

# Past Presencing in Local Museums: Remarks on the Use of Art in the Creation of Representations of a Locality

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**Abstract:** Museums and art are both phenomena strongly connected with collective identities. During the process of development of modern nations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, museums were actors (or tools, depending on the context) of the process of the construction of collective representations. This relates to a certain link between collectivities and objects, in which the latter contribute to the emergence of social roles and the organization of social worlds. Artworks as collective representations, and memory carriers significantly participate in these processes.

Since 1989, the importance of local identities has been growing. Local actors undertake organized activities to develop a sense of community and attract the attention of outsiders. Museums also participate in these processes, yet in the changing context the question arises as to whether they play a role similar to the national ones or, perhaps, different situations introduced new ways of museum involvement.

The paper examines the practices during which representations of a locality are constructed to be displayed in the museum context. We are interested in how art pieces contribute to this process and how they are used in comparison to non-aesthetic artifacts. The study is based on 50 in-depth interviews collected during two projects conducted in the Subcarpathian Voivodeship in Poland and in the Kosice Region in Slovakia. Concentrating on the practices of collection building, exhibition designing, and interpretation, we discuss different classes of objects used in the process, analyze their effectiveness in representing the original context – the main topic of museum narratives – and indicate some of them as boundary objects around which arenas emerge.

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Since<sup>1</sup> sociology is a discipline devoted to the study of *people* and their collective practices, making inquiries about museums – institutions in common knowledge dedicated to collecting and preserving *things* – might be perceived as a misunderstanding. However, even a simple analysis of such an entity allows one to designate at least two fields that make the museum an interesting topic for a sociologist. Firstly, a museum is not just a classical-style building in which old things are displayed and visitors are asked not to touch them. It is predominantly a system of organized and institutionalized roles and practices that promises a fruitful field of inquiry for a pragmatically-oriented social scientist. Secondly, the objects that are preserved, studied, and displayed within a museum space reflect the social order existing at many levels in both past and present society. This also makes museums a promising field of study for a scholar interested in practices of meaning-making.

<sup>1</sup> The paper contains data collected during two projects: *Muzea Podkarpackie 2004-2014. Globalizacja i europeizacja a przeobrażenie lokalnych instytucji kultury*, supported by Ministry of Culture and National Heritage grant (05787/15); and *Rola muzeów w konstruowaniu tożsamości lokalnych w Polsce i na Słowacji* (IA-11/2017/508), supported by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education grant designed for carrying out scientific research and related tasks supporting the development of young scientists and doctoral studies, participants at the University of Rzeszów, Department of Sociology and History.

Understanding museum as an institution means assuming that social order is a vital component of its functioning. A social phenomenon is institutionalized when particular cultural patterns are identified as important for a community and as such reproduced in time. A museum is about the institutionalization of the phenomenon called *museality* by Zbyslav Z. Stránský, meaning the need to preserve certain things against the rules of nature and history (Biedermann 2016:55); the need to take care of them and not allow them to deteriorate. The museum as an institution is appointed to perform three things: to preserve, to study, and to inform about the collections and practices (Weil 1990; Folga-Januszewska 2008; 2015; Borusiewicz 2012). A system of institutionalized practices develops around these three objectives.

When it comes to achieving these goals, one should recall the notion of organization. Situating ourselves within the tradition of sociological pragmatism, we prefer to think about ordered collective practices in this way rather than in terms of structure (Znaniński 1954:137; 1963:391-392). According to Florian Znaniński (1945:200), organization is a dynamic set of interrelated social roles cooperating to achieve certain ends. These roles might be institutionalized (Znaniński 1954:137) and – except small, private museums relying on individual collections – they

usually are. The development of museums brings about official positions, such as curators, educators, conservators, etc. People performing these roles have certain rights and duties to fulfill, and have to cooperate to achieve them. The more complex the organization is, the more members it includes, and the more points of interest for social sciences emerge. The sociology of organization studies staff members' collective behaviors and the social order emerging from their interactions, yet only a certain number of practices are object-oriented, and only such practices are in the scope of our investigation.

### Connecting the past and the present

Switching the focus to the relationship between an actor and an artifact moves us toward the sociology of objects. This, however, poses some questions about the status of objects in such a relationship. In a more conservative approach, they are located within the scope of interest of various cultural sciences (Znaniński 1963:393), elements of rights needed to perform certain duties (Znaniński 2011:350), or indicators of certain social phenomena (Nowak 2010:176). In more recent developments (Gell 1998; Latour 2005; Krajewski 2013), the relationship between a person and an object is shown as a more complex and a more symmetric one. It is a human being who creates objects, but he/she could not do it without their applications, since they assume the form of: 1) tools; 2) media; 3) material means forcing certain use of the human body; or 4) a material, symbolic and often affective context of action (Krajewski 2013:27). The study of objects can provide certain information concerning their place in social systems and the organization of these systems. The status of artifacts in the museum context, however, is different from its everyday-life counterpart. In the museum, one can find many objects that are used

in the curator's work, but they are used differently than elements of collection and exhibits. As Marek Krajewski (2013:12–13) suggests, artifacts that underwent the musealization process are far better recognized than their everyday counterparts; their role in the human world is better known; however, they seem to be more distant. They ceased to be the element of individual life and a necessary condition of being a human. They are not used anymore; they are watched instead. Although a *thing's* life course consists of various changes in both users and uses, moving artifacts to the museum collection is the most drastic shift. The object's life ends when it becomes obsolete. However, locating the object in the museum seems to change the game's rules. A discussion is needed as to whether the museum is a rejected artifact's 'graveyard' or a space where it becomes useful in a different way. Is it a place where stories about objects are invented or where the relationship with people is re-defined?

Using Krajewski's typology of objects, *musealia* bear resemblance to memorabilia, which are not useful *per se*, yet their function is to recall something that is not present anymore. In the new context, they lose their utility function and maintain only the symbolic one. As such, they become the element of a broader process, which Sharon Macdonald called **past presenting** (2013:16). The study of contemporary groups and individuals might be often incomplete without the knowledge of their historical context (Strauss 1977:164). Preserving and interpreting the past are both important components of collective identity construction, and museums invented to perform these tasks were significant factors in the development of modern nations (Bennett 1995:36; Anderson 2006:178). Exhibitions containing artworks and artifacts connected with personae, events, and places important for the group shaped its identity and

invoked its **synthetic image**, allowing members to recognize themselves as belonging to the same community and to distinguish themselves from others (Levitt 2015:6). We emphasize the meaning of such simplification for developing a powerful collective representation. Yet the exhibition or even the collection is not a complete representation of pictured phenomena. It bears resemblance to a group stereotype discussed by Anthony Cohen (1985:74), who suggests that community members are aware of the complexity of their culture; however, they treat such a simplification as useful in intergroup relations.

The problem of the relationship between *musealia* and the context they were primarily used in is one of the basic ontological problems in museology (Gluziński 1980; Jordanova 1989; Saumarez-Smith 1989; Bal 1996; Pomian 2006; Assmann 2013; Biedermann 2016). An important question is how to construct a representation of an **original context** in a different setting with the use of a limited set of artifacts. The problem of limit should be emphasized, since a museum usually does not own – or have control over – all components of the original context. A collection is, therefore, a set of more or less **accidentally or purposely musealized artifacts**, since a museum does not have access to all artifacts from all historical periods it takes care of (nation, region, art, technology, etc). Certain objects were destroyed, forgotten, or they simply remain undiscovered. The financial factor is relevant, too. Museums often cannot afford to buy the desired thing, and curators make certain decisions concerning object acquisitions. Objects that undergo musealization are somehow important and assumed worth of preservation (sacralization). The question is, however, how this process is structured and what factors influence it. Historically, curators were often biased due to the lack of scientific method use or due to their colo-

nial perspective, ideology, or chauvinism (Ossowski 1966:355; Pomian 1990:60-64; Clifford 2000:215-217; Stránský 2005:153; Hudson 2014:66; Beránek 2020:44). This makes the final product a distorted representation of the original context. The fact is that a tool, a dress, or a weapon had a different meaning for an original user, a curator, and a visitor (Baxandall 1991:36-37). There is a significant difference between a carpenter using a plane, a member of the staff using a file template to describe the tool as an element of the collection and preparing a note for exhibiting purpose, and a visitor watching the displayed object with (or without) interest. Between the original context and the display, at least two spaces emerge for meaning-making practices: collection building and exhibition design (Porczyński and Vargová 2019).

Since this paper focuses on the problem of construction of local representations, the question arises as to how local museums contribute to the discussed phenomena. Do they speak about a locality in a way that national museums speak of a nation-state, or is there a significant difference? As we already mentioned, there is a strong relationship between a nation-state and a museum (Bennett 1995; Anderson 2006; Hudson 2014; Ziębińska-Witek 2020). However, along with the development of national museums, many local community-focused institutions also emerged (Stránský 2005:151; Stojak 2007). The situation lasted throughout the Cold War. Many Eastern-Bloc countries continue to establish regional museums, yet their narratives were connected with the official state ideologies (Stránský 2005:153,155). Recent studies which consider the post-EU accession period show that local communities become more aware of their distinction, and a kind of local Renaissance takes place. Globalization – contrary to the common belief – has not destroyed local cultures, but provided means which helped them sur-

vive and strengthen (Mach 2004:88). Museums, as gatekeepers of local traditions, can participate in that process and, therefore, develop and strengthen local identities (Kurczewska 2003; Crooke 2007; Jagodzińska 2021). The sociological pragmatism tradition provides some examples of how a city – as a material, social, and symbolic complex – might be enclosed in icons to which groups refer during their interactions (Strauss 2008:160). Joanna Kurczewska (2015:54) argues that the new period of local culture development (and its research) has much to do with objects. A locality is a space of life that contains material components shaping everyday practices. A recollection of objects important to collective identity might be seen in local branding. Promoting products as unique and significant to the local culture is a contemporary way of building local consciousness and setting the relationship with outsiders.

### Describing a locality through art

Often because of its accessibility through national museum exhibitions, art has also a lot in common with the development of national cultures. Many historical events and influential people are recognized through paintings, sculptures, music, and literature. Selected artworks shape the national culture canon (Znaniński 1990; Kurczewska 2000; Kłoskowska 2012). The *Battle of Tannenberg*, Jan Matejko's famous painting depicting an important historical event, is exhibited in the National Museum in Warsaw and is reproduced in school handbooks, thus shaping a collective representation of a significant historical event. Art is localized and corresponds to the culture (Geertz 2005). Literary, iconic, and TV representations can also shape local imaginaries (Sulima 2001:133). Aleksander Kotsis' landscapes and scenes of Podhale, Canaletto's views of War-

saw, or Bruno Schultz's drawings and descriptions of Drogobych are all puzzle pieces that make it possible to reconstruct places experienced by their authors. Therefore, in the museum context, art and 'ordinary' objects can be used in the process of past presencing. The question is, however, whether they are used similarly, or if aesthetic sacralization changes the status of artworks in the museum context. This problem seems to be quite complex for two reasons. Firstly, as already mentioned, the musealization process contains a strong aspect of sacralization. Whether these are sculptures, combs, or swords, they are elevated to another level of importance. Secondly, the museum history of aesthetic objects is very difficult. As Stanisław Ossowski (1966:354-355) argues, it is permeated by class and colonial inequalities. He notes that in Europe 'art' is understood as European art, one connected with elites. Aesthetic objects produced by European lower classes or traditional crafts of Asian, African, or American authors (art with an adjective) are not considered as true art. While *the* art is a matter of interest of art museums, the latter is treated more as an ethnographic phenomenon. The problem is still relevant. As Gary Alan Fine (2004) shows, there is no *one* art world, and different worlds can emerge around different sorts of art, which leads to the development of a separate self-taught artistic social world.

Regional museums' practices cover different historical periods and various spheres of society. They put together everyday artifacts lacking aesthetic qualities as well as such which can be objects of aesthetic assessments, including artworks. A significant number of studies (e.g. Ossowski 1966; Simmel 1980; Bourdieu 1984; Szlendak 1998; Geertz 2005; Muggleton 2006) show that aesthetics might be a factor of distinction between groups or

social classes. Folk costumes and handicrafts make it possible to draw a line between separate ethnographic groups, while a careful analysis of fashion and home furnishing helps to describe different tastes of modern society's classes or youth sub-cultures. It is a significant indicator of social phenomena. Traditional cultures lack the strong distinction between objects and art, and art is more likely about aesthetics permeating all spheres of everyday and festive life (Znaniński 1937:504-506; Jackowski 2007:278-280). Modern society exhibits certain elements of traditional cultures – fashion and design somehow connect to many spheres of everyday life, but there is also a specialized sphere of 'true' art, one that is distinct from more 'profane' fields. Noting all these differences, we would like to treat all collected and exhibited things as objects. We do not want to assess the aesthetic qualities of handicrafts and artworks, as it is not the element of a sociological inquiry (Ossowski 1966:371; Znaniński 1963:389). We assume that selected artifacts bear certain traits that make them more than 'useful', 'durable', 'fragile', or 'handy'. They become 'beautiful', 'ornate', 'decorative', etc. This helps to compare them with other collection pieces and to extract unique perspectives and approaches that curators apply when dealing with them.

### The study's aim and outline

The paper examines practices of Polish and Slovak museums focusing on the creation of representations of a locality. The main objective is to answer the question about how aesthetic objects contribute to the process of past presenting in comparison to different types of museum artifacts. We would like to determine how different museum staff members negotiate either to impose their points of view or to develop a coherent exhibition narrative.

The perspective negating the uniqueness of art objects and locating them within the broader set of aesthetic objects leads to thinking over the art-world approach which puts the art object in the center of social practices (Becker 2008). The artifact is linked to the locality, but its connection to the past is stronger than its relation to the present. This study focuses on the functioning of *musealia* in the institutional context, noting that a regional museum performs different functions than an art museum. Although it can contribute to the functioning of the art world, more likely it is the institution belonging to different social universes, i.e. that of a locality or that of past presenting (the one uniting people and organizations dedicated to making the past experienced today: historians, archeologists, collective memory researchers, reenactment groups, heritage institutions, etc.)

This study is based on material collected during two research projects. The first one was conducted in the years 2015–2016 in the Subcarpathian Voivodeship museum. The analyzed data consists of 34 in-depth interviews conducted with managers, curators, educators, and PR officers. The second study was carried out partially among curators of the Subcarpathian Voivodeship (8 IDI's) and the Kosice region (another 8 IDI's). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Although both projects dealt with the problem of the globalization's influence on cultural institutions, interview scenarios included question blocks concerning topics of collection building and exhibition design, fitting the scope of this paper. We focus on those practices and museum staff perspectives which are connected to the process of creating an exhibition. We do not try to decipher the complete meanings of final exhibitions. The paper tracks decisions behind the choice of certain pieces as elements of collections or displays rather than the final organization of components.

The respondents were intentionally selected according to the constant comparison approach. We selected museums of different sizes and founded by different parties to provide conditions for successful comparisons. When writing this paper, we followed the methodology of grounded theory (Konecki 2000; Charmaz 2009). We coded certain parts of interviews, selected the most promising (theoretically) parts, and then constructed categories. In order to illustrate our narratives, we cite our interviewees. All citations are anonymous and since our respondents could be easily identified, we removed territorial indicators and used only interview codes.<sup>2</sup>

### The relation of an artwork to the original context

An art object seems to be more complex than other musealized elements of everyday life. They are not just 'things', but things with aesthetic traits. This situation generates more possibilities of connecting the art piece to the original context than the other *musealia* have. The artwork and different types of artifacts share a certain set of features that might be recognized by examining the museum documentation or the objects themselves. One of the museum staff's responsibilities is keeping records containing information about artifacts' features. They include the objects' physical description, **provenience**, and **authorship**, and for a sociologist, these elements are of the most vital

<sup>2</sup> The codes describing individual interviews can be interpreted as follows:

- for *Subcarpathian Museums 2004-2014* project, "Muzeum-07" means that the interview was conducted in a seventh museum on a list and "02" denotes the individual number of the interview carried out in this museum;

- for the *The role of museums in local identity construction in Poland and Slovakia* grant, codes contains the indication of the country where the interview was conducted (PL or SK) and a sequential number (e.g. SK-4).

importance, since they bind the artwork with the original context. For the purpose of this study, we call them **primary indicators**. As linkages to the locality, they are difficult to challenge, since they are grounded in the time-space aspect of reality; they were either created in the local context or used by a member of the local community, and as such they became legitimate objects of the curator's interest and care, as they allow the museum worker e.g. to tell something about the living conditions of a certain period:

The point is to make every L. citizen or tourist better know the history and not only of a particular object. For example, there are no descriptions under exhibits in a burgher sleeping room because it is about making an impression of a museum of the interior. There is, however, general information concerning that from where the furniture comes. There is a connection between these objects with a particular person, the explanation of who that person was. So, it is about showing a broader historical context using these objects as background. [PL-2]

Interior design is an example of the use of the class-related category of taste. This consequently shows our perspective as much broader than based on a more strictly understood category of fine arts. A reconstruction of the interior not only provides information about the living conditions of peasants, burghers, or aristocracy, but it also gives a snapshot of their taste and accepted aesthetics. A similar situation concerns artworks owned by people that used to live in a certain place:

[A]s for the other art collections, they point to, not just the paintings, but particularly the origin of it... not the origin but to the founders of the castle, to those owners. [SK-5]

By studying the objects one can learn about people who used or owned them. This can help to make generalizations about local representatives of a certain social class and, later, to make comparisons with members of the class at the national or international level. Art in different forms seems to permeate many aspects of life. In traditional cultures, the border between it and everyday objects is often indistinguishable. Wooden architecture, tools, kitchen utensils were all decorated. Not only were they allowed to fulfill a need for beauty in everyday life, but they also became indicators of the locality. Ceremonial costumes are usually connected with certain regions and allow their inhabitants to distinguish themselves from others as well as symbolically express their identity. They are important components of folk culture exhibitions and collections, and as such they are indicators of a locality:

[F]rom the perspective of ethnography and fashion, an incredibly precious thing is an R. [folk] costume from the period of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> century, preserved in a decent state. It is a jacket and a [...] vest. It may be this is one of the first costumes sewn as today's conventional R. costume? [PL-1]

**Q. In the context of R. and the regions which do you study is it possible to speak about any distinction of the local community from the rest of the country, nation?**

A. Distinction, well at this moment it is really difficult. Sure, we have many distinguishing features, that we can use to draw this distinction. However, I'm not completely sure [...] whether on the one hand we try to care about this locality and regionality, whether it is mentally important for us but do we show it? I don't know that. [...] So I think yes but anyway, like, some positive things happen. Since, not long ago [...] I had a conversation with a man who embroiders, and here

he uses our collections, archives and he was asked by a lady, who was getting married, for making a belt for her wedding dress, which was exactly a typical reproduction of an embroidery, here, ours, [from] R. and additionally earrings for bridesmaids, I think, and so on. And he said that the groom comes, exactly, from M. and he ought to have, in turn, patterns from M. embroidered on cuffs [...] And so it appears, this ethno-design or, [...] it was important for them to show, how, really, to show up in this [costume] which is related, here, with our region. [PL-8]

By making collections available to visitors, museums not only retain a snapshot of the past, but also provide their audiences with a certain set of references for identity construction and expression. Even stronger indicators of the locality are products of local artisans – especially in places identified as historical centers of traditional crafts (e.g. Krosno with glasswork, Medynia Głogowska with pottery, or Kolbuszowa with furniture-making). In such places, handicrafts can be treated as a value and a component of the local habitus. In these particular cases, to speak about the locality is to speak about certain craft traditions:

Our museum is a specific one. It's not a modern art museum, we generally are into the history of crafts in K. and surroundings, and the town's rank based mostly on craft development. Craft from the very beginning made the town develop well, there were plenty of great craftsmen. From time to time we do a series of workshops "From an apprentice to a master." We show particular professions, we show how many prominent craftsmen appeared here through ages, how K. based on craft. Today it is shown only from the museum's perspective. It is important to build this local identity, through repeating, showing citizens how does the history of K. influenced the

city's development, how beautiful and rich history we have. [Muzeum-07-02]

Representing handicrafts in museum narratives makes it possible to distinguish another vital factor: the importance of **authorship** and the author's persona. Among a large number of hand-made objects, usually created by more or less anonymous artisans, certain artifacts are produced by craftsmen of high skill or status, i.e. by masters. The question of authorship is even more important when it concerns objects identified as artworks *per se*. Local museums often include in their collections works produced by a more or less famous author, born or living in the neighborhood. It is a common strategy of many towns to be recognized by their relationship to a famous person, and artists are not the exception. Thus, representations of a locality include elements whose role is to convince the audience that the given place is special, because it is, e.g., the hometown of Zdzisław Beksiński (as is the case with Sanok). Institutions either provide space for the author's exclusive exhibitions or they display their artworks among other artists' pieces. Therefore, the museum in Stalowa Wola collects and exhibits works of Alfons Karpiński, the museum in Jasło – Ignacy Pinkas' paintings, and the museum in Michalovce owns a large collection of pieces by Theodor Mousson.

We try to do that [to build an image of the town as a living place of a famous painter] in the town as well. The town is simply... even though the local government wants M. [to be perceived] as a town of sports, which I do not agree with, and I keep saying that M. – a town of knight and painter, hey, so I promote this idea, because as it was in one Slovak film “you can chop wood when on command but you won't paint the picture”, they won't force me to talk about M. as M. – the town of sports. [SK-3]

Artworks, especially photographs and realistic paintings, might as well be a form of **documentation**, i.e. capturing past events, street views, or people's appearance. As such, they are also strong indicators of local representations.

A common material existence. The same through ages. I speak about peasants. There weren't significant differences. There were richer, poorer peasants but more or less [their living conditions were the same]. This entailed way of dressing, which might be seen in W. photographs. These are also vanishing elements of folk culture. Fashion is universal now. Second-hands did the thing. [PL-1]

These visual representations can interact with other exhibits, helping to understand their meaning, significance, processes of production, and use. They might be valuable when the displayed objects are difficult to interpret without some support or context. Depending on the museum's resources, they might enrich the exhibition based on original artifacts or substitute them in a situation when the institution lacks them.

**Secondary indicators** require some serious effort from the curator to become a legitimate rendering of the original context. It usually concerns a situation when artwork or an artist is not directly connected to the locality. In such cases, through meaning-making practices the museum tries to validate a connection between the object and the local representation. Such a convincing link might be, e.g., a historical period, art trend, or industry sector important to the place. Stalowa Wola is a town which was founded in the late 1930s. Since an important part of its heritage is the steel industry and modernist architecture, the local museum undertook many projects to commemorate, preserve, and promote this legacy. Many

of these events were connected directly to the local architecture, but others are linked to more general ideas of modern art and deco art and design. Thus, the museum built up the collection of the interwar Polish design and art:

As for the art department, we have two directions, so: regional artists but also Alfons Karpiński, who was born here, Stefan Norblin, an artist from the interwar [period], a period when Stalowa Wola was founded, so we collect his paintings. [PL-4]

Norblin was not born in Stalowa Wola and he never visited it, yet his art was found iconic for the interwar period, during which the town was developing, and as such it became an element of the locality's image. In comparison – Bronisław Chudzyński's watercolors are more significant as representations of the locality, since the author depicted local architecture while at the same time being the local 'Southern Works' construction's director. It seems, however, that as works of an amateur, they are not as 'sound' as the renowned Norblin's oil paintings. Having a famous artist's artwork strengthens the feeling of pride. Some curators recall visitors' disappointment caused by a lack of 'canonic' artists' works in museum collections; having and displaying one is a matter of prestige and a potential lure for tourists.

This documental aspect draws attention to a unique quality of artworks as exhibition components, namely **aesthetics**. A painting, a photograph or a piece of furniture might be put on display not because of their importance to the original context, but because of their beauty or illustrative qualities. Curators analyze them using a framework of aesthetics, focusing on the author's skill, composition, and color palette. They compare the object with similar

works from the period to tell whether they are of greater or lesser quality than the others:

But arts can be not only painting, sculpture, or drawing but also film or photography. W.'s photography is artistically ingenious. Of course, there are mistakes in it but they result from the equipment he had. He overexposed some, or did not see, or did not keep an eye on the light. All W.'s are composed [in advance], these are not reportage photos [...] All people here are set, gestures, gloves are put on, portraits are set, profile here... It's a high level of photographic art. [PL-1]

From the perspective of representation-making, aesthetics is considered along with other indicators:

Q: [D]o you think that art may concern, shape the sense of locality, local identity?

A: It might be, since we had, for example, a painting exhibition, a lady who is [a person from here] and lives in S. [now]. And she painted, among others, a few landscapes from [here]. They were very popular. Yes.

Q: Because it was art or because she came from [here]?

A: First of all because [she came from here] and it was of good quality. A lot of people came. [PL-3]

What binds a visitor with the exhibit is predominantly the sense of communal solidarity with the author. Identifying the artist as the person "from here" is an important element in accepting the display as a way of speaking about the locality. However, the artwork also contains aesthetic qualities and in this particular example they strengthen the object's importance. The excellence of the painting fills visitors with pride that such a gifted person can be counted as a fellow citizen. The relationship with the art of a famous outsider is a different case. While creations of the local artist support the con-

struction of imaginaries reflecting a given reality (documentation of the past), including the artworks of a creator from beyond the community is a matter of current practices oriented toward the future. Although in both cases the process of interpretation takes place, the former example does not need a significant amount of work to gain legitimacy. The practice of legitimizing a famous person as a “resource” for a community has to do with historical policy or regional marketing, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

### **Representations of the locality’s past as a boundary object**

In many heritage institutions, artworks are only a portion of stored artifacts. Regional museums’ collections usually compose of natural, archeological, historical, ethnographical, and artistic objects. This, of course, corresponds to the complexity of the original context that they speak about. Lacking burgher or working-class traditions, rural localities will not have access to memorabilia relating to the class. The depiction of the period is based on different types of objects, yet before they become part of the exhibition, several decisions are made. As previously mentioned, there are at least three stages during which a curator (or another authorized member of the museum staff) makes decisions concerning the choice of artifacts.

Susan Star and James Griesemer (1989) introduced the notion of a “boundary object” to describe certain elements that are evaluated and interpreted differently by involved social actors. The emergence of such a phenomenon invokes a discursive field, i.e. a social arena where antagonistic interactions take place (Strauss 1978; 2008; Clarke 1991; Kacperczyk 2007). This concept can be applied to the analysis

of the construction of a representation of a locality’s past in museums. Besides the original use of the term describing differences between curators and the audience’s perspectives on exhibitions, it can be applied to all phases emerging during the preparation of the display. At every stage of the musealization process, the curator makes certain decisions to include the element into the collection or the exhibition, and these decisions are often preceded by negotiations with other curators and museum officials, who may have different perspectives and agendas.

In the fragment where a curator expresses his/her negative opinion concerning the rejection of the heritage of a famous artist in the practices of identity-building, two perspectives on locality clash. This situation provides two important pieces of information. Firstly, an element of the past through certain meaning-making processes can be treated as a main motif of the local representation. Secondly, different motifs exist and under specific circumstances they can compete in the arena of local representations. Although this particular situation concerns discourse between different institutions (heritage versus politics), similar competitions can appear in organization itself.

Q: If you had a choice between an item, less attractive from a universal perspective, but valuable from the perspective of your collection building guidelines and, eventually, an object that is of universally high value, an artwork, for example, a painting, but not necessarily related, and you would have money. What would you choose?

A: Probably I would choose a regional thing. Another [regional painter’s] or [famous Polish painter’s] piece would not impress me. We have so little here, it isn’t a history that I may compare to Cracow’s history. Every artifact found here moves our [work] forward,

begins to speak about this place's history. I'm also a fanatic, so it makes me difficult to say. Every prewar citizen's visit card makes [me] happy. [PL-4]

The first stage of musealization during which decisions and negotiations take place is the building of a collection. James Clifford (2000) provides an apt metaphor of ethnography, defining it as a practice of collecting.<sup>3</sup> During fieldwork, an ethnographer makes decisions concerning elements of culture that should be included in the developing theory. It is difficult to completely recognize local cultures (as extremely complex phenomena) during the limited time of the fieldwork. The researcher's personality, theoretical approach, or even random factors might significantly influence the process. In effect, museum collections are not complete sets of items representing the original context. Certain conditions – such as financial capacities, access to important objects, deciding which pieces are important, storage spaces, collecting strategies, scientific approaches – can all influence the collection status at every stage of its making (Porczyński and Vargová 2019). As museums usually have insufficient funds, each purchase is preceded by negotiations:

We have such an entity, called The Commission of Acquisition. Of course, it's me, who – from all these offers, that come to me – choose these most interesting [objects], which I know, are missing at the moment, or that will be useful at the exhibition, or what's important. This my proposal of acquisition I introduce to the commission, and the commission accepts it, although the director accepts this decision finally. These are also financial considerations. She knows we can afford something or not. [PL-4]

<sup>3</sup> Clifford recalled Margaret Mead's statement about gathering particular pieces of culture during her research.

During this process, artworks compete with other types of objects. Curators representing different museum units have their own ideas about the significance of the artifacts (e.g. a historian might prefer documents, an ethnographer will favor elements of folk culture, etc.):

From ethnography, through archeology, history, numismatics, phaleristics, to the... Everything is here. Every piece, even the art department. We are creating the art department at the moment. In the past, my predecessors didn't pay attention to art, saying that the gallery of the Town Cultural Centre is for it. They [the gallery] should take care of pictures, sculptures and they [museum] will have peace of mind. But, their collections come from all corners of Poland and me, here, not often but from time to time, do exhibitions about art, from religious to super modern, of artists associated with the region, associated with our areas, or exquisite artists coming from Subcarpathia. [PL-5]

Functioning in the conditions of scarcity, lacking storage spaces, and having different statuses in the organizational system of the museum, representatives of different units negotiate upon the selection of artifacts. They decide which piece would best represent the original context at the given moment. They act collectively in order to reach the most satisfactory conclusion.<sup>4</sup>

The subsequent stage of the process includes the selection of artifacts that would be put on display. Assuming that the exhibition is the representation of locality with which the audience can directly interact, this stage has a greater influence on the im-

<sup>4</sup> We allow the possibility of the existence of a more antagonist approach where the curators compete on the arena of representations to enforce their own point of view, but we lack sufficient data to make such a statement.

age of the original context when compared to the collection itself. It is because people from outside rarely have the opportunity to see the stored artifacts. During this phase, curators are even more restrained than during the process of gathering items. They rely on the collection, which is not the original context itself. Rather, due to its incompleteness, it is a distorted image of the context.

In order to make the past present in a more accurate manner, curators are sometimes forced to seek some alternative indicators:

Undoubtedly, the underappreciated family in L. is the first family of P., which has outstanding merits, members of which made the closest entourage of Polish kings. Because of the lack of objects related to this family, it is very difficult to say something more about this family. It is difficult to build some identity basing on this family, or tradition. It stays rather in this sphere of narratives. [PL-2]

Therefore, during this stage, different ways of visualizing the locality compete, and from the point of view of museology, they are not equal. Stránský's theory includes three types of representation: authentic, iconic, and informative (Stránský 2005). The most valuable are the first and the second ones, since they have an authentic connection to the people they represent on the display. As such, they bear resemblance to relics. When there is a lack of such objects, curators need to use different means to construct a representation of the past. Since there is also a lack of faithful images of people from the Middle Ages, some 19<sup>th</sup>- or 20<sup>th</sup>-century representations are used.<sup>5</sup> Their power to represent the original context

<sup>5</sup> The most popular representations of the Polish kings are Jan Matejko's portraits from the 19th century. It is not known how e.g. Mieszko I or Bolesław Chrobry really looked like.

is not as strong as the authentic ones'. Narratives, which our respondent recalled, are the weakest indicators. They are applied instead of authentic and iconic ones, or to support the representation build with their use. Art can be used either as an authentic representation or as an iconic one. It can be a relic – a thing owned by – or “witnessing” the life of – a historic person, or it can be a sort of documentation, i.e. a portrait helping to visualize the person's looks, or an important scene in which he/she took part.

The question of the collection's and exhibition's (in) completeness might be resolved in various ways. Besides “telling the stories”, different methods – such as artifact reconstructions, use of pictures, or multimedia – are utilized to provide more or less accurate representations of the locality. Another part of the interview provides more information on the factors that shape the final form of the exhibition:

Q: What decides that one object finds its way to the exhibition and the other one to the storage room?

A: Definitely its state of preservation. Having a choice – considering for example an ethnographic exhibition – between two benches, which are from the same period, I choose the one which looks more attractive. Besides, such *musealia* were selected for the exhibition to create an attractive arrangement. Very often something ends up in a storage room because of a lack of place for exhibiting it. Although the building is spacious, only four rooms were designated for display and this space is very limited. Wanting to say more about the town we had to make multimedia presentations. They display themselves, scroll on monitors. Yet exhibits were selected to speak about the town in a reasonably attractive way. These are the best-preserved objects and the most beautiful ones, however, there are many interest-

ing fabrics, costumes in wardrobes and, unfortunately, there is no place for them. [PL-2]

From the perspective of the exhibition as a whole, not only the significance of the artifacts but also their attractiveness is considered. The display is, therefore, a configuration of objects that are significant as elements allowing to make the past present, as well as an aesthetic phenomenon. Curators transform chosen elements of the collection into a medium that makes it possible to represent the past in the most attractive way. A similar aspect relates to the completeness of the thesaurus as a base for the exhibition. The lack of key artifacts hampers the representation of the original context during the exhibition design. Thus, it seems that it is not only important that the exhibition should faithfully represent the original context, but also how attractive the way of doing it is. While preparing the display, curators balance between their interpretations of the past, the possibilities of representing it with *musealia*, the available exhibiting space, and, finally, the capacities to satisfy the taste of the audience. The strategy which might be called “a scientific” one competes with a different – aesthetics-oriented – approach, which relates to the fact that the exhibition might be treated as a work of art (Świecimski 1992). Thus, the organization of *musealia* in space and their choice are two aspects connected not only to the faithful representation of the original context, but also to the creation of an aesthetic, “good-looking” organization of objects and space. The exhibition’s design and all practices that come after it (guided tours, education) include the practices of selection and, if there are more people involved, also discursive practices:

We here, from every department, were supposed to select the five most valuable exhibits, but I said no,

we should better promote less, for example, although they know about this museum, it has the largest collection of M.’s paintings and let them come to look at them and they will see also different things. [SK-5]

Two perspectives were applied here. The first one includes the notion of value, which might be about several traits of the artifact: its importance to the original context, its uniqueness, or (rather doubtfully) its market price. This approach clashes with a more market-oriented idea of the main motif based on a renowned artist. As such, it is even more synthetic than the exhibition itself. In this case, other indicators of the original context were subordinated to the main one. It means that the perspective of the curator as an expert in the field challenges not only his/her colleagues’ approaches, but also confronts with the audience’s needs and abilities to participate and interpret the exhibition. Since the audience encompasses a broad spectrum of people with different levels of education, the display needs to be designed in a way which allows people with low cultural capital to understand mediated meanings. As our interviewees noted, better-educated visitors are those who can fully perceive both the aesthetic and the symbolic meanings that the given artwork communicates. For this reason, art might be less influential if compared to different artifacts:

Looking at L.’s citizens I’m not convinced it would have any broader response. Even if, it still would be this small group looking for something. [PL-2]

When dealing with less-educated visitors, aesthetic object may be treated as an “ordinary” artifact, or only its documentary traits might be utilized:

[O]ne may talk about art on several levels. If I have a more sophisticated visitor – I like to guide [him]

very much [...] when I have such a visitor, like a... clot, sometimes I host even such politicians – nothing gets through to them... you know, this basic, historical information should be told, or what is in the picture... 'In the picture is a lady with flowers, and a dove that flies to her'... you know? 'Mother of God Hodegetria' and now a few words about the topic... But if we have a more sophisticated visitor I prefer to show, that this Pantokrator, which we talked about, what this kind of representation is... 'Please, look how subtle the face is painted... Please, look at the color palette...' I could bring him into the painting. I could tell something more... Similar things happen on other exhibitions [...] this gallery linked to the French painting. It is, practically, more historical information, that P. – the founder of the gallery, was Piłsudski's legionnaire, and then he fought in Polish-Bolshevik war, and... 'here you see him on the self-portrait'. They aren't interested in whether this self-portrait is artistically worthless or is it a masterpiece, right? They don't know it. So... a piece of short historical information gets the whole of such an exhibition done and nothing more makes sense... [Muzeum-02-01]

Therefore, artwork in the museum context is a boundary object at three levels of interpretation at the very least. A decision is to be made whether it is to be treated as an aesthetic object or as a more "ordinary" object. In this context, it challenges perspectives shared by different parties (curators or visitors) during collection-building, exhibition design, or educational practices. As an aesthetic object, it can be analyzed according to the rules of different art disciplines and as such it competes with other pieces of art. When it is treated as an object or as a document, its aesthetic traits are not relevant; it is compared with other items in relation to their power to represent the original context.

## Conclusion

Local culture is a symbolic knot binding local, national, and global cultural patterns (Wojakowski 2006), and as such, under certain circumstances, it can be interpreted either as an element of a broader phenomenon or as a unique manifestation of it. The peasantry, bourgeoisie, aristocracy, certain life- and art styles are phenomena existing in various time and spatial frameworks. Their general characteristics are elements of scientific and everyday discourse, but historically they existed in various forms as local varieties of broader phenomena. When analyzing local collections and exhibitions, one can learn more about those forms. This also allows the application of the discussed secondary indicators of a locality. Rooting the primary ones in the local context is not difficult; they are self-explanatory. The use of artwork to make a representation of the original context – when the piece a) was made locally; b) was authored by an artist connected to the place; c) documents an element of the original context; d) was owned or used by someone connected to the place – does not need an elaborate justification. Only a deep understanding of the local context makes it possible to find connections between it and personae, events, or artworks that were not created or used in a certain place, thus allowing one to build a convincing narrative on this basis.

However, the arena between the scientific and the aesthetic ways of displaying objects is only a part of a broader problem. Looking from a somewhat different perspective, local cultures have in many cases been noticed and appreciated through globalization. It has yielded a multitude of diverse benefits, primarily the opportunity for these cultures to present themselves to the world and promote their little homelands, but it also allowed them to

learn something new. This process is significant for various types of institutions, including museums, which are tasked with strengthening and cultivating tradition and representing local communities to outsiders. This is because museums not only collect artifacts of all kinds, but also organize and interpret them. All the tasks discussed above precede the processes of interpretation and communication, which correspond to the developing museum tourism, i.e. a branch of cultural tourism whose importance grows in the globalizing world (Wieczorkiewicz 1996; Kranz-Szurek 2012; Stefanik and Kamel 2013).

Until recently, culture and tourism had been treated as two separate entities. Cultural resources were perceived as part of the heritage of a local community, related to education, or as a foundation of that community's identity. Tourism, on the other hand, was seen as a form of leisure-oriented activity, clearly distinct from everyday life or local culture. This approach had been gradually transformed until culture became recognized as a factor enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of a given region. In light of the role it plays in bringing in tourists and economic growth, it began to be considered in terms of the driving force behind tourism (WTO 2001; OECD 2009), while the risks involved are not fully realized. A hasty and selective consumption of cultural heritage by tourists can lead to its value being lowered (Purchla 2013). Therefore, whether a place becomes an important point on the cultural map of a country is determined not only by the mere fact of possessing certain resources, but also by their skillful interpretation which must take into account both the symbolic layer of resources and their market dimension (Ashworth 2002). The demand for the same product can vary depending on how it was "packaged" (Broński 2013).

Cities are enthusiastically searching for cultural resources that could be included in their tourist offer, contributing to their recognition at the same time. Local authorities use acclaimed figures, including artists, to convince the audience that their locality is unique. Museums have also become part of such a strategy and have begun to provide space for individual exhibitions or for presenting pieces by selected artists among other displayed works. They are becoming an arena of struggle for the attention of the viewer and decision-makers alike. Renown names not only ensure greater attendance, but also boost chances of receiving various kinds of subsidies. Moreover, to meet the requirements of modern tourists, museums ceased to function as mausoleums or places of art and history cult, where a collection is the only thing that matters. They became a well-arranged representation of the original context, making art an integral part of life and enriching it with various forms of entertainment (Adorno 2005; Newhouse 2005; Broński 2013). As an important part of the tourist industry, they were intended to encourage visitors to spend money not only in the museum itself, but also to visit restaurants, use accommodation services, etc. (Myerscough 1988). The museums becoming significant players in the tourism industry target a specific audience, i.e. an audience that is no longer so keen on contemplating works of art in silence and solitude, but, rather, is focused on exploring leisure opportunities and taking advantage of offers that meet their recreational needs, as well as providing unusual experiences (Bauman 1993; Stephen 2001; MacCannell 2002). Therefore, although museums continue to maintain to some extent the image of temples of art and knowledge – drawing the attention of visitors to the exhibits and imposing on them an attitude of complete concentration – they mainly strive to generate new and attractive scenarios of the past, comple-

mented with contemporary art (Folga-Januszewska 2011; Pomian 2014). The rank and value of a given work are both more and more often determined by various accompanying events, such as concerts, readings, and shows. On the one hand, this attracts a mass audience and places a given institution on the aforementioned cultural map, but on the other, there is a fear of crossing the thin line that separates the museum as a cultural institution from an entertainment facility, and artists from entrepreneurs in the financial industry (Boltanski 2011; Pomian 2014).

One of the key channels through which museums – and by extension cities – can communicate their assets and attractions is through exhibitions. They are not always all-encompassing or ideal representations of a locality; they are often the outcome of random choices, different kinds of negotiations, and also the influence of external factors. The shifting social, economic, and political realities compel museums to modify not only their scope of activity, but also their exhibition planning (Hooper-Greenhill 2007). There are times when exhibitions are reduced to a mere combination of random notions of locality, or to an interpretation that employs objects that are devoid of any cultural or historical context and only pretend to form some kind of whole (Clifford 2000). Also, those in charge of arranging exhibitions deliberately shift away from presenting a given phenomenon in a one-to-one fashion and, rather, they transform it, for example, into a highly aesthetic medium. Decisions of curators and directors who have the final word on what

will be put on display, in what configuration, and when are not only manifestations of their power, but also their means of imposing a specific image of the world (Szczerski 2005). Over the course of this process, works of art compete against diverse kinds of artifacts. Not only are they more complex objects when compared with the rest of museum collections, but they also have aesthetic qualities. Many pieces showcased in museums are plucked out of their original context. This is especially true for the early sacred and ecclesiastical art. Typically, visitors see only the final result, which is the outcome of arbitrary decisions taken by museum professionals, and, usually, they do not know what the purpose of such a selection was. Sometimes they even do not know if it is a work of art they are perceiving, since the curator does not inform them that a certain traditional mug or plate might be an object of aesthetic contemplation. After all, museum professionals are the ones who, based on their knowledge and experience, distinguish handicrafts and works of art (Zgodzińska 2018).

In light of our analysis, Krajewski's statement that objects become suspicious means nothing more than objects moving from the sphere of use to the sphere of symbolization. In the original context, they had been used by people. When on display, they invoke the past. They are still used, but differently. This does not mean that the approach of the sociology of objects is not applicable; one first needs to reconstruct the past in order to analyze the practices of its representation in the present.

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## Uobecnianie przeszłości w muzeach lokalnych. Uwagi o wykorzystaniu sztuki w kreowaniu reprezentacji lokalności

**Abstrakt:** Zarówno muzea jak i sztuka silnie wiążą się z tożsamościami zbiorowymi. W procesach rozwoju nowoczesnych narodów, w XIX i XX wieku, muzea były aktorami (lub narzędziami, w zależności od kontekstu) procesów konstruowania wyobrażeń zbiorowych. Odnosi się to do pewnego powiązania między zbiorowościami i obiektami, w którym te drugie mają wkład w wyodrębnianie się ról społecznych i organizowanie światów społecznych. Dzieła sztuki jako wyobrażenia zbiorowe i nośniki pamięci znacząco uczestniczą w tych procesach.

Od 1989 znaczenie tożsamości lokalnych rośnie. Aktorzy lokalni podejmują zorganizowane działania, aby rozwinąć poczucie wspólnoty i przyciągnąć uwagę z zewnątrz. Także muzea uczestniczą w tych procesach, jednak w zmieniającym się kontekście pojawia się pytanie, czy odgrywają one rolę podobną do ich narodowych odpowiedników, czy też może odmienne okoliczności wymagają nowych sposobów zaangażowania muzeów.

Artykuł analizuje praktyki, w ramach których reprezentacje lokalności konstruuje się w celu wystawienia w kontekście muzealnym. Interesuje nas jakie dzieła sztuki mają wkład w ten proces i jak używa się ich w porównaniu z artefaktami niemającymi cech estetycznych. Studium opiera się na 50 wywiadach pogłębionych zgromadzonych podczas dwóch projektów przeprowadzonych w województwie podkarpackim w Polsce i kraju koszyckim na Słowacji. Koncentrując się na praktykach budowania kolekcji, projektowania i interpretowania wystaw, omawiamy rozmaite klasy obiektów używanych w tych procesach, analizujemy ich efektywność w reprezentowaniu oryginalnego kontekstu – głównego tematu narracji muzealnych – oraz wskazujemy niektóre z nich jako obiekty graniczne, wokół których powstają areny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** tożsamość zbiorowa, uobecnianie przeszłości, muzeum, muzealizacja, sztuka, społeczność lokalna