also explore the debates surrounding ownership of memory concerning the personalised artefacts discovered at Sobibór, as they are presented to the remaining family members of the victim.

I refer to the term ‘materialisation’ in this study to define the material objects and visual adaptations associated with the site of Sobibór: a part of history that has been devoid of physical evidence since the destruction of the camp by the SS. This includes items which previously belonged to certain victims, as well as items such as diaries which were written in the immediate period after the Uprising in the camp in 1943, some of which are now on museum display. I analyse how objects are being used, or mediated, in various museums and institutions, and emphasises the issues and tensions that can occur in spheres of public and private memory discourses of the Shoah. Therefore, my study centres around two integral aspects. Firstly, the publication of certain artefacts over others, exposure via different mediums such as photographs, the use of the objects in educational talks and their role in the media when information on Sobibór becomes public. Secondly, I consider the ways in which artefacts relating to Sobibór and the biographies of its victims have already featured in exhibitions, museum collections, and other instances of public engagement since the end of the war.
Jari Harju  
Helsinki City Museum (Finland)

Our City, Our History

Helsinki City Museum re-opened its doors to the public in May 2016. New city museum was a product of planning process that took three years and resulted in a totally new concept. One of the most important lesson we learned during this process was, that in order to be important to our public, we need to know them better. So we used fair amount of time to study what they expect and what they want from us. This helped us to build a museum to meet these expectations. But this knowledge of our visitors was not enough. We needed also to learn how to keep the constant dialogue with different audiences in Helsinki, to make exhibitions and programs together with them.

We can’t copy-paste the concept from other city museum or any other kind of museum. We have to learn how to be important for our communities, the citizen of Helsinki. And because this is not an uniform public, we have to learn the ways how to make our museum, it’s exhibitions and programs as multi-vocal as possible. Cities like Helsinki are too big and too complex to fit into one story shared by all its citizen.

All this meant also re-evaluation of the role of the curator. How can curators work side-by-side with citizen planning and creating content for the museum? What does it really mean to give authority to the citizen? Dealing with these questions in my paper I like to show how important it has been in Helsinki City Museum to have the communication with different communities in the city. This has been our method to be a platform to the memories of various communities and at the same time give our visitors more open-minded and tolerant view to the city and its history.

Emelie Höglund  
Hallwyl Museum (Sweden)

Disarmed by Drama-methodology

Drama-methodology has grown to be a dominant feature in the Hallwyl Museums branding during the past 16 years. Initially the method was a way to approach the everyday life in the house; the stories of the servants and of the academics working with the collections, with a focus on the hierarchies of the household and the radical project of turning a home into a museum. Today the method is used to target multiple groups and to discuss more complex subjects.

Drama-methodology allows us to invite the audience to a first meeting with a lower threshold, a kind game, where they travel back in time with our staff. Studies show that laughter can make people lower their guard and become more receptible to facts, but also more easily relate to emotions. The effect is better recollection. The playful approach of drama-methodology carries this effect. The method thus allows us to lift more complex subjects, not despite its playfulness, but because of it.

Examples of subjects lifted in our newly produced tours are shame society or how sexual morality are shaped by socioeconomical aspects. Upcoming topics are the chock effect of avantgarde art, the struggle of the working class, and the view on homosexuality in the early 1900’s. Some of these subjects could make the audience want to distance themselves, not to be too involved, but the twists and turns of dramaturgy keeps the audience engaged. The tours debate society and normativity as collective creations and demonstrate that they can change over time as the audience compares the context of the characters to their own. Drama-methodology brings you closer to the people in history, tackling similar difficulties as we face today. Here regional or national relations are less important, more so the story itself and the questions it raises.
Lise Johnsen
Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger (Norway)

‘Museum without Cabinets’

In Norway, archaeological excavations are the responsibility of the university museums. At The Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger (UiS) excavations are opened up for visitors. The Department of Education and Visitor Service are coordinating these visits. An archaeological excavation is one of a range of contemporary museum practices. My thesis is an ethnography of archaeological practice within the context of the university museum in 2016 and 2017. It explores how knowledge is established and communicated through archaeological fieldwork.

This presentation reflects upon relations established in meetings during site visits. There are no cabinets in a temporary outdoor museum landscape, but visitors can attend tours and talks. Visitors are also welcome to ‘drop by’, and have a chat with archaeologists at work. Knowledge is produced and communicated through social relations that develop through meetings between employees. At the same time relations are established through meetings between employees and visitors. The idea of a participatory museum is to reconnect with the public, and for cultural institutions to become more dynamic, relevant, essential places through their practice (Simon 2010).

This study focuses on participation from the perspectives of museum studies and public archaeology. Scientific knowledge is constructed, represented and translated in a museum context (Macdonald 2002). Knowledge is also produced and communicated in archaeological fieldwork (Edgeworth 2003). Through public archaeology, the museum ‘meets the world’ (Moshenka 2017). In open archaeology visitors are given a view of the site through viewing platforms. Either on the web or as a tour at the excavation where visitors gets to talk to the archaeologists (Morgan and Eve 2012; Moshenska and Schadla-Hall 2011). What characterizes the visitor involvement in these meetings on site? What opportunities lie in these meetings for involvement in knowledge production? I will try to give an answer to these questions, through a presentation of my analysis.

Tehmina Goskar
Curatorial Research Centre (UK)

Who’s in Charge? Collaborative Leadership and the Democratisation of Curation

‘The changing nature of work has prompted a radical shift in the attributes, competencies, skills and behaviours required of leaders. Developing leaders is no longer a question of focusing on the person at the top of an organisation but of creating opportunities for individuals to lead at all levels.’ (Arts Council England, 2018). This paper will explore the changing nature of leadership in museums drawing on the growing body of research which identifies the need for museum leaders to embrace collaborative leadership as a means by which to unlock the power of their teams and their communities to uncover multiple perspectives. As sector leaders in collaboration and partnership working, Cornwall Museums Partnership has been researching, developing and exploring the values and behaviours that shape museums who successfully encourage debate, find new ways to engage communities, and make their institutions relevant.

To support our philosophy of collaborative leadership and to encourage a radical shift in power relations in Cornish museums, we have originated the Citizen Curators Programme – a work-based curatorial training and museum awareness course for volunteers from our communities. This experiential learning programme has been designed to support the democratisation of museum decision-making and to open up the knowledge locked in our collections. Our paper will share results of the research carried out through the pilot programme in 2017/18 and share work in progress on the full 3-year programme. We will illustrate our findings against the context of Cornish identity and distinctiveness as our Citizen Curators will be leading the curation of the Cornish National Collection – a distributed collection of artefacts and memories that reflects the diversity of Cornish society past and present.
Nina Robbins
University of Helsinki (Finland)

Museological Value Dialogue and Memory Institutions

This presentation focuses on the issues of values in everyday museum practices, by presenting the term museological value dialogue as a tool for museum professionals. This tool helps museum professionals when engaged in any tension-creating discourse. It requires hands-on practice and an open approach toward everyday museum work, in order to reach a comprehensive understanding.

Prior research has shown that there have previously been value discussions and evaluations in museums, but these have rarely been recorded in official documents; value discussion up to now in many museums has largely remained tacit. Bringing forth such tacit knowledge will offer additional means for current museum professionals as they conduct a museological value dialogue, be it theoretical or practical in nature.

Such a museological value dialogue is not based solely on our current idea of values or identity, but also on those ideas that have accumulated through the centuries. This dialogue is seen in the existence and caretaking of collection objects over time. By studying these networks, specific to each museum, it is possible to gain information about the mutual values of museums, in order to reach a common voice. Such a common voice is especially important so that the heritologically meaningful aspects of society are not seen only in terms of being market-oriented or profitable for current consumption.

Furthermore, it will be beneficial to observe values from a wider, heritological point of view, including all heritage fields, where values are seen accumulating through the centuries in museums, libraries and archives. This heritological aspect will help us to comprehensively understand historically significant objects, revealing their impact factor. This means that a museum and its collection do not exist in an isolated past only, or in our current culture only, but should be understood as a long-lasting entity in society.

Panel 5A: Memory Regimes II: The Role of a Post-Communist Museum

Maria Kobieska
Jagiellonian University (Poland)

Mapping the Boom. “New Museums” in Poland as Memory Devices

From the beginning of the 21st century historical museums have gained particular attention in Poland; multiple newly founded or rearranged institutions, offering spectacular exhibitions, powerfully influence remembrance patterns and visions of the past. Such museum space can serve as a touchstone of Polish memory culture and its dynamics. “New museums” can be described as “memory devices” that produce tendencies of remembering by encouraging, supporting and modifying mnemonic content for their users.

“Memory device” is a general concept I use to catch the shape of contemporary memory cultures and to talk about “new museums” in particular. The whole system of a memory culture can be described as a mega-apparatus in Foucaultian sense – a web of power relations, heterogeneous entanglement of various elements, managing human subjects – making them remember in particular ways, discouraging from others. The “museum boom” results in a complex network of museums whose influence is constantly growing in Poland; they become not only more and more popular among visitors, but also appealing as political tools for those in power. While the narrative of every museum can be interpreted in terms of “memory device”, the mentioned network as a whole may be also seen as a “mega-device”, preparing their users to remember in particular ways.

The proposed paper, based on a research undertaken in a dozen of Polish “new museums”, will aim at investigating this hypothesis and testing the “memory device” term at the same time. Do Polish historical museums propose consistent remembrance patterns or express some prevalent tendencies of the Polish memory culture as such? How do they contribute to or negotiate with memory politics? What are the dominants in the field? Can any counter-projects be noticed within? I will try to answer these questions by analyzing several examples of exhibitions and sketching their similarities and differences in order to map the mentioned network of “memory devices”.

ABSTRACTS

Linara Dovydaitytė
Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania)

Between Representation and Activism: Museums as Agents in Post-Soviet Memory Culture

The paper will explore the concept of community involvement into museum practices within the context of post-Soviet memory culture in Lithuania. After 1990 the museums of newly re-established post-Soviet countries not only took an active role in shaping new collective identities but also faced a challenge of dealing with different narratives of a recent past. A survey of Soviet heritage representations in Lithuanian history and culture museums reveals what kind of narratives of a difficult past have been produced over the course of almost 30 years, which narratives dominated while others were side-lined or even silenced. The paper’s theoretical assumptions are based on Tony Bennett’s concept of the museum as a modern form of governmentality intended to produce rather than represent culture and values. Such ‘contradictory political rationality’ of the museum is especially important when thinking about museum representations of ‘dissonant’ Soviet heritage. Referring to the concept of museum as an active producer of images and stories of the past, I will discuss the role of ‘source communities’ and ‘history owners’ in building museum displays of life under Soviet regime. What are the forms and practices of museums’ collaboration with interest communities in Lithuania? Do the role of community participation in the process of musealization have been changing during almost 30 years? How the museums deal with the need to function not only as a place for (impossible) community representation but also as a space for community activism?

Olga Zabalueva
Linköping University (Sweden)

Contested Memories Then and Now: The Institutional Regimes of Exhibiting “Difficult Issues”

Do the “difficult memories” have “expiration date”? Is there a difference in how museums are addressing historical issues of the 20th and the 21st centuries? In this paper I aim to explore the mechanics of communicative memory¹ in relation to the contemporary history represented in the museum narrative. I am interested if this memory has to be formatted and shaped into a specific form to be publicly exhibited and how these mechanisms are functioning in the context of post-conflict societies or hybrid political regimes.

As a case study I will use the representations of one of the most contested periods in modern Russian history – Stalin’s Great Purge of the 1937-1938 – in cultural memory institutions. Events of the Great Purge had become a public knowledge under Khrushchev’s rule in the late 1950s, however, the true effect of repressions was revealed only thirty years later under the “glasnost” campaign in late 1980s. The International Memorial Human Rights Society then began collecting both documents and material objects related to the victims of Stalinist repressions. However, the very period of revelation – the turn of the 1990s and the collapse of the Soviet Union – is now being reassessed by the contemporary Russian memory politics.

By analyzing the official historical narrative for both the 1930s and the 1990s, displayed in the historical park ‘Russia – my (hi)story’, I intend to draw on two different modes of memory for the contested periods of history.² I am convinced that by studying memory politics in Russia, we can better understand how museums can act against stiff institutional formalizations of cultural memory towards the positive social change.

Anna Yanenko
National Kyiv-Pechersk Historical Cultural Preserve (Ukraine)

Ukrainian Museums and Soviet History: Remember or Forget? (Experience of the National Kyiv-Pechersk Historical and Cultural Preserve)

In the current political situation in Eastern Europe (including Russian aggression in Ukraine) and forming modern civil society in Ukraine, the national museums have faced varied memories and forgetfulness connected with contested, difficult, ambiguous and multiple-value history and cultural heritage in Ukraine. Museums and research staff in Ukraine have to use knowledge and tolerance for helping people to recollect, commemorate, even forming new reminiscences about different colours of history instead of simple and dangerous dualism of evaluation of the past and its material evidences (glorification & stigmatization/censure/destroy; black & white; good & bad etc.).

Since 2014 The National Kyiv-Pechersk Historical and Cultural Preserve has conducted activities, including creating museum displays and excursion service, in circumstances of implementation of decommunisation law and Russian-Ukrainian war.

The Preserve was established in 1927 according to Ukrainian Soviet authority resolution to protect and research into historical and cultural heritage on the area of the former orthodox monastery. But since the early 1930s the Preserve became an ideological “weapon” on the “anti-religion battlefront” in UkrSSR. For the purpose to conservation of the church heritage Ukrainian intellectual community had to present monastery architecture and cultural masterpieces as an evidence of “exploitation of the helpless people by Orthodox Church”. In spite of total control and repression against intellectuals, the museum staff proceeded with studies of collection, history, architecture etc. It’s significant to in today’s museum displays to introduce different behavioural models in Ukrainian Soviet intellectual community to visitors.

Museums in Ukraine have enough politics independence. But sometimes museum administration “afraid” of a punishment from Ministry of culture of Ukraine (it’s can be call soviet bureaucracy heritage). In this circumstances in the Preserve exhibitions during last four years have been changed in consideration of decommunisation laws but, unfortunately, partly the creators of new museum display choose the way of ignoring Soviet and Imperial time in history of the Preserve. History of Soviet museums is still unexpressed, unvoiced, unnecessary, especially Ukrainian history of the second half of 20th century.
Panel 5B: Curators’ Perspectives

Therese Quinn
University of Illinois (USA)

Urgent Presents, Oppositional Memory Practices and the Preparation of Museum Workers

On July 6, 2016, Philando Castile, an American school-worker, was shot and killed by police after being pulled over for a broken car tail-light (Lartey & Swaine 2017). Ten days later a local museum posted an entrance sign stating it joined “the community in mourning the tragic killing” (Ojeda-Zapata 2016). After a barrage of complaints, the plaque was removed.

In 2017 a meme – Museums Are Not Neutral – emerged on social media. The stance has a decades-long history in the field, including within critical, new and sociomuseologies, supporting the view that museums must respond to urgent social conditions. Yet, as the opening example indicates, museums practicing non-neutrality can face opposition, and feel compelled to retreat.

Between 80–100 people die daily in Illinois prisons, an epidemic that remains largely invisible (Wildeboer & Smith 2014). Inspired by prison abolition and justice-informed museologies, in 2016 a collective of artists and scholars founded the Illinois Deaths in Custody Project (IDCP). Housed in a university museum studies program, IDCP engages a website to serve as exhibit, archive and memorial, documenting and revealing these deaths, and acting as an engine of public memory. As Thomas Dunn (2011) notes, “Within the frame of public memory, the past operates not as historical fact but as historical interpretation for the purposes of making public argument. Through framing the past, we serve a present need” (p. 440). Using IDCP as a model, this paper proposes that higher education programs preparing cultural workers should teach how museums, archives, and related forms can frame the present to produce “oppositional memory practices” – narratives interrupting official accounts and foregrounding justice aims, such as ending the American carceral state (McGeough, Palczewski & Lake 2015: 232).

However, this view has pedagogical implications: Museum workers must also be equipped to navigate the resistance and hostility non-neutrality may trigger outside and within institutions.

References


Anu Kannike
Estonian National Museum (Estonia)

Ester Bardone
University of Tartu (Estonia)

Memory on the Plate: Museums as Agents of Food Heritage

Museums all over the world are responding to the current public fascination with food by integrating food exhibitions, programmes and workshops in their agendas. Food’s flexibility to be studied from multiple perspectives facilitates its use in audience engagement through sensory museology.

Drawing on the experience of an ongoing food culture project at the Estonian National Museum, the paper will discuss the dilemmas and challenges of bringing the idea of food as a cultural resource to a wider audience. What opportunities and problems do museums face while aiming to contribute to the sustainability of food heritage in dialogue with local communities, tourism developers, state institutions and individual entrepreneurs? Although food is a topical issue in public discourse, often fashion trends or dietary aspects are on the foreground while its cultural and historical significance is overlooked. Tourism institutions and networks tend to underestimate the role of historical expertise in marketing food heritage.

The paper argues that museums can play a pivotal role in educational work on food history as well as strengthening local identities through knowledge on the culinary past of a community. Furthermore, they have underused potential to support entrepreneurship in this field, contributing to economic viability and new initiatives.

Food culture studies at the ENM aim, besides academic research and cooperation, towards closer communication with small entrepreneurs whose products are based on local food heritage. How can the expert knowledge that the museum provides contribute to the development of new regional food products, including recipes and design, marketing and community-building? How can culinary engagements in museums offer not only sensory entertainment, but reflexive and significant encounters with food culture, combining both theoretical and practical approaches?

Kristel Rattus
Estonian National Museum (Estonia)

Mediating “Dialogues” at the Estonian National Museum’s Core Exhibition Encounters: Methods and Challenges

In 2019, the Estonian National Museum is 110 years old. It is a national museum and an ethnography museum, which, until the present day, has mostly focused on displaying the Estonian pre-industrial peasant culture. With the present core exhibition “Encounters” that was opened in the Estonian National Museum’s new building in October 2016, the museum is introducing a novel approach that would allow people from different cultural and social backgrounds to identify with Estonian culture and express their own personal identities.

Present paper inquires how can multiple and continuously changing cultural heritages be displayed on a museum exhibition. What methods have been applied to make the exhibition more dialogical and dynamical? What challenges do these methods pose?
**Conference registration desk**

Open at the Film Museum (Estonian History Museum, Tallinn)
24 April 15:00–19:00
25 April 9:00–10:00, 13:30–17:00

Open at the Estonian National Museum (Tartu)
26 April 10:00–15:00

**Name tag**

A name tag is required for admittance to all official conference sessions and events. The name tag can be obtained from the registration desk.

**Conference venues**

**Estonian History Museum**
Open Tuesday–Sunday 10:00–18:00
Pirita tee 56, Tallinn

Maarjamäe history centre is situated in Maarjamäe Palace park and consists of several buildings and outdoor exhibitions. In Maarjamäe history centre you can visit renovated Maarjamäe Palace, the Film Museum and the historical stables. Children’s playgrounds and an outdoor exhibition are also situated at the Maarjamäe history centre.

The conference keynote and first day presentation will take place in the Film Museum Cinema and Conference Hall, equipped with free Wi-Fi.

Lunch will be in the Estonian History Museum restaurant and the opening reception will take place in the Estonian History Museum Summer Hall.

The second conference day sessions will take place in the Film Museum Cinema and Conference Hall and in the Estonian History Museum Fireplace Hall, where coffee breaks are also provided.

**Wi-Fi**

*Network: MM_guest*
*Password: kylaline*

**Estonian National Museum**
Open Tuesday–Sunday 10:00–18:00
Muuseumi tee 2, Tartu

On 26 April the conference will take place at the Estonian National Museum, located at the centre of the historic Raadi Manor complex and old Soviet Military Airport, opened 1 October 2016.
The conference keynote auditorium is Jakob Hurt Hall, equipped with free Wi-Fi and 2-pin plugs located under the seats.

The sessions will take place in Jakob Hurt Hall and in the Aliise Moora Auditorium.

Coffee breaks are provided for all conference participants outside Jakob Hurt Hall.

Lunch and conference closing reception will take place in the ENM restaurant.

**Wi-Fi**

*Network: ERM public (free access)*

**Exhibitions**

**At the Estonian History Museum**

In the Estonian History Centre there are five permanent exhibitions.


There are two temporary exhibitions at Maaramäe Palace: *Choose A Better Past* (for groups, in Estonian); and at the Film museum a photography exhibition entitled *Estonian Masters*, by Heikki Leis.

The Estonian History Museum also has a second exhibition space in Old Town with permanent exhibition called *The Spirit of Survival. 11 000 years of Estonian History*, and the temporary exhibition *Fashion Line: Estonian Ladies 1920–1940*.

**At the Estonian National Museum**

There are two permanent exhibitions, both of which have free admission for conference participants, the Estonian exhibition *Encounters*, and the Finno-Ugric exhibition *Echo of the Urals*.

In addition there are several temporary exhibitions that are also free to conference participants: *DIY Estonia* (in the Temporary Exhibitions Hall), *Uniformed Story 12* (in the Make Yourself an Exhibition Hall), *Estonian Postal Collections* (in the Open Collections Hall) and *The Story of the Estonian Chair* (in the Gallery).
Getting around

**Public transport**
Tallinn uses a chip card system, cards can be purchased at the R-Kiosk shop. You can also load money onto the cards at R-Kiosk (and in the airport). You can find more information about tickets here: https://www.tallinn.ee/eng/pilet/Ticket-information-for-tourists.

A single ticket costs €1; a 1 day ticket €3; and a 5 day ticket €6.

You can also purchase a ticket from the driver (for €2) which covers one journey. You can only use cash to buy tickets onboard and you should enter the front door.

**Getting from Airport to the Centre**
More information on getting to and leaving from airport using public transport is available here: https://www.tallinn-airport.ee/en/transport/leaving-the-airport/.

**Getting to the Estonian History Museum**

**Buses**
The conference hotels are located around 10–15 minutes from the Estonian History Museum by public transport (busses 1A, 8, 34A, 38 from Viru Keskus bus terminal). Timetables are available at https://transport.tallinn.ee.

The buses leave from stop 5 (1A & 34A) and stop 6 (8 & 38) underground at the Viru Keskus bus terminal, apx. 50 metres from the hotel.
The closest stop to the Park Inn hotel is Pronksi, where you can take busses 1A, 5, 8, 34A, 38.

The Estonian History Museum bus station is Maarjamäe (5th stop from Viru Keskus).

Returning from the Estonian History Museum you use Maarjamäe bus stop on the opposite side of the road to Viru Keskus.

**Taxi**

Most taxi drivers speak some English and all taxis are equipped with meters. The journey from the Viru hotel to the Estonian History Museum by Tulika taxi (dial 1200) is around €7. You can find Tulika taxis in front of the Viru Hotel. There are also more affordable options, such as Yes taxis (dial 1311) – the same journey will cost €4.

With Uber the journey from the Viru Hotel to the Estonian History Museum will cost around €6 and with Bolt (Taxify) around €4.

**26 April Conference Bus Tallinn-Tartu-Tallinn**

The conference bus will leave promptly at 7:30 Friday 26 April from the car park in front of the Viru Hotel and will return to the same place in the evening.
PRACTICAL INFORMATION

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Area code for phone calls from abroad: +372
Emergency number in Estonia: 112
Police: 110
Ambulance: 112
Info numbers: 1182, 1185, 1188

In case of problems call
Agnes Aljas +372 5349 0515

USEFUL LINKS

Conference: http://enmconferences.ee/en
Estonian National Museum: http://www.erm.ee/
Estonian History Museum: https://www.ajaloomuuseum.ee/
City of Tartu: https://visittartu.com/
City of Tallinn: https://www.visittallinn.ee/est

#MUME:
FB: https://www.facebook.com/events/224982601707378/
Conference contact: conference@erm.ee
MAARJAMÄE AJALOOKESKUS
History Centre at Maarjamäe

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Estonian History Museum
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24–26/04/2019
Tallinn, Tartu / Estonia

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