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CULTURAL HERITAGE GOVERNANCE, POLICIES AND MANAGEMENT IN SERBIA

Abstract: The article deals with the system of cultural heritage governance and management in Serbia as a successor state of Yugoslavia which faced a number of serious risks. These included not only an economic downturn and public neglect, but also war and systematic destruction based on political and ethnocentric agendas. Since the beginning of the 2010s, the heritage community in Serbia has been provided systematic public support in the form of finance, legislation and priority. The paper tests the effect of these institutional changes in practice by using indicators such as museum visits, scholarly and curatorial activities. It concludes that the rise in the number of visitors in Serbian museums is hampered by low cultural participation of the population and by the lack of sufficient curatorial activity.

Keywords: cultural heritage; governance; management; Serbia.

Introduction

With the collapse of the so-called Eastern bloc, the economic free fall, the “shock therapy” and the lack of institutional security put the cultural heritage governance at extreme hardships in the states of Eastern and Central Europe. Similar events followed in Yugoslavia, where the amalgam of small Balkan states united by their common Partizan past crumbled during the same years. However, the factors that affected cultural heritage were not only purely economic, war, embargoes and outright destruction of cultural heritage based on ethnic affiliation are to be added, creating one of the biggest issues in that sphere since the Second World War. Thus, the study of those developments and the institutional measures for the revitalization of the cultural heritage in both protection and socialization are worth exploring. That is particularly valid for the successor state of Yugoslavia – Serbia.

The systemic approach to cultural heritage in Serbia was ignited by the emerging Romanticism and nationalism in the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, mostly by single intellectuals such as Vuk Karadzic. However, the governance and management of cultural heritage developed quite late. The archaeological activity was dominated by the National Museum of Serbia and with the creation of the Archaeological Museum in the mid-20th century, the archaeological work and its display increased dramatically¹. Later, the cultural heritage management in Serbia became a leading one in comparison to other states from the end of the Second World War until the 1980s in terms of building conservation and restoration methods as well as in their integration within urban planning. That was supported by one of the most advanced legislation in the sphere across Europe².

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¹ **Cvjeticanin, T.** Museum Archaeology in Serbia and the Myth of Museum Neutrality, Belgrade: Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2018, pp. 11–12

² **Živaljević-Luxor, N. & Kurtovic-Folic, N.** TRANSVERSE ACTIONS FOR IMPROVING HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN SERBIA. Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Servicio de Publicaciones, 2015, p. 1129.

Recent developments

Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, the system of the cultural heritage in Serbia started lacking sufficient funding, political interest and backing. Furthermore, the level of protection varied greatly from site to site³ with a lot of the vernacular built cultural heritage not sufficiently protected⁴. That problem deepened within one generation, which created a substantial generational gap in the heritage institutions as well as affected the technical knowledge – a problem similar to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe⁵.

Another set of problems were driven by the Yugoslav wars. For example, during the Kosovo War 1025 cultural heritage objects were destroyed in Kosovo, accounting to almost one fourth of all designated objects⁶. Additionally, the shared Partisan heritage of Yugoslavia raises the question of its common management amongst the former Yugoslav republics⁷, raising the questions of its neglected protection or extremely politicized interpretation and socialization.

Systematic institutional efforts to counter those negative developments started in the 2010s. In 2011 two bodies were formed within the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia: the National Committee for the protection of intangible cultural heritage and the Commission for entries into the registry of intangible cultural heritage with one of the important priorities being the formation of the Centre for intangible cultural heritage in Belgrade⁸. Since 2014, Serbia has an item listed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the Slava – family Saint Patron Day. That was met with enthusiasm by the local public, and Serbian intangible cultural heritage became more visible⁹.

Additionally, the “Special plan for the area of special use” within the Law on planning and construction from 2014 was an initiative towards increased protection of built heritage within its relation to construction and real estate development, however, it was still lacking major elements for complete protection. It has built upon the development of local spatial plans adopted between 2007 and 2012 which were increasingly including cultural heritage in its economic and social sense¹⁰. However, there are still institutional issues that need to be addressed. For example, even though digitalization of cultural heritage started in the 1990s, the national policy in those terms began in 2017 with the current situation not providing standard procedures and metadata for mapping of artefacts¹¹. That example becomes increasingly valid during the Coronavirus-2019(COVID-19) outbreak, preventing the physical visits of museums and sites, with some scholars even arguing that providing online access to cultural heritage is an obligation

³ **Terzic, A., Jovicic, A. & SIMEUNOVIC-BAJIC, N.**, COMMUNITY ROLE IN HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: CASE STUDY OF THE DANUBE REGION IN SERBIA. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, Issue Special Issue, pp. 183–201, 2014, p. 189.

⁴ **Niković, A. & Manić, B.** THE CHALLENGES OF PLANNING IN THE FIELD OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SERBIA. *FACTA UNIVERSITATIS Series: Architecture and Civil Engineering*, 16(3), pp. 449–463, 2018, p. 455.

⁵ **Roter-Blagojević, M., Nikolić, M. & Vukotić-Lazar, M.** Serbia. In: C. Machat & J. Ziesemer, eds. *HERITAGE AT RISK WORLD REPORT 2014–2015 ON MONUMENTS AND SITES IN DANGER*. Berlin: endrik Bäßler verlag, 2015, p. 125.

⁶ **Drancolli, J.** Protecting cultural heritage in Kosovo. Ankara, Pozitif Printing Co. Ltd, 2010, p. 1388.

⁷ **Jaukovic, M.** To share or to keep: The Afterlife of Yugoslavia`s Heritage and the Contemporary Heritage Management Practices. *Croatian Political Science Review*, 51(5), 2014, pp. 93–94.

⁸ **Lukic-Krstanovic, M.** Management and production of intangible cultural heritage. Examples in Serbia. *Traditiones*, 41(2), 2012, p. 230.

⁹ **Krasojević, B. & Djordjević, B.** Intangible Cultural Heritage as Tourism Resource of Serbia. *Sociology and Anthropology*, 5(6), 2017, p. 445.

¹⁰ **Živaljević-Luxor, N. & Kurtovic-Folic, N.** TRANSVERSE ACTIONS FOR IMPROVING HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN SERBIA. Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Servicio de Publicaciones, 2015, pp. 1134, 1135.

¹¹ **Ognjanovic, Z., Marinkovic, B., Šegan-Radonjic, M. & Maslikovic, D.** Cultural Heritage Digitization in Serbia: Standards, Policies, and Case Studies. *Sustainability*, 11(3788), 2019, p. 2.

of the European museums, given that the right of cultural participation of every citizen is guaranteed by various international

Data analysis of the Serbian cultural heritage governance and management

The recent institutional developments in the cultural heritage governance and management in Serbia could be tested with the statistics of the number of visitors, exhibitions, etc. The number of visitors and its fluctuation could provide evidence on the socialization efforts of the Serbian heritage community, whilst the number of publications made in museums could indicate the development in heritage interpretation. Through their increase, there could be an easier transition from old-style Socialist museum to the new concept of museums¹².

At first, based on the data analysis using the statistic of the European Group on Museums Statistics (EGMUS, 2020), it could be concluded that the number of private museums in Serbia is quite small, with the number of state-owned museums rising in recent years. A notable positive development is the increase of the number of local and regional museums, which is in line with the modern paradigm of museum studies (Table 1.).

Table 1. Types of museums in Serbia

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Art, archaeology and history museums	64	64	63	62
State-owned museums	13	13	13	13
Local-, regional-owned museums	123	123	118	115
Other public-owned museums	8	8	8	8
Private-owned museums	4	4	4	4

Source: retrieved from EGMUS/Country statistics
https://www.egmus.eu/nc/en/statistics/complete_data/

Secondly, the number of museum visits is rising with both total and free admission in the period 2016-2019. However, the total number of visitors remains quite small revealing low cultural participation of the Serbian population. In comparison with neighbouring Bulgaria for 2017, which has the lowest cultural participation rates in the whole European Union, Serbia has a participation rate of 0,30 visitors per person, while Bulgaria has 0,72. Additionally, for the same year, the percentage of free admissions in Serbia was 44,60, whilst in Bulgaria it was 23,90 (Table 2).

Table 2. Number of museum visits in Serbia

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Total admissions	2.260.073	2.272.623	2.137.212	1.955.544
Free admissions	973.702	926.076	952.897	835.226
Free admissions as percentage	43,10	40,70	44,60	42,70

Source: retrieved from EGMUS/Country statistics
https://www.egmus.eu/nc/en/statistics/complete_data/

Thirdly, the scientific output of museums is sluggish and not providing steady increase. The number of temporary exhibitions grew, but showing decrease in the joint temporary exhibitions, with cooperation between museums undisputedly creates additional scholarly and expert value. Further, the number of museums with at least one publication ceased rising as in 2016-2018 and in 2019, it almost halved. The scientific and socialization efforts of the museums relates easily to the number of visitors as well As argued by Towse, even if museums are not providing constant changes to their exhibitions and collec-

tions, additional programs and techniques providing enhanced experience could contribute to sustaining or even enlarging the audience¹³ as cited by Vasilev¹⁴ (Table 3).

Table 3. Scientific output of Serbian museums

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Total temporary exhibitions	917	900	906	879
Own temporary exhibitions	611	576	553	531
Joint temporary exhibitions	306	324	353	348
Number of museums with at least one publication	36	69	63	61

Source: retrieved from EGMUS/Country statistics
https://www.egmus.eu/nc/en/statistics/complete_data/

Conclusion

Even though the 2010s reforms in the heritage sector in Serbia does not provide all new positive developments, their continuous effect should not be disregarded. It should be pointed out that the curatorial activity is becoming increasingly expensive in terms of specialized staff and ICT solutions, thus their de-prioritizing leading to budget cuts may be reasonable in difficult economic setting. Additionally, the cultural participation rate, even though being treated with increasing free admissions, could be a mark for either cultural predisposition of the Serbian society or economic problems not allowing higher cultural participation by the population. Thus, the reason, whether cultural or economic, should be addressed in order to allow greater socialization of the Serbian cultural heritage.

In any case, standardization in the digitalization efforts of the Serbian museums or ensuring proper museum statistics are comparatively less resource-intense actions that the heritage community should acquire for the normal heritage management. Besides managerial actions based on statistics, the digitalization and the museum statistics could be used for further academic research and policy development.

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¹³ **Towse, R.** *A Textbook of Cultural Economics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2010.

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