(Re)assembling Our Past, Present and Future:

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum as a Platform for Dialogue

By
Louise Diane Susannah de Vries

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I Abstract

This thesis aims to illustrate and explain contemporary interactions between Western ethnographic museums and broader society. It is based on one central case study, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM) in Ljubljana, Slovenia. A majority of informants expressed a wish for the museum to be a platform for dialogue. In connection to their visions, this thesis discusses the potential of ethnographic museums to work towards promoting and facilitating inclusivity and social change as well as some tensions that arise from this development. This is done through an analysis of ethnographic data on museum employees’ views on the relevance and responsibilities of the museum and its status as a cultural and scientific institute. New museology and actor-network theory are used as primary analytical tools. A responsibility to represent ‘correctly’ in the museum is related to the influence that tangible and intangible heritages, as actants, can have on society. It is argued that cultural heritage could be instrumental in achieving positive social change. However, there is a core tension between the envisioned position of the museum and the power hierarchy that it maintains through its identity as a scientific institute that shapes dominant knowledge.

Keywords: ethnographic museums, responsibility, social change, former Yugoslavia, new museology, actor-network theory, epistemology
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“Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.”

George Orwell, *1984*
1. Introduction

The big square feels a bit cold. Tiny snowflakes come down and settle only shortly on the grey tiles before they melt as I make my way to my destination. Institutions surround me. Some other people, wearing warm hats and scarfs, are hastily walking towards the front doors of where they have to be in this new cultural quarter in Ljubljana. Nobody seems to be wandering around. I can imagine that this will change as soon as the summer approaches. A big glass wall impresses me as I walk towards it. Somehow, it seems to look down on me and invite me in at the same time. My first thought is that there is an interesting combination of old and new going on here. The modern architecture combined with artefacts from earlier times is appealing. In this space the past, present and future meet.

What does thinking about museums remind you of? Old, dusty stuff, perhaps? Or maybe you associate them with beautiful things and what we call ‘art”? Do you generally like them? Do you consider them dull? These institutions take many different shapes and all of us develop different relations to them. In this thesis, I focus on ethnographic museums, the one that I just introduced in particular. I ask what this museum means to the people that (do not) visit it nowadays and reflect on what kind of position it occupies in contemporary society. I want to show that the ethnographic museum and the cultural heritage that it holds are not static and ‘just there’, but rather changing, adapting, influential and interactive.

Ethnographic museums, as most other types of museums, are still primarily revolving around the objects they put on display to their visitors. However, as I will describe in detail later on, the historical purpose of these museums has changed drastically and what they should be and could do is at present under discussion. Even when we can see a growth of the number of museums globally, they are facing an increasing questioning of whom they are for and what their role should be. There has been a widening of expectations about what museums can and should deliver since the 1960s (McCall and Gray, 2014:6). As Sharon Macdonald (1996:1) describes it: falling visitor numbers, failure to attract minorities, storage and conservation problems of ever-expanding collections (many of which are never displayed), and competition from the electronic media and other leisure pursuits, all threaten the future of the museum. In 1983, Konaré wrote that “the ethnographic museum as we know it today is doomed, and new types will have to be created in its place” (Konaré, 1983:146). There is a continuing demand
that the management of cultural heritage becomes more open, inclusive, representative and creative (Harrison 2013:225).

It will become clear throughout this thesis that the ethnographic museum is a much more complex institution than we in the first instance take it to be. Ethnographic museums are not just about things that we can hold in our hands. Their reach is wider than that. As Foucault (1970:312) argues in The Order of Things, we are all both objects of knowledge, as made visible by human sciences, as well as subjects that know. The museum also constructs us in relations of both subject and object to the knowledge it organizes (Bennett, 1995:7). In ethnographic museums, we ourselves are the objects of knowledge but also spectators. Usually, when we visit a museum, we expect to see material artefacts. However, these spaces are also instrumental in the construction and development of intangible heritage. A broadening approach of ethnographic museums, which recognizes the importance of intangible cultural heritage and aims for an increased public participation, requires careful attention in the studying of the workings of such institutes and their position in society. In this thesis, I encourage to search for a new perspective on and way of thinking about ethnographic museums, through looking beyond material aspects and taking into consideration their potentials and responsibilities.

All the different heritages¹ in ethnographic museums are influencing our ideas of who we were, who we are and who we strive to be in the future. As has been extensively written about, it is undeniable that cultural heritage has been used for the construction of European national historical narratives through museum discourses. The connection between the public museum and the emergence of the nation state (Bennett, 1995) has been widely recognized. Ethnographic museums have not only been instrumental in the formation of national identities, but are also inseparable from the shaping of the cultural heritages that are key in this process. The ideological and educational use of the museum has been around for so long that the general public usually perceives these institutes as offering a ‘true’ or ‘correct’ representation of national history and culture. We need to keep in mind that these ideas have been internalized over the years. However, the museum does not merely exhibit or store cultural heritages, but takes part in its very creation and definition. What is less clear is how

¹ I use the concept of heritage here in plural as I approach it as something that is constantly redefined and reshaped in the present in a variety of ways and based on different interpretations and realities. As such, we can speak of multiple heritages instead of a singular heritage.
these connections are still (ab)used in modern museum discourses. Or, more interestingly, how our knowledge of these connections inspires and encourages working towards social inclusion and intercultural dialogue within the museum world.

Laurajane Smith famously wrote in her book *Uses of Heritage* (2006) that there is no such ‘thing’ as heritage. I disagree with this bold statement, as I believe heritage can be something very material, physical and bodily. However, I do relate to her reasoning behind it. She argues that heritage is what it is because it is subject to management, preservation and conservation – not just because it ‘is’. We construct it and create its meanings and as such we should see it as a constitutive cultural process. In this thesis I will analyse the characteristics of this process.

**1.1 Research aim**

The central objective of this thesis is to describe the relations that people nowadays have with the ethnographic museum and what position it occupies as a cultural institution in contemporary society. My aim is to illustrate and explain interactions between broader society and ethnographic museums based on one central case study, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM) in Ljubljana, Slovenia. I do this by means of an analysis of the views on the relevance and responsibilities of the museum as described to me by museum employees. The majority of my informants expressed a wish for the ethnographic museum to be a platform for dialogue, which would ideally benefit intercultural understanding and acceptance. In connection to their visions, I discuss the potential of ethnographic museums to work towards promoting and facilitating inclusivity and social change as well as some tensions that arise from this development.

The research questions that guide this thesis are:

1. *How do employees at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum perceive the relevance and responsibilities of the museum?*

2. *In which ways do their understandings of and interactions with the Slovene Ethnographic Museum relate to the changing (theoretical) ideas about the position that European ethnographic museums should occupy in society?*
How employees of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum approach and think about the museum is the red thread throughout this thesis. I will connect their personal concerns and opinions in relation to their workplace to broader discussions surrounding ethnographic museums and the public reach of these institutes. There are different tensions and competing ideas on ideal functioning and goals within museum services (McCall and Gray, 2014:20). I aim to give an impression of the various tension points that are felt and articulated by the employees of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Although the research questions focus on the discourses of the museum workers, I place these throughout my analysis against the practices that I have observed in the museum. This thesis is descriptive in nature and the intention is not to offer direct solutions for that which it problematizes. Now, let me explain the relevance of this thesis for scholarship and society.

1.2 Relevance

In this subchapter I will explain how this study connects and adds to a broader scientific discourse and where it can contribute to concerns outside of the academia.

Social relevance

Looking into the workings of a national museum like the Slovene Ethnographic Museum is particularly important as memory wars, in which cultural heritage is deliberately used within ideological frameworks, continue to define the cultural landscape of former Yugoslavian postsocialist countries. The former Yugoslavia is still in a state of reconciliation, or in an in-between phase of peace and armed conflict, and ethnic tensions are all but resolved.

At the time in which the field research for this work has been carried out (January - March, 2016), the refugee crisis in Europe was at a high point. Increasing immigration re-opened and intensified discussions about nationality, state borders and identity politics. In Slovenia and its capital Ljubljana, where the fieldwork for this thesis has been conducted, tensions related to these discussions were apparent. When talking to my Slovene informants about their relationships to their ‘own’ cultural heritage, they often referred to the increased immigration

For instance, Slovenes in favour of welcoming those in need and looking for shelter and safety countered protests of nationalist groups. At some point, lines were clearly drawn on official levels by closing parts of the state border (using barbed wire). Most of my informants understood this as useless, a waste of money, and an overly hostile response from the Slovene government.
in explaining why they think it is of importance. Confrontation with cultures and peoples from outside the direct and known environment increases the awareness of who you are or want to be (Barth, 1969). During periods like these, museums of world cultures could provide civilians from anywhere with a platform for dialogue and acceptance. I believe that this could prevent misunderstandings and xenophobia as a result.

Furthermore, as will be addressed in more detail later on, this thesis is highly relevant in connection to the embedded origins of ethnographic museums in colonial history. These institutes are nowadays still contested, under discussion and criticized for being informed by colonial ideas and attitudes. An approach of ethnographic museums as more responsive to current social issues is of importance against this historical background. According to Krouse (2006:180), museums have not moved completely beyond their legacy of colonialism. The world is not as post-colonial as Moira Simpson implies in her book *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (2001). It remains a place of great disparity in power relations, including in the representation of peoples in museums (Krouse, 2006:180).

In relation to these discussions on the imperialist history of ethnographic museums, debates on the repatriation of cultural artefacts to indigenous communities and ethical treatment of human remains are still unsolved in today’s museum discourse.

I argue that ethnographic museums are actors and representatives of human culture in the broader network that is society. As such, they occupy a position that encompasses an influence on the worldview of visitors and the additional responsibilities that come with it. With this thesis, I hope to make a contribution to the lively debate outside of academia around the roles that ethnographic museums should play in society and the responsibilities that they would be able to take. By focusing on the discourses and concerns of museum workers, I show their agency and impact on how the museum works. Hopefully, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, as well as other institutes, will be able to make use of the data presented in this work and get encouraged by this research to make change.

*Scientific relevance*

Within a scientific framework, this thesis aims to contribute to the broader discourses of the anthropology of museums and cultural heritage studies. As mentioned before, museums have often been studied in terms of their historic development and their role in national identity
building. However, the contemporary function of ethnographic museums in particular is not as widely discussed in much detail. I believe that thinking critically about ethnographic museums is especially relevant to anthropologists and ethnologists, as these institutes are closely related to their histories and fields of study. As we shall see in the chapter on methodology and throughout the ethnographic part of this thesis, studying ethnographic museums means in a way having a closer look at the influence of our discipline on society and processes of the shaping of knowledge.

As I will be elaborating on in the next subchapter on theory, new museology is a theoretical approach to museums that is already quite developed within academia. However, the debates central to this field are all but concluded. Much remains to be discussed. McCall and Gray (2014) write that within the movement of new museology – and a great deal of museological literature – it is assumed that as a result of the rethinking of the purposes of museums, real change has occurred in both the understanding of museum functions and the activities that museums undertake. However, they argue that there has been relatively little analysis of actual museum practice to assess the extent to which changes have lived up to the assumptions of new museology across the museums sector as a whole (McCall and Gray, 2014:5). This thesis hopes to fill a small void in this bigger picture.

Finally, by making use of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in combination with the ideas of new museology I hope to give a refreshing perspective in the study of the (potential) impact and influence of cultural heritage and ethnographic museums on society. In the following subchapter I present an overview of these two theoretical approaches as well as an explanation of how and why I chose to use these in my analysis and argumentation.

1.3 Theoretical approach

First, I will discuss the main characteristics of actor-network theory (ANT). The abundant criticism that actor-network theory has received will be reflected on. I will continue by giving a description of the new museology movement. In doing so, I will explain how this perspective on museums inspires to not only consider the historical development and contemporary function of ethnographic museums, but also think about them in a progressive way that approaches them as active change makers in the future.
I believe that actor-network theory and new museology can be seen as complementary to each other in the context of this study. Where actor-network theory is very abstract and specific, new museology is in a sense too idealistic and lacks an in-depth analysis on the relationship between social change and museum collections. I will try to make clear how these approaches fit well together.

**Actor-Network Theory**

Actor-network theory (hereafter ANT) is used as a starting point in this thesis. I ask what museum objects, as well as intangible heritage represented within museum contexts, do and mean to us. Through ANT cultural heritage is assigned a more active position, which is of interest when discussing the discourses surrounding ethnographic museums. Let me elaborate.

ANT originates from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and was first developed in the early 1980s in France. Michel Callon (1986), Bruno Latour (1986; 2005; 2013) and the sociologist John Law (1986; 2004) are seen as the founding fathers of this approach. ANT has been used to examine the processes by which scientific claims come into being. This is done through determining the interactions, connections and activities of the actors involved in this creation. Objects are regarded as *performative* agents (Latour, 1986:63,107). For Latour (2005), social relations are always in process and must be performed continuously.

According to Oppenheim (2007:485), the anthropological appropriation of ANT has focused on its concerns with non-human agency, hybrids, sociotechnical borderlands and amodernity. He states that the literature related to ANT becomes increasingly more interesting for anthropology (2007:485). In museum studies ANT is mainly used as a part of the analytical shift in object-oriented research from the study of ‘products’ to ‘processes’ through which objects are defined and materialized in social practice (Latour, 1988; Waller, 2016:194). ANT studies suggest that museums are not end-points of the social trajectory of objects, but rather settings where the relations between science and society are tested and ordered through curatorial practice (Waller, 2016:194).

Two central claims of ANT are that both humans and non-humans have the ability to act and that their actions and agency are composed through translations (Latour, 1986:88; Latour and Woolgar, 1986: 281; Hacking, 1999). The main aim of actor-network theory is to define and
describe the relational ties between both human and non-human actants within a network, or assemblage. An actant could be an automatic door opener (Latour, 1988) or a scallop in the sea (Callon, 1986). An actant is a point in the network, a node if you will. ‘Actant’ is commonly used instead of the better-known ‘actor’ as central term within ANT as the latter often invokes a human connotation. From now on, I will refer to actants instead of actors in this thesis. All actants are dependent on both the network as well as other actants. When the bigger picture changes, the smaller individual components also change. We must analyse the actants to understand the network, but we also have to understand the network and its context to be able to fully understand the actants. When the position of an actant in the context changes, the meaning of the actant in itself changes as well. Therefore an actant cannot be seen as separate from other actants, the network and its context in society.

A serious complication, and point of criticism, is the notion that all assemblages are consisting of actants and that all actants are assemblages within themselves. In a very abstract way, we could theoretically take this as far as we want, which means that defining a network can become extremely vague and not useful. It is up to the scholar to draw the borders for the studied network. In this sense, networks are changeable and highly dependent on the interests and purposes of those studying them. In this thesis, I do not aim to design a singular limited network. Rather, I use ANT as a tool to describe the dynamic processes within the museum and around it. I look into multiple interconnected dynamic networks and single out some main actants.

What is distinctive about ANT is that it places the networks it analyses within a flat ontology, meaning that all actants are assumed to have the same level of agency. A key assumption within this theoretical and philosophical approach is that there is no existing hierarchy between human and non-human – it rejects anthropocentrism. Non-human actants are approached as equally important to the network as the people. This unique feature of ANT, the equal value and agency of all actants (whether human or not), is also often a point of criticism. For many people this idea can be upsetting. ANT has even been accused of being...

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3 Law (2009: 147) sees little difference between Gilles Deleuze’s concept of agencement (commonly, however not correctly, translated to assemblage in English) and that of actor-network. However, these concepts are not straightforward to define and their relatedness is under discussion. I use assemblage and network in this thesis as compatible. According to Müller and Schurr (2016: 219), an assemblage can in a most basic way be understood as “a collection of relations between heterogeneous entities to work together for some time”.

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amoral, as it complicates the assigning of responsibilities for actions. It can be difficult, and seem ridiculous from some perspectives, to give an equal value or agency to things around us. However, this does not suggest that ‘our’ agency as humans is decreased as a result. ANT merely points out that non-humans also are influential within the construction and conservation of any given network.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the actant and the network are approached as two faces of the same phenomenon and not as two different things (as for instance an individual and society). As Latour (1986:46, 217) made clear: the ‘actor-network’ is not an encounter of two different entities or spatialities (‘actors’ with ‘networks’). Rather, he states, actants are actant-networks. I do not interpret ANT as a functionalist theory. Actants are not defined by the functions that they have in the network but rather by the relationships and translations that come into being amongst various actants as well as related to a network in its entirety.

An important criticism is that ANT is not sufficient as a theory by itself. It is very relevant in describing networks, how they come into being, in defining components and pointing out relations between actants. However, it can be said to only have a limited usefulness. It does not aim to explain (for instance, why networks exist). Also, it is pointed out how ANT has very little to do with affect and reflects only modestly on the influences of external forces on the network.

ANT is nowadays neither completely accepted as a theoretical approach, nor fully dismissed. It is finding its way into different disciplines. ANT is very useful when thinking about the impact of non-human actants and the shaping of knowledge. This is why I make use of this approach, even when I do not use it in its entirety. In this thesis, I work towards an analysis of the broader networks in which the Slovene Ethnographic Museum is situated to be able to reflect on and describe the potential social impact that it could have. In addition to this, it is necessary to look at the network within the museum, in which both human and non-human actants play important parts. In the end, approaching cultural heritage as something that is very much alive and (potentially) influential by itself connects well to the idea of a flat ontology.
New Museology

I make use of New Museology in addition to actor-network theory in my analysis. The new museology is a discourse around the social and political roles of museums, encouraging new communication and new styles of expression in contrast to classic, collections-centred museum models (Mairesse and Desvallées, 2010).

The idea of more community-focused museums is not a new one. Already in the 1960s, the new generation of museum employees grew to dislike the modernist paradigm of the 1930s (Van Mensch, 2005:176). They wanted active, even activist, institutes that would serve communities. In the 70s, these ideas became more solidified. New museology evolved from a perceived failing of the ‘old museology’ or original museology. In 1971 the harsh claim was made that museums are isolated from the modern world. They were supposedly elitist, obsolete and a waste of public money (Hudson, 1977:15). At the 1971 ICOM General Conference and UNESCO’s Santiago de Chile Round Table of 1972 the need for ‘integral museums’ to connect with communities in which the institutions are located and which they serve was emphasised for the first time (Edson, 2014:9). The aim of the new museology theory is to focus on the purpose of museums instead of its functions, including collecting and displaying. As noted by Vergo (1989:3) “what is wrong with the ‘old’ museology is that it is too much about museum methods, and too little about the purposes of museums”. According to Krouse (2006:181), the question for museums and the new museology is not how objects should be collected and exhibited, but why objects should be collected and exhibited.

New Museology was developed as a subfield in museology, or museum studies, in the 1980s. According to McCall and Gray (2014:3), new museology started with the intention of introducing a new philosophy around the functioning of museums and a changed relationship between museums and the societies or communities that they are located in. It moves away from a functional interpretation of museums (McCall and Gray, 2014:4). New museology argues that museums need to develop into more accessible, responsive and interactive places. The aim of their educative work would have to shift from teaching imposed norms and values towards developing and evolving those values that are already present in society. New museology is very closely related to sociomuseology as it also encourages valuing the
knowledge and life experiences of the individuals that make up museum publics (Sarraf and Bruno, 2013:94).

Nowadays, new museology has transformed into what is called critical museology. The aims of critical museology and new museology are very similar. Even though the first ideas have been communicated as early as in the 1960s, many museologists claim that not enough has changed so far. Museums nowadays are in a critical period, which is characterized by some sort of institutional identity crisis. If they do not adapt to their changing environment, they will lose their relevance and ultimately cease to exist. As Sola (1992:106) puts it: “the truth is, we do not know anymore what a museum institution is”. Contemporary society calls for museums that are more open to dialogue and co-creation.

According to Krouse (2006:170), whether we focus on theory or methodology, the new museology represents a particularly anthropological approach to museum work. It emphasizes the need for an emic perspective, trying to understand and take into consideration the needs and wishes of not just a selected group of people but instead promoting a mechanism that works through full inclusion.

I connect this approach within museology with actor-network theory in the following way: when we use ANT to approach cultural heritages as actants within a network, we see how tangible and intangible heritages as well as museums in their entirety can be influential. They can evolve from being channels of state power and ideology that merely serve a small elite into being change-makers that reflect the positions and interests of all people.

As will be shown in this thesis, museums have a responsibility to not only engage with the versions of history as shaped by nationalist politicians, academics, or other powerful elites. Museums should become representatives of the moral values and memories of a wider range of groups within society. Furthermore, museums should not exist out of tradition or merely for the sake of existing. The ways in which the past is actively shaped in the present relates directly to contemporary moral and ethical perspectives on past events (Harrison, 2013:168). In line with this thinking, and as will be described throughout this thesis; museums have a position in society that is not free of responsibilities. I argue that this position should be made use of in a positive way, for instance through actively working towards social change.
1.4 Chapter overview

This first chapter, in combination with chapter two and three, provides an overview of the research that is the basis of this thesis. These three chapters give shape to a groundwork that prepares for a better understanding of the following ethnographic chapters. This introduction chapter has begun with making the aims of this thesis explicit. I have introduced the research questions that are the red thread throughout this thesis and made clear that I analyse the discourses of the employees at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in relation to the museum practices that I have observed. This is followed by a reflection on the relevance of this thesis and the research questions for scholarship and society. Finally, I have introduced and described actor-network theory and the new museology as the main theoretical approaches that I use for my analysis.

The second chapter on methodology starts with explaining the process of defining the field. What follows is a reflection on the different qualitative research methods that I have used for data collection. I make clear when fieldwork has been carried out and in which ways I gathered the information that will be presented in the ethnographic sections of this thesis. The third and last section of this chapter revolves around reflections on the process of doing fieldwork. Here I make clear what my limitations have been. Ethical considerations are a part of these reflections.

The third chapter provides deeper insights about the field by describing the historical development of European ethnographic museums and the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in particular. It provides background information on the colonial origins of ethnographic museums and positions them in contemporary discussions on the functions of these institutes. The second part of this chapter focuses on the historical development of the central case study of this thesis. Here the main events in the shaping of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum as it is today will be discussed, as well as the most important people that have been responsible for these happenings.

Chapter four to six constitutes the ethnographic part of this thesis. The main aim of the fourth chapter is to describe how employees approach and see their role in the responsibility of the museum to (re)present history and culture “correctly”. Museums show what has been collected and preserved and this can yield a very distorted record of the past (Bennett,
This chapter starts off with a description of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and its permanent exhibitions in the section “walking through”. In the second section of this chapter I problematize how ideas of the past are romanticized within the museum, in particular in relation to the rural heritage of Slovenia, and offer a description of how employees reflect on these issues. This is brought in connection to the ideological use of cultural heritage within the shaping of a Slovene national identity and to discussions on (Yugo-)nostalgia. The third section of this chapter revolves around the inclusion of intangible heritage in the museum and a discussion on its necessity for a complete and thorough representation of culture.

The **fifth chapter** is shaped around the analysis of the location of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and how this placement defines its identity and influences its relevance according to my informants. It looks at the location of the museum from three geographical angles within different networks; its specific location within the urban environment of Ljubljana, its position as an urban institute in relation to museums outside of the city and its reach across the state border of Slovenia. In the first section, the impact of the museum’s transition towards having its own buildings within the urban cultural centre of Metelkova is the focus point. I discuss what museum employees expressed as negative and positive influences of this location within the city of Ljubljana on the relevance, popularity and workings of the museum. This section ends with a reflection on the position of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum as being an urban cultural institute. The second section of this chapter reflects on the museum as being “without borders”. The main focus through this concluding section is a discussion on the relevance and responsibility felt by museum workers to address Slovenia’s migration past in relation to today’s refugee crisis within the museum.

The tensions felt by museum employees relating to the idea that the museum has not reached its full potential are the focus for the **sixth chapter**. In this last ethnographic chapter I describe how employees encounter struggles in realizing an inclusive and participatory approach and offering a safe space for dialogue that everybody feels truly welcome to. In the first section I bring up the imbalance between the museum’s collections and the selection that is accessible to visitors in its exhibitions. I relate this to a broader discussion in the cultural heritage field on processes of remembering and preservation. In the second section I describe the concerns that employees expressed about the low visitor numbers and what they believe to be possible explanations for the questions why the museum attracts relatively little people.
This is brought in connection to a wider discussion on the perceived authority of that what we consider to be ‘scientific’. The last section contains a reflection on the visions of the museum as a platform for dialogue. The concerns about accessibility and inclusivity in museums connects ultimately to broader discussions about the role and the use of knowledge in society, in particular to questions relating to the extent of which knowledge should be structured and mediated by professionals and institutional interpretations.

In **chapter seven**, I tie the ethnographic chapters together in a concluding discussion and formulate answers to the research questions that guide this work. This chapter contains discussions on the future of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and European ethnographic museums in general. A responsibility to represent ‘correctly’ in the museum is related to the influence that tangible and intangible heritages, as actants, can have on society. Museum employees have expressed a desire for the museum to be a platform for dialogue and inclusivity. It is argued that cultural heritage can be instrumental in working towards positive social change. However, there is a core tension between this envisioned position of the museum and the power hierarchy that it maintains through its identity as a scientific institute that shapes dominant knowledge. Finally, suggestions will be made for further research.
2. Methodology

There are different ways to study the research objectives that have been described in the previous chapter. My approach, in line with the anthropological tradition, was to do ethnographic fieldwork. I have carefully selected the Slovene Ethnographic Museum to analyse as a case study to gain better understanding of the broader topics that my research relates to.

In this chapter, I give insight into the process of selecting a case, drawing the borders of the field, choosing and applying appropriate methods for data collection, and the shortcomings and difficulties that came up during fieldwork. Even though conducting this fieldwork has not been a predictable process with an easily recognizable line of development, I try to be as clear and precise as possible about it. First, I will introduce my ‘field’, which is the groundwork for the ethnographic chapters. This will be followed by an elaboration on the different methods that I have relied on in approaching and engaging myself with this field. Finally, I will reflect on different challenges that I encountered during the field research.

2.1 Defining the field

After considering different museums in a wide spectre of countries, I decided to focus on the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM) in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Let me explain why.

The urge to show that anthropological investigation in Western society is as valuable as ethnographic research in non-Western or, if you will, ‘indigenous’ contexts, was a reason for my decision to stay closer to ‘home’. Closer to home does not necessarily translate to staying in a place that is geographically nearer but, to me, meant staying in a Western environment. This resulted in a search for an ethnographic museum within Europe.

I never visited Slovenia before conducting the fieldwork for this thesis. Not having that much background knowledge on Slovenia and its recent history increased my interest. Furthermore, the small population of Slovenia and the country being culturally and geographically located in a contested area in between Eastern and Western Europe shaped my expectation that this specific museum might prove to be a highly interesting case when analysed within the scope of this research. The territory of Slovenia has been a part of many different state formations
over time and is only formally recognized as the Republic of Slovenia \textit{(Republika Slovenija)} since its independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991. As will be elaborated on in chapter 3, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum changed drastically in the past thirty years and is, just like every museum, still developing and adapting to its environment. This museum is particularly relevant to my research questions, as it recently had to adapt to the independence of Slovenia and the consequential refocussing on the shaping of a national identity. It also stands out because of its recent expansion and relocation within the city of Ljubljana. Despite its long history as a traditional museum, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum can be approached as a fairly young museum when considering these major changes. These relatively new circumstances and recent opportunities for improvement and development make this museum an interesting case in researching the relevance of ethnographic museums in contemporary society.

The fieldwork for this thesis has been conducted during the period of January 25 to March 21, 2016. During these eight weeks I lived in Ljubljana, visited the museum regularly and got known to my surroundings and my informants. Fieldwork was carried out at both the exhibition building and the office building of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum as well as at other locations both in and outside of the city of Ljubljana. The initial field that I considered before moving to Ljubljana – the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and its surroundings in central Ljubljana – broadened during my stay. The people that I got in touch with and where they directed me expanded it. My time in the field, the experiences that shaped my analysis and the people that are central to and main facilitators of this thesis will be introduced and discussed in detail in the ethnographic chapters. For now, let us have a look at the methods that were used for the data collection that this research is based on.

\textbf{2.2 Methods}

I have relied on qualitative research methods for the data collection during fieldwork. Qualitative research methods define and characterize anthropological ethnographic fieldwork. The research methods that the majority of my data comes from are (participant) observation, ‘hanging out’, informal conversations, small talk and semi-structured interviews. It should be mentioned that the research questions as formulated in this thesis came out of the data analysis and were not leading me during the time of fieldwork.
(Participant) observation and ‘hanging out’

Most of my field notes are written from jottings made during observations. Sometimes I combined this method with simply ‘hanging out’. When making use of participant observation, I usually felt like I was more on the observational side. However, in some cases I could participate as well, for example when I took part in a protest against neo-Nazis in Ljubljana, at the times when I went out with informants, or during events organized by the museum. Within the museum, I observed both the daily routines and the special events like exhibition opening ceremonies. Additionally, I observed its direct surroundings, the neighbourhood it is located in. Observations in other areas in central Ljubljana, at other museums, as well as at some locations outside of Ljubljana that I went to with informants were also part of the data collection.

Semi-structured interviews, small talk, and informal conversations

Most of the people I talked to during my fieldwork are highly educated women. It is striking that only female students are employed at the museum and most of the employees at the office are women too. I expect that being a woman myself, in addition to being an anthropologist, has eased building relationships with my informants within the museum. The majority of the people that participated in this research are Slovenes working at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Besides Slovenes both from within the museum as outside of it, another part of my informants are foreign tourists and exchange students at the University of Ljubljana. Most informants are between the age of 25 and 55.

A total of ten in-depth interviews were recorded, of which eight were with employees at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. The duration of the interviews ranged from forty minutes to one and a half hour. The two other recorded interviews were with Slovenes living in Ljubljana that had visited the museum before. Every recorded interview has been transcribed and analyzed on the basis of the recording, the notes made before and during the interview, as well as the transcription. Several other in-depth interviews were conducted without recording (both with employees at SEM as with others).

Nearly all interviews were recorded in the last two weeks of the fieldwork period. I wanted to wait a while before starting semi-structured interviewing. My aim was to first gather as much
information as possible through participant observation, small talk and informal
conversations. This provided me with a better overview of what I wanted to focus on and
made clear to me which information gaps I still had to fill in my data collection. Also, I
wanted to get known to my interviewees before interviewing them.

During the interviews the possibility to let the conversation go into any direction was limited
compared to the informal talks, however not fully absent. I did not prepare question lists for
the interviews. Instead, to ensure a more natural conversation, I merely wrote down several
topics that I intended to cover. In combination with a certain ‘preparedness’ that I experienced
from some of my informants, with whom I usually had set a meeting for an interview some
days earlier on, many interviews resulted in data that I would not have gotten had I used
another method. The informal conversations, small talk and interviews provided me with
different types of data and proved to be important in their own ways.

**Other data such as catalogues and (audio-)visuals**

In addition to these main methods, there are a few other ways in which I conducted research
and gathered data. I have received material from several informants, including published
articles written by them, exhibition catalogues, and DVDs of videos screened in the
exhibitions. These materials provided me with some basic information that I did not find
online or through conversations with informants. Most of all, it proved to be a stable basis that
I could get back to in case my field notes were incoherent or insufficient. These materials are
referred to in the bibliography when used anywhere in this thesis. Finally, I took pictures and
recorded videos on many occasions during the fieldwork. This material served mostly as a
reminder when writing descriptions of places or events, in addition to my field notes. Not all
information I initially gathered in my head found its way back in my field notes and these
extra materials were essential in freshening up my memory.

**2.3 Limitations, reflexivity and ethical considerations**

Being open to adapt to whatever direction I was being pointed during the fieldwork made me
flexible as a researcher. I gave my informants the freedom to share with me what they feel is
of importance as much as possible. The ‘letting go’ of control over the field resulted in some
eye-opening insights that I would have missed had I been stricter about the process.


**Language handicap: good and bad?**

I was unable to carry out fieldwork using the local language, Slovenian. Instead, I relied on using English. This has been a limitation and at times a challenge during the fieldwork. One of the problems that I encountered as a result of this language barrier was that I could not understand all texts in the exhibitions of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Furthermore, a lot of the information that is available online and in the museum library about the museum and the development of ethnology in Slovenia was not available in English. Also, the working language within the museum and at all events organized by it is Slovenian. This meant that I at times had difficulties understanding what was going on and recording the communication between informants while doing observations. My informants, who were at most occasions happy to patiently explain and translate for me, helped me limiting the gap between the available information and what I could understand considerably. However, I must take into account that some data probably still got lost in translation.

With the exception of those of the older generation and some on the countryside, all people I spoke with were comfortable with communicating in English and able to express to me what they wanted to share. When communication in English was not possible, other informants usually jumped in to translate. My lack of Slovene skills has also positively influenced relationships with my informants and the collection of data. I experienced that some of my informants explained even small details for me that I would not have gotten so much explanation about had I understood Slovenian. In this way, my inability to understand the language of the field helped me in getting data that I might not have gotten had my informants assumed that I understood everything without their help. In a way, my linguistic ‘outsider’ status turned into a research tool by itself. Not speaking the language of the research community has never been a serious obstacle in the process of data collection. It both limited my own observations as well as broadened the explanations given to me by my informants.

**Lack of visitors**

Before getting to the field, I was planning on interviewing visitors of the museum for the main bulk of data. Unfortunately, and unexpectedly, already in the first week of fieldwork it became clear that the museum is not that well visited on average days. I will get back to this in the final ethnographic chapter. This situation asked for some flexibility and made me alter
my approach. I had to rethink my ideas and instead focus more on talking to the museums employees. This difference between fieldwork expectations and the reality on site turned around my research questions and aims.

**Researching within the discipline**

Researching among colleague anthropologists created certain challenges. It was as much an advantage as a disadvantage. It was difficult for me to ask ‘easy’ questions, as the majority of the participants in my research were familiar with the main concepts and topics that I am working with. During interviews some of the questions I asked were answered with an unanticipated complexity and theoretical backdrop. I was not planning on having conversations related directly to my research objectives and questions, but this proved to be harder than it sounds. Additionally, it was difficult to remain ‘anonymous’ as a researcher in some situations where it would have been useful to ‘blend in’. I was strangely recognizable as an anthropologist, as one of my informants joked when I met her during the opening of an exhibition at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Being a PhD student at the department of anthropology and ethnology at the University of Ljubljana, she has an eye for ethnographic methods and when we had our first conversation she immediately stated, laughing: “ah you’re an anthropologist too, am I right? I saw you with your little notebook walking around Tromostovje [triple bridge, in the center of Ljubljana]”. This lack of anonymity as an anthropologist increased the pressure I felt as a researcher and raised my awareness of my own position in relation to the field.

**Anonymity and informed consent**

Besides reflecting on my own anonymity, I have to take the privacy of the people who I encountered during my fieldwork into consideration. I made my informants as unrecognizable and untraceable as possible throughout this thesis, unless they stated that they would like to be named or took part in this research as a representative of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. However, I am aware that it could be possible to recognize informants in this thesis for those familiar with the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and its employees. I have always been clear about the purpose of my stay in Slovenia and my presence at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Everybody I talked to during fieldwork has been informed about my research and agreed on taking part in it.
Some of the people I have talked to shared information with me that they in retrospect wanted to be excluded from this thesis for personal reasons. I have taken these requests seriously. This data has in no case been accessible to anybody other than me and will be erased from my field notes after the final grading of this thesis.

**Reciprocity, selection of data and subjectivity**

A challenge that I have to reflect on is the reciprocity to the field. I am aware that I am unable to give back to my informants what they have given to me. They made this thesis possible, and for that I am very grateful. As agreed on with the director of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, this thesis will be sent to the museum and made available to anybody who wants to read it in the museum's library.

I have tried to treat my data as ‘correct’ as possible. To use all data I gathered during fieldwork in this thesis has been impossible. Inevitable, I had to select parts of my material to use in the ethnographic chapters. To say that I have collected a perfect overview and well-balanced amount of information within the limited time that I had in the field would be a lie. However, the data that I have collected has been sufficient to draw conclusions from.

A final comment has to be made on my own subjectivity in defining my relation to the field and how I perceive it. I want to emphasize that this research could have turned out completely differently when conducted by somebody other than me. I am fully responsible for any mistakes, misinterpretations of data or misunderstandings in this thesis.
3. Context and background

This chapter will deepen the field as introduced in the previous chapter. It aims to give an understanding of the background of the research topic and environment before moving further into the case study. First, I will describe the historical development of European ethnographic museums. I discuss the colonial origins of these institutes and position them in contemporary discussions on their functions. The second part of this chapter focuses on the historical development of the Slovene Ethnographic.

3.1 European ethnographic museums

Looking back into the history of museums, there have been many developments and changes. Museums, like all other social institutions, serve many masters, and must play many tunes accordingly (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992:1). The traditional museum as it developed in Europe and North America began as an elitist institution designed to limit access to the privileged classes of society (Ames, 2014:98). The 19th and early 20th century saw the establishment of ethnographic museums and national museums across Europe. Some examples of volkenkunde museums are the Weltmuseum in Vienna (founded in 1876), the museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge (founded in 1884), the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (founded in 1864) and the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Madrid (founded in 1875).

The burden of colonialism

It has been widely recognized that museums were the premier colonial institutions – they created reduced and objectified representations of the colonized world for the paternalistic imperialism that characterized this period of time (Bennett, 1995; Young, 1990, 2001; Harrison, 1997:45-47; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Boast, 2011:64). Through their early collecting practices all over the world, traditional ethnographic museums are intrinsically connected to processes of colonialism and missionary work. As a result, they usually have a morally and politically problematic history. Tony Bennett (1988) writes that the employment of anthropology within the exhibitionary complex in the context of late 19th century imperialism arguably proved most central to its ideological functioning. According to him the discipline played a crucial role of connecting the histories of Western nations and civilizations.
to those of ‘other people’. The relationships between cultural heritage, museums and the constitution of nations and nationalities are well-explored topics of research (see for instance Kaplan, 1994; Boswell & Evans, 1999; Knell, 2011; Graham & Howard, 2008).

The anthropologist and museum professional Christina F. Kreps (2003), who describes herself as part of the new museology movement, offers a critical perspective in her analysis of museums as being in a process of decolonization. She researched Dutch anthropological museums as well as museums in Indonesia, comparing the museum practices of the colonizers to those of the colonized. Where Simpson (2001) presents museums as already being in a post-colonial phase, Kreps (2003) approaches museums as still in the middle of a decolonizing process. She states that “the ideology of modernization, and the notion that the museum is a modern, scientific institution, have also worked to mask the existence of traditional indigenous curatorial methods, or rather, how local people have had their own methods of collecting, caring for, and preserving objects of cultural significance” (Kreps, 2003:36). Kreps (2003) makes clear that there is a contrast between Western museums, which are increasingly willing to interact with communities and elders, and Indonesian museums, where there is at times reluctance to work together with communities as this is considered less professional or modern. According to Krouse (2006:180-181), “without doubt, the most flagrant kinds of abuses by museums have largely ceased”. As an example she gives the great improvement that has been made in the repatriation human remains that were previously collected and exhibited.

The reason that museums first assembled collections was to preserve the memory and evidence of what were mistakenly thought of as disappearing cultures (Shelton and Houtman, 2009:11). Museums can be seen as temples and palaces of modern society, expressing the essential values of the communities that they are placed in through both their architecture and their contents (Meyer, 1979:130). Ames (1992:101) makes clear that museums, in particular national museums, besides this value transmitting also serve as political instruments of the state. According to him, they are expected to “present the authorized or established picture of a nation’s history and culture or to serve as monuments to the benevolence and culture of the governing party itself”. Foucault (1972) has made clear how power and knowledge are interrelated: power is involved in the construction of truth, and knowledge creates power. Macdonald, in line with this thinking, argues that “[museum] displays are never and have
never been, just representations of incontestable facts; and they always have cultural, social and political implications” (MacDonald, 1998:1).

**Shaping contemporary ethnographic museums**

Recently, anthropologists have been central to the emergence of critical museology. Rather than legitimizing national cultural values, museums have become sites at which values are most profoundly contested (Shelton and Houtman, 2009:11). Edson (2014:17) points out difficulties in finding a balance between acknowledging the history of museums and moving beyond this to focus more on a future development of these institutions. He writes: “if the traditions out of which museums have evolved are forgotten, their purpose and identity might be lost. Yet, if these traditions – no matter how good or right – are held too rigidly, they may become self-serving. The conflict between the practices of the past and the expectations of the present (and future) often causes museums to lose sight of their objective”. Within the new trends in museology, as described in more detail in the theoretical background (chapter 1.3), the first focus was on more educational programmes in museums. The idea behind this was that museums should not just collect, store, research and exhibit their items but be more aimed at and adapted to the public. According to van Mensch, the museum paradigm that started in the 2000s focused more concretely on the concepts of participation and social inclusion (van Mensch and Meijer-van Mensch, 2011:13). The social role of the museum is nowadays widely acknowledged and museums are increasingly seen as places for the creation of social actions and change. They are moving away from their association with mausoleums towards an interpretation of them as sites of “pleasure and consumption” (Witcomb, 2003:17), including both entertainment and education.

**3.2 Historical development of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum**

Each museum has ‘its own problems, its own opportunities and its own pace of growth and decline’ (Hudson, 1998: 45). It is important to note that there are differences between the development of ethnographic museums in ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ Europe. Interest in foreign lands has played only a secondary role in Yugoslav ethnology. The ethnologists of the later

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4 See Hudales (2010) for a description of the development of ethnographic collections and exhibits in Slovenia until the first half of the 20th century.
industrializing areas of Eastern Europe have been concerned with self-discovery and with the legitimation of their native elites (Halpern and Hammel, 1969:18-19).

The history of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM) in Ljubljana goes back to 1821, the year that the Carniolian Provincial Museum was founded. The idea to establish a historical museum in Slovenia came up in the period of Enlightenment when the influential poet, priest and journalist Valentin Vodnik (1758-1819) advocated a museum as one of the most appropriate means to awaken Slovene national consciousness and self-confidence (Škafar, 1993:35). As one could hardly speak of a national consciousness before the middle of the 19th century, the research interests of museologists was mostly directed towards the geographic area of Carniola within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and not towards the entire ethnic territory populated by Slovenes (Škafar, 1993:35). The Carniolian Provincial Museum covered five different fields: history, statistics, natural sciences, technology and physics. Ethnology was a part of the history field and dealt with research and collection of folk and fairy tales, songs and the description of the Carniolian’s customs. It is not known how much was actually gathered at the time. However, a guide to the museum published in 1888 mentions special ethnographic collection of items from North America and Africa, donated to the museum by several Slovene missionaries.

A century later, in 1921, a first step was made towards founding an independent ethnographic museum. On the initiative of the anthropologist Niko Županič (1876-1961), the Royal Ethnographic institute was established as part of the National Museum in Ljubljana (Škafar, 1993:37). Županič managed to obtain permission to found the museum from the authorities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1923. He was the first academically trained Slovene anthropologist and is seen as the founding father of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum by the museum employees that I have talked to. In 1926, the museum started a journal, called Etnolog, in which it reported on the museum’s activities (Škafar, 1993:37). During World War II the museum did not prepare exhibitions or carry out field research. However, Etnolog was still being published. It is important to note that the museum nowadays still also has the status of an academic research institute and works together with the University of Ljubljana.

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5 Boškovic (2005) discusses the relationships between anthropology, national identity and Balkanization in Yugoslavia (in particular in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia).
In 1945, Boris Orel became the new director of the Ethnographic Museum. In 1948, the prewar bulletin Etnolog was replaced by Slovenski etnograf. In the first edition of Slovenski etnograf, Orel presented a programme of activities in the Ethnographic museum and its tasks. This introduction was in accordance with the political requirements of the period and elaborates on the ideas of the Slovene theoretician of socialist ideology, Edvard Kardelj (1910-1979) (Škafar, 1993:41). Kardelj envisioned that the final achievement of socialism would be that all differences between towns and the countryside disappeared. For Orel, this meant that ethnography and folklore should be devoted to a rapid gathering and studying of material related to Slovene folk life. These disciplines had to serve the people and the new society in this time of building socialism. During this period, for the first time, material was collected systematically and in all Slovene provinces through the work of field teams.

Up to the 1960s, the museum’s activities remained on pre-war grounds (Škafar, 1993:40). In the 1960s, the subject, aims and methodology of ethnology were discussed in the Slovene Ethnological Society (which was founded in 1957). In 1963, Boris Kuhar became the new director of the museum (which he remained until 1987). On his initiative the adjective Slovene was added to the Ethnographic Museum, to point out that this was the central Slovene ethnological museum and institution.

At this time, the museum had struggled already for a while with a lack of appropriate exhibition spaces. Kuhar proposed to solve this problem partly by opening exhibition spaces outside of Ljubljana in Podsmreka Castle (where the pottery collection was housed) and Goričane castle (which became the Museum of Non-European collections). Finally, adequate space was found to stage guest exhibitions with non-European themes. During the period that Boris Kuhar was head of the museum over 200 exhibitions took place in Ljubljana, Goričane and elsewhere (Škafar, 1993:45). The awareness of the importance and variety of the cultural heritage of Slovenia increased during this time.

In 1991, Slovenia became an independent state for the first time in its history and the museum revived its bulletin Etnolog as the successor of the pre-war Etnolog and the somewhat jaded post-war Slovenski Etnograf (Škafar, 1993:51). The museum also started publicizing its collections through a series called ‘Library of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum’. Still, more space was needed to be able to create high quality exhibitions and for museum workshops. In 1992, the Slovene government had to make decisions on new functions for a group of
buildings in Ljubljana, which were previously occupied by the armies of the former Yugoslavia, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. These buildings were built in the late 19th century as barracks for the infantry of the Austro-Hungarian army and were abandoned shortly after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The northern part of the army complex was squatted in 1993 by a group of underground artists and intellectuals known as ‘Mreža za Metelkovo’ to stop it from being pulled down. The Slovene Ethnographic Museum applied for residence at the southern part of this location. In 1997 it already partly moved to the first renovated building. In 2004, after a two-year process of re-building and modernizing, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum opened its current exhibition spaces there. In 2007, the museums basement storage space and outside area were completed.

The location of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in relation to other cultural institutes in Ljubljana and its influence on the museums success will be discussed in depth in chapter 5. In the following chapter I will give an overview of the contemporary lay-out and functions of the museum.
4. Just old things?

I am sitting with one of the curators of SEM on a braided stool next to the model of Čupa, a traditional wooden fisher boat from the west of Slovenia, in the exhibition ‘Between Nature and Culture’ [Med Navaro in Kulturo]. We are talking about how she feels about the museum and her work. She tells me how much she loves this exhibition on the third floor of the museum. Irena grew up on a farm and knows a lot about these old objects that were until recently used on the countryside of Slovenia. “Everything was made by hand”, she tells me proudly with a smile from cheek to cheek. A personal bond between her and this object is created through the reminders of her childhood. These reminders are mediating actants. They translate between two other actants, Irena and the artefact, in a wider network that shapes the museum as an institution. Irena does not recognize everything in the exhibition from her own memories. When I ask her which objects they had at her family home she stands up and walks me to something that she associates with growing up. She points at a braided basket and explains to me that these were used for storing walnuts. She tells me about her granddad and how he would make these baskets himself. I asked her where he learned to do this, but she did not know precisely. Perhaps he learned it from his father?

In this first ethnographic chapter we will have a closer look at what is presented in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. What kind of things is it actually really about when we look beyond the material put on display? According to Macdonald (1996:14), any museum or exhibition is a statement of a position. She describes them as theories, or, suggested ways of seeing the world. It will become clear that museum objects are not ‘just there’ to be glanced at. They do something with us. At times this has to do with memories of places or people that we connect to them, as was the case with Irena and the walnut basket. At other times they have the ability to simply affect us because of their beauty. Things, as actants that possess agency, have the power to move us. In the museum this happens through their aesthetic qualities or the intimate connections that they have to our images of the past. We do not only attach meaning to them, which would imply a one-sided relationship. As non-human actants they also do something to us. Interpretive agency is not only restricted to humans, both human and non-humans have the ability to act (Latour, 1999; 2005). Within ANT, this action and agency is realized through translation (Latour, 2005:88; Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Hacking, 1999).
In this chapter we will look into different translations that happen within the museum through an analysis of how employees approach and relate to the responsibility of the museum to (re)present history and culture in a ‘correct’ way. Museum exhibitions create artificial and stereotyped contexts that may obscure the objects they are intended to feature (Halpin, 1978). The first section of this chapter walks you through the museum. Here I describe the layout of the museum and give an impression of how it feels to visit it. In the second section of the chapter, I problematize how ideas of the past are manufactured, changeable and open to different translations. Decisions made about the acquisition and displaying of objects are philosophical and political of nature (Hudson, 1987:114). This is brought in connection to discussions on romanticism and (Yugo)nostalgia. The third and final section of this chapter revolves around one employee in particular and her thoughts on the inclusion of intangible heritage in the museum and its necessity for the presentation of a ‘complete’ picture. Her position towards non-objects as cultural heritage illustrates the importance of not only non-human but also non-material actants in the changing networks that continuously shapes the museums identity. Within the evolving new network, audio-visuals in the exhibitions are introduced as actants that mediate intangible heritage to the visitors. By the end of this chapter, you will have a clear idea of what is presented in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and where the first tension points lie.

4.1 Walking through

The see through sliding doors in front of me automatically open up, welcoming me inside the central hall of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. It is an impressive space, in which it would be able to accommodate a decent amount of visitors. It feels a little bit alien, somehow. I expected something more livelily. It is a Tuesday afternoon in February and there is nobody here. I make a turn to the right towards the reception desk, which is located in a connecting room. Two slightly bored-looking girls are sitting behind it. “Yeah… January and February are dead months. People have spent their money in December and now they don’t come...” says the girl on the left when I ask her a bit confused why it is so quiet, explaining to me in an apologetic way why there is nobody else here. She tells me that most visitors come in summer, hinting at the temporality that defines the networks that the museum relates to. Both these girls are master students at the University of Ljubljana and started working at the museum as a side-job to earn some extra money.
There are in total twelve of these young women working part-time at the museum. All of them do not have just one single task but are responsible for different things. They work behind the reception, they guide school classes through the museum and they help out as hosts and wardrobe workers at events such as exhibition openings, for example. Their faces are the ones that visitors get to see the most. Other employees at the museum simply refer to them as ‘our students’. This pointing out of the non-professional status of these employees is a performative action that produces a hierarchy between different actants – the curators and other museum professionals and those who are ‘just’ part-timers and still studying. When I get to know these students better, it becomes clear that their relationship to the museum and its mission is somewhat double. We will get back to this when discussing generational differences in attitudes towards cultural heritage and museums in chapter 6.

I continue my first visit after getting a small introduction to the exhibitions and the general layout of the building. Navigating my way through turns out to be not straightforward. The building feels somewhat like a maze. When I mention this initial confusion to one of the curators some weeks later, she giggles and tells me that she has been working at the museum for years but sometimes still feels a bit lost. The architecture of the building is an actant that influences our impressions of and interactions with the museum. A big central staircase at the end of the entrance hall leads up to the different exhibition floors and, on the top, some office space and ultimately the attic where promotion and workshop material is stored among other things. Another museum worker tells me that she thinks the building is not necessarily too big. For her taste it is a little bit too cold, though. She explains that she gets this feeling from the modern architecture, in particular from the amount of steel and glass that are used in its design.

The mission statement of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, as written on their website, is:

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum is a museum “about people, for people”, a museum of cultural identities, a link between the past and the present, between traditional and modern culture, between our own and other cultures, between the natural environment and civilisation. It is a museum of dialogue, open, active and hospitable, dedicated to serving the public. It presents and reports on traditional culture as well as mass and pop culture in

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6 For a visual overview of the museum's exhibition building, have a look at a series of maps in appendix 1. These maps are handed out in the shape of a foldable flyer to visitors when they enter the museum.
Slovenia and the diaspora, on non-European cultures, and on the material and intangible cultural heritage of both everyday and festive life.\textsuperscript{7}

The museum has 3220 objects on display in its permanent exhibitions and around 1700 objects annually through temporary exhibitions. Its depot holds 50,000 objects, of which 40,000 are a Slovene collection and 10,000 are non-European. In chapter six I will discuss these imbalances between the collections of the museum and the small amount of it that is accessible to visitors. On its website the museum states that it treats the Slovene and non-European collections as equally important. The museum preserves, documents, researches, communicates and presents these collections to its visitors.\textsuperscript{8}

The two permanent exhibitions in its modernized building are the first permanent exhibitions in the entire history of the museum. They are mostly designed for a domestic visitor audience. The first permanent exhibition was opened on the 9\textsuperscript{th} of March 2006 and is named “Between Nature and Culture”. It is described to visitors as a “treasure house of Slovene and Non-European heritage of the everyday and the festive” (Židov, 2009) – underlining the ascribed status of the cultural heritage it presents as something special and valuable. Thirteen museum employees curated it, each of them responsible for their own part of the exhibition. This exhibition is located at the third floor of the exhibition building. To get there you don’t have to pass through the other exhibitions. There are two options to get up, either with the elevator (which, being completely made out of glass, is an attraction \textit{an sich} for children), or by using a wide staircase. This first permanent exhibition is clearly object-focussed. It consists of six different sections. One of these sections is dedicated to “\textit{A Reflection of Distant Worlds}”, which is the only part of the permanent exhibition dealing explicitly with non-European cultural heritage. The objects represented here are connected to a Slovene history as their stories are told through the relation they have to their Slovene collectors. Their positions as actants in the network of the exhibition is shaped by the decisions that other actants, the curators, made. Another section of this first permanent exhibition that stands out is the “\textit{Ethnoalphabet}”, which is a labyrinth of models of museum objects and concepts from A to Ž. These models posses a similar agency as the ‘original’ objects. This part of the exhibition is specially designed for young visitors and is part of most guided tours for school classes.

\textsuperscript{7} https://www.etno-muzej.si/en/about-museum
\textsuperscript{8} https://www.etno-muzej.si/en/about-the-collection
Children, and others that go through it, are encouraged to discover and interact with the models.

Sanja, one of the students working at the museum, sighs when I ask her about the space that is made for the non-European collections in the first permanent exhibition and says that she feels like it is “cut in two”. I have also noticed that it seems a little pushed aside, or off in some way, when I walked through it for the first time. The elevator entrance is breaking the exhibition in parts, as you have to pass it as a visitor to continue the walk through. When doing so you sort of snap out of the exhibition as it does not only break the line connecting the different items, the experience in its entirety changes as it momentarily gets brighter. The natural light through the big glass walls of the building breaks in where you pass this exit point. This flaw in exhibition design seems to disconnect to the museum’s statement that it treats the non-European collection as equally important as the European collection, at least from a visitor’s point of view. This interrupting reduces the freedom that the cultural heritage presented here is given to tell a story.

The second permanent exhibition is located on the second floor of the building. It is called “I, We and Others: Images of my Worlds” and was opened a while after the first permanent exhibition, on the second of December in 2009. Eight museum employees curated it. This exhibition has a very different, refreshing, set-up in comparison to the first permanent exhibition. It revolves less about ethnographic objects and my informants generally described it as a more ‘difficult’ exhibition to understand and go through. Its intellectual nature is assigned some sort of prestige. It is more philosophical and makes the visitor ask questions about their own identity and their relationships to others. This exhibition illustrates the tensions and difficulties in trying to preserve accessibility (as a presentation that is understandable for everybody) in a less object-centred approach of museum design. A central concept used in this exhibition is the idea of ‘belonging’. It is explicitly stated that it does not offer any answers and that its main aim is to provoke contemplation. It addresses the relations between personal, communal and universal heritage and asks questions about the making and significance of cultural heritage. This exhibition is in general not used for guided tours with children. It is presented as a counterpoint to the first permanent exhibition, which is explicitly collection-based. For those who don’t speak Slovene, such as myself, it is unfortunately hard to get at lot out of it. International tourists are less represented as actants within the network that shapes this exhibition. Little translation to English is offered which makes it clear that
this space is directed mainly towards Slovene visitors. Language is an actant that shapes the experience that visitors have when ‘reading’ this exhibition.

Hudson (1998: 44) states that the concept of permanent exhibitions has become increasingly obsolete. He believes that museums have to keep up with the constantly changing social attitudes, educational standards and methods of communication in their displays and assumptions. According to Hudson, museums will lose ‘customers’ if they do not increase their responsiveness to these changes. Some employees in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum share this opinion, as they believe that those solid exhibitions are not responsive enough to changes in society. According to them, the exhibitions at SEM are already ‘old’ and outdated. The permanent nature of these exhibitions creates a tension with the temporal networks that they consist of and relate to.

One museum employee expressed to me that she has problem with a part in the permanent exhibition that addresses stereotypes. According to her, the lack of guidance for visitors in this section reinforces the stereotypes that it tries to break down. The initial ideas of the curators are not translated as such in the exhibition. It is not explained well enough. According to Sanja, the tours through the museum solve this problem partly. Through their position as mediators, tour guides are actants that ensure the translations between the ideas and messages of the curators, that which is exhibited and museum visitors. Sanja believes that you need a tour to get the most out of the museum. The tours are a central actant in the network as it is at present. Otherwise the museum “does not get to visitors so well”, she thinks. In this sense, visitors are expected to not understand everything unless somebody is mediating between them and the exhibitions. This is a difficult issue, as a mediator also changes the interpretation of the items on display though his or her own choice of explanation. As a node in the network of interpretation, thinking in line with ANT, this mediator actively builds the knowledge about the item that is discussed with visitors.

The museum has space for different temporary exhibitions besides these two relatively unchanging parts. The first floor and a part of the ground floor are reserved for this purpose. The administration building of the museum also houses a small exhibition space, which has free entrance and is open on weekdays between 08.00 and 18.00. On the ground floor visitors can also find toilets, a wardrobe, a photography space, the museum shop, pottery and weaving workshop spaces and a museum café, called Kavarna SEM. During the fieldwork I learned
that the workshop spaces and the café are approached as somehow separated from the museum. They are seen as related to, but not an essential part of, the network within the museum. The museum employees generally do not organize the activities in these spaces and those who come here do not necessarily bring a visit to the museum as well. Especially the café, where for instance dancing evenings take place, was very busy on some days while the museum felt deserted. This contrast is striking, especially as it is spatially connected to the museum and accessible from the museums reception hall. As such, the museum and the café cannot be interpreted as fully separate entities, even when they function accordingly. One museum employee explained to me in a joking tone how the only connection that the museum has to the café is that they provide catering for some events organized in the museum.

4.2 Romanticizing the past

When I walked with Irena through the museums first permanent exhibition, she said something that describes the most widely held view about the contemporary function of cultural heritage. She told me that she believes that “if you know about the past, you can understand the present. If you don’t know about your past, then you don’t know who you are”. This remark illustrates perceived connections between personal identity and cultural heritage. It points to how we understand the present based on our interpretations of the past. Andreja, the head of education and pedagogics at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, shares this sentiment. Over the weeks that I spend at the museum she made clear to me many times how she wants people to get a better understanding of the relevance of cultural heritage, or sometimes she simply said ‘the past’, to the present. The connections that these museum employees make between cultural heritage and processes of identity formation are indicative of them, as actants, taking part in the construction of heritage. They create and articulate a link between heritage and identity that has not always been there. This is illustrative furthermore of the temporality of knowledge and an interdependency between actants within a network.

Andreja, like Irena, is convinced that we need to bring the present in connection to what has already been in order to understand who we are. However, doing this in a ‘correct’ way is a difficult task. The past is not something objective and stable. It can be transformed and manipulated, which makes its careful management a central responsibility. Petkova-Campbell (2009:408) writes that museum exhibits can be seen as influential in the process of
constructing shared interpretations of events and experiences, a collective identity. In her description of the relationships between communism and museums in Bulgaria, she states that museum exhibitions in Europe had a “role of facilitator, creating a link with an interpreted past as an expression of ‘public culturing’ and representation of the idea of belonging within political and social contexts” (2009:409). Within the museum as a network, different actants re-interpret the past over and over again. Macdonald (1996:14) states that every museum or exhibition communicates a suggested way of seeing the world, as it speaks to some matters and ignores others. Or, as Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996:36) put it, “the interpreted past is a changeable creating of the present amenable to goal-directed intervention”.

In her well-known book Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage (1998), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett reflects on the ‘making’ of ethnographic objects. She writes that “they are ethnographic not because they were found in a Hungarian peasant household, Kwakuitl village, or Rajasthani market rather than in Buckingham Palace or Michelangelo’s studio, but by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached, for disciplines make their objects and in the process make themselves” (1998:18). So, ethnographic artefacts are objects of ethnography. They have been detached from their original surroundings and made into an artefact by ethnographers. Heritage is a ‘value-added’ industry (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). These values are actants that shape how we construct and define objects as artefacts and ultimately as cultural heritage that is worth preserving.

_A museum about rescued farming tools or ‘others’?_

One morning I asked Ana if she thinks that people generally think about rural society when they think about the ethnographic museum. She started laughing and said:

“yeah, I’m afraid that is still… even sometimes in our ministry [of culture], you know, they are so close but they still think that we only have exhibitions about peasant culture. Which is not true, as you can see, probably. Maybe in the last few years they changed their mind. But still, I think that the majority of people think like that”.

She continues by telling me how this can alter the expectations that people have of the museum. According to Ana, people expect to see things related to these topics. “At least, I can judge about the people who come to the library…” she explains, “…usually they search for such topics. Except maybe some young people, some students”. 

43
A key-figure in the development of the museums’ collection of objects of rural culture, as mentioned in the chapter 3, was Boris Orel. As a response to the industrialization of Slovenia, he organized field teams of ethnographers with the aim of collecting and ‘rescuing’ as much as possible cultural heritage from all provinces of the country. He was afraid of the ‘disappearance’ of this heritage. This ‘rescuing’ mentality has been a major factor in the development of ethnographic museums. So-called ‘urgent filming’ – documenting vanishing traditions through audio-visuals – has been a part of this movement (Valentinčič Furlan, 2015). Nowadays, the approach of culture or tradition as fading is criticized within anthropology, as culture is approached as something more dynamic. The ‘disappearing’ of tradition in this sense encompasses the changing and developing of these traditions. We do not lose culture, but culture is changeable. The urge to rescue seems to slowly fade as major influential actant in the shaping of the identities of ethnographic museums, although the idea of ‘rescuing’ is still prominent in the broader cultural heritage discourse (which becomes especially visible in disaster areas and through discussions on the deliberate ideological targeting of heritage in armed conflicts). The field teams of Boris Orel are responsible for a significant part of the museum’s collection. I heard his name many times during interviews and informal talks with museum employees. He is a central figure in Slovene ethnology. That museum employees see him as an important and respectable scholar could certainly have an influence on the selection of objects for especially the first permanent exhibition. Scholarly achievement and excellence has an influence on the respect that museum professionals receive from their colleagues.

The association with rural culture, or farming culture, that people have with ethnographic museums, whether based on the reality of the museums collections or not, has influence on the status of the ethnographic museum as a cultural institution in society. Another association that many people have with this type of museums is that they (should) show ‘other people’ and ‘other cultures’. This was mentioned during interviews a couple of times. Even though the museum does not have a separate exhibition building for the non-European collection anymore, it is still associated with the museum of non-European culture that was part of it before it moved to its contemporary location. Here we see that even when certain actants might have left the network in reality, the belief that they are still have this position in relation to the museum can influence the associations that people have with it. The separate exhibition space for the non-European collections was located outside of Ljubljana and used to be a
popular day-trip destination. Many of the museums employees are not happy with the imbalance between the representation of European (mostly Slovenian) and non-European culture in museum as it is nowadays. Significantly less space is reserved for non-European collections within the permanent exhibitions. This is, of course, also a result and reflection of the material in the museums collections. Both these ideas of rural culture and the ‘other’ are easily subject to romanticism and exoticism in the museum and by visitors. This romanticism has a connection to nostalgia.

(Yugo-)nostalgia

Irena described to me how she interprets the city of Ljubljana as a “city drenched in nostalgia”. The rural roots of most Slovenes still provoke feelings of nostalgia in relation to the countries farming past, she told me. Other museum employees also brought up the concept of nostalgia. For instance, Nika, one of the students working at the museum, told me that she believes that the feeling that ‘everything was better before’ can be misleading. I was walking with her to the school group that she was about to give a tour when she mentioned this. I asked her how she approached the classes and what kind of impression she wanted to make. The feeling of having to represent a ‘right’ and not overly positive picture was one of her main concerns. She feels a responsibility to share a ‘true’ picture with museum visitors. In line with this, Irena made clear to me that she believes that people become nostalgic when visiting the museum. She pointed out that she believes that nostalgic interpretations of museum exhibitions can even be dangerous. This gives people a false idea of the hardship of those who worked on the land. Irena explained it like this:

“Life in the past was never easy, it was difficult. You have to be careful with nostalgia and stereotypes, in the museum too. But people are looking for those kind of objects that connect to the stereotypes. It makes them proud.”

For Irena, nostalgia has a clear connection to pride. According to her, Slovene people that visit the Slovene Ethnographic Museum are in many cases looking for confirmation of identity and pride. These searches of visitors for specific types of heritage have an influence on how the museums network is shaped. It responds to these expectations, which are actants, in its balancing between pleasing (potential) visitors and staying true to an envisioned scientific, ‘objective’, representation of the past.
Interestingly, people I spoke to outside of the museum seemed to be primarily nostalgic about Yugoslavia and not so much the rural past in particular. The history of Slovenia as part of Yugoslavia is not explicitly discussed anywhere within the permanent exhibitions of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. However, the concept of ‘Yugo-nostalgia’ is real and noticeable in Slovenia. According to Spaskovska (2008:147), in the case of post-socialist nostalgia, we can speak of a permanent process of re-memorialization because the Yugo-Slav (south Slav) cultural sphere, with its linguistic and historical ties, will not cease to exist. She notes that the Yugoslav sentiment never disappeared and lay dormant on under the aggressive nationalistic discourse in the early years of Slovenian independence in the 1990s (Spaskovska, 2008:144).

When I was talking to people about their connections to what they see as ‘the past’ and ‘history’, the first subject that came up was often Yugoslavia. Maša reflected on this when I was interviewing her in my apartment in Ljubljana. She is a close friend of my key-informant and flatmate Mojca, who introduced me to her. I had been in Slovenia for just a couple of weeks and was only starting to locate the main associations with cultural heritage as felt outside of the museum. Maša was happy to sit down with me at my kitchen table, with some tea and breakfast, and explain to me how she experiences mixed feelings about Yugoslavia. She feels like there is a disconnection between what is being taught in school and the stories being told at home. “History at home is hmm… well, everybody is talking about Yugoslavia”, she told me, “everybody is saying like, ohh, when we were living in Yugoslavia everything was so good”. This contrasts to the institutional narrative that is being told, in which the falling apart of Yugoslavia is approached as a positive event. The institutional network is differently shaped, following a different narrative.

Maša is born in 1986 and grew up in Piran, a harbour town in the west of Slovenia. She moved to Ljubljana when she was 20 years old. She was very young when Yugoslavia fell apart in 1991. Despite not remembering much of those events in her early youth, she can tell me a lot about how she experiences her family reflecting on this recent history and how she feels about it. Her parents are from Bosnia, and for them it was very easy to move around in Yugoslavia. “In Yugoslavia you could move to Croatia, to Serbia, to Slovenia… and Slovenia was the wealthiest part of Yugoslavia. Like a small high-class”, she tells me. Her parents went to Slovenia, around 35 years ago, because her father got a job offer. This was in the period of rapid industrialization in Slovenia and many cities big factories were opened, which were
looking for employees. She described how she felt that there was suddenly a country called Slovenia, from nowhere, while everything was one big country before. Her parents already had the right papers so they could stay. After the independence, people were mostly missing how things were before because of the changing economic situation. Maša illustrates this:

“Everybody was saying; “when we were Yugoslavia, everybody had a job”. This was the story I was hearing. So, as a kid I was playing in the living room and I could hear my parents talking to their friends. Not in a bad way, but they were just talking about the situation, just like we are talking right now, you know?”

She tells me that everybody that is a bit older and lived in Yugoslavia would say that much was better back then.

One exhibition at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum that some informants proudly told me about relates to this Yugo-nostalgia. The exhibition was called “Cockta – the drink of your youth and ours” (2010). Cockta was a non-alcoholic beverage produced in the 1950s as an alternative to Coca Cola. It disappeared almost entirely from the Yugoslav market when it opened up to foreign products but it experienced two major “revivals”; one in the 1970s and one in the 2000s (Petrovic, 2013: 108). According to Petrovic (2013:108), the museumization of industrial labor in the Yugoslav successor states often aims at strengthening national identity by framing industrial heritage as national heritage. With this exhibition, the museum actively associated itself with the usually non-institutional narrative about Yugoslavia that is characterized by nostalgia. Cockta, for many Slovenes a symbol of the ‘good old times’, entered and reshaped the museum’s network as an actant closely related to Yugo-nostalgia.

That Yugo-nostalgia can also be felt by those who did not spend the majority of their life in Yugoslavia became clear to me at a party in the northern part Metelkova, the square at which the Slovene Ethnographic Museum is located. During Carnival, an evening at one of the clubs at Metelkova Mesto, Gala Hala, revolved around the theme ‘nostalgia’. I went there with Maša and my flatmate Mojca. The crowd, of which I expect the majority was in their 20s, sang along out loud with nearly all the songs played by the DJ. The club was full. When I asked Mojca what these songs are about, she said that it were mostly songs about Yugoslavia or from Yugoslavia. Many of them were about partisans. One song stood out, because it was received by loud enthusiastic screaming when it started. It was a song about Nebotičnik [‘the skyscraper’]; a high-rise building in the centre of Ljubljana that at the time of its completion in 1933 was the highest building in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with its 70 meters. This
building is still an important landmark in the cityscape of Ljubljana and its rooftop bar is a well-visited and promoted tourist attraction. It is regarded as national cultural heritage and an actant in the network that shapes the urban identity of the city.

Where I write about nostalgia, other scholars refer to reminiscence when discussing the relationships between memory and heritage. For example, Urry (1996:55) writes how “to reminisce is collectively to effect a performance. There is no single or simple history conveyed through the performances of heritage”. In this sense, even when museum exhibitions are designed in connection to certain outlined processes of romanticism or nostalgia, this does not mean that the translation between the items in the exhibitions and those who walk through it is a predictable or uniform one. Visitors do not always describe exhibitions the same ways that the curators would. Urry (1996:54) writes in his essay “how societies remember the past” that there is no evidence that visitors passively accept heritage sites, such as museums. Everybody ‘reads’ these places in different ways. As such, it can be presumed that even the most apparently unambiguous heritage destinations are up for interpretation. Macdonald (1995:21) has shown that designers of an exhibition at the Science Museum were surprised by the interpretation and framing by visitors which they did not plan for. People visiting made connections between exhibitions that the curators did not intend them to be made.

Glassie (1977) proposed that objects could potentially be a more wide-ranging and representative source of information than words or written accounts as they are used by a much broader cross-section of the population. He proposes that objects offer a possibility to understand the minds of a great majority of illiterate people in the past who remain otherwise inaccessible except through impersonal records and the distorting view of a literate elite. I have to note here that it has also been an elite that has selected objects for museum collections. For instance, the farmer objects in the museum were usually selected by aesthetics, as one informant pointed out to me. So, to a limited extend the representation of the past could be said to be more inclusive when taking objects into consideration. However, I doubt that a fully democratic image has been created in any museum yet.

In this subchapter we have seen that cultural heritage, however not made explicit in the exhibitions at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, has intimate connections to romanticism, exoticism and nostalgia through the associations made by those interacting with it. This is
intertwined with the idea of the construction of cultural heritage as changeable and subjective. As we will get to in the last ethnographic chapter, the idea of the past as manufactured and inherently political gives way to the notion that cultural heritage can also be used in a progressive way when approaching it as potential stimulant in achieving social change. For now, let’s direct our attention to another aspect of cultural heritage: intangible cultural heritage.

4.3 “It’s not only about objects”

As described before, heritage objects can have a strong emotional effect on us. We have seen how some of the most interesting influences of these materials are, in fact, arising from the memories that we ascribe and connect to them. It is explained earlier on how, according to actor-network theory, networks consist of both non-human and human actants. However, what does not become immediately clear within this theoretical approach is whether these non-human actants are necessarily material. Can we also see the immaterial aspects of a network, like ideas or emotions, as non-human actants? Within the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, as well as in the broader cultural heritage sector, immaterial heritage is an aspect of the network that we should not underestimate or ignore. In addition to tangible heritage, the less graspable concept of intangible heritage can’t be overlooked when discussing the influence of cultural heritage on our perceptions of the world.

I visited my flatmate Mojca in her family home in Slovenske Konjice, a small town in the northeast of Slovenia. This area of Slovenia where Mojca grew up changed heavily during the period of rapid industrialization between the 1950s and the 1970s. It became an important economic region. Many people moved to the region to work at the factories. Nowadays, many of those factories are closing and people are moving away again. Mojca explained to me how all her friends moved to bigger towns or ‘the city’, just like she did. During my visit, the assumptions I had developed about intangible heritage were affirmed. I expected intangible cultural heritage to be of at-least-equal importance as tangible cultural heritage to the people I would get in touch with during my fieldwork. Being more difficult to define, and less explicit, I thought of intangible cultural heritage as also more personal to people in way. Mojca and me were sitting together in her old bedroom in the house where she grew up. Her parents never had much to do with going to museums or anything else connected to heritage, she told me. I asked her about traditional Slovenian things or customs and how she felt about them. She
started telling me about some Slovenian folksongs that she likes. She became excited when talking about how she feels when hearing those songs and describes to me how they can make her very emotional. Putting a finger on why exactly is hard for her, but she made clear that these are not ‘just songs’ to her. As actants, they do something to her. They provoke an emotional response. Folk songs and traditional music are only one aspect of the wide range of Slovenian intangible cultural heritages. Very early on during the time in the field it became clear to me that literature, or rather the Slovene language, is seen as Slovenia’s most important immaterial cultural heritage. The most famous figure in Slovene literature is the poet France Prešeren, who lived from 1800 until 1849. His poem ‘Zdrabljica’ from 1844 is the national anthem of Slovenia.

Intangible heritage also plays an important role within the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. It is not only objects that are showed to its visitors. On the website of the museum it is explained that the SEM, as a central ethnological institution, is a national coordinator of the register of the intangible heritage of Slovenia. It mentions the Shrovetide traditions as an example. This position means that the museum works for the ‘safeguarding’ of intangible heritage and is responsible for the documentation (both audio-visual as photographic) of these heritages. It also has a decisive position in the selection of proposals of units to be listed in the register. This illustrates the authoritative position of the museum in the defining of what counts as heritage, and what not. One of the yearly Slovene traditions that are incorporated in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum is the celebration of St. Gregory’s day on the twelfth of March. On the evening before, candle-lit miniature houses are send off downstream. These handmade boats are called gregorčki. Andreja explained that “it is spring then, so nobody needs the lights anymore and we put them in the water”. In the museum, small children from pre-school and primary school are coming over each year to craft these paper houses under the supervision of their teachers and museum workers. In Ljubljana the houses are put in the Gradaščica stream, which is a smaller river that ends in the Ljublanica river that winds through the city. The museum connects to ‘living’ traditions by facilitating organized school visits, which in turn encourage children to learn about these kinds of celebrations and take part in them.

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10 Intangible cultural heritage is often referred to as ‘living’ as opposed to ‘dead’ tangible heritage (corresponding to the idea of museums as ‘artefact cemeteries’). This is problematic. I oppose this distinction, as I understand both tangible and intangible cultural heritages as actants that have agency and are characterized by a constant change of nature in relation to other actants.
Audio-visuals and cultural biographies

Ema has developed an increased interest in the non-material counterpart of cultural heritage. She is working at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum since 2000 and has a lot of knowledge about visual anthropology. Her aim is to include more video material into the museum. In the year that she started working at the museum it opened the Department of Ethnographic Film. This was the first museum department of this kind in Slovenia (Valentinčič Furlan, 2015:179). It enabled systematic activities in the field of visual anthropology. According to Valentinčič Furlan (2015:181), the curators of SEM have kept, researched, and presented visual data and sources from the very start: the museum acquired its first visual records (photographs, drawings) when it separated from the National Museum of Slovenia in 1923.

However, for a long period film technology did not allow films to be easily integrated into museum exhibitions and there was not much understanding of the significance of the film medium among museum staff (Valentinčič Furlan, 2015:181). As such, audio-visuals as mediators of intangible cultural heritage are relatively new actants in the museum’s network. One of the fundamental functions of film in the museum exhibitions is to provide the context of the exhibited objects. According to Valentinčič Furlan (2015:185), no other medium can be as effective in humanizing exhibited objects as moving pictures, especially when accompanied by authentic sound. She notes that the workshop spaces in the museum where craftsmen work could be stronger in the sense of human presence and interactivity, but that the original cultural setting here is lost and that they are not permanently available.

Audiovisual material from the permanent exhibitions in SEM was first published on DVD and for only sale at the museum’s shop but later on made available to everybody, no matter the geographical location, through the museum’s website. These recordings offered a stage to intangible heritage within the dominant institutional heritage discourse. It is unthinkable for contemporary ethnographic museums to not consider traditional dances, songs, crafts and other intangible heritage in their exhibitions. However, this is a fairly recent development, which shows us a difference between the old and new networks defining the museum.

One video shown in the permanent exhibitions is “Čupa, the vessel of the Slovene fishermen”
This is a filmed cultural biography (Kopytoff, 1986) of the čupa Marija, the last completely preserved seagoing vessel from a single hollowed trunk, made and used by Slovene fishermen in the Trieste littoral (Valentinčič Furlan, 2015:185). The making or usage of this particular artefact could not be filmed anymore and was staged for this video. These boats were only used until the end of World War II.

Appadurai (1986:34) notes that there are important differences between the cultural biography and the social history of things. These have to do with two kinds of temporality, two forms of class identity, and two levels of social scale. The cultural biography perspective, as formulated by Kopytoff (1986), relates to specific items as they move through different contexts and uses, from owner to owner. Through these processes they accumulate their own particular narrative. A particular item, let’s say a hat, may have its specific biography. However, the whole type of this item, the class of things called “hat” itself, may have a larger historical ebb and flow, in the course of which its meaning may shift significantly (Appadurai, 1986:34). When looking at classes or types of things we have to keep in mind to take in consideration the longer-term shifts and larger-scale dynamics, which transcend the particular biographies. The museum’s network has an influence on the cultural biographies as well as the social histories of the tangible and intangible heritage that are part of it.

On a rainy afternoon I am meeting Ema at her office in the administration building of SEM. While I sip from the coffee she offered me, she chats away about her work with a lot of enthusiasm. According to her, video is ‘close communication’. It is a valuable new actant, especially considering the museum’s striving towards a more dialogical communication with society. Ema explained to me that her function at the museum was a very new kind of position and that nobody really new what her job would be. According to her, no museum in Slovenia had a very systematic programme of showing documentaries so she had to develop of a way of doing it herself. Ema goes on to describe that intangible culture heritage was only adopted in Slovene museums quite late. When she was a student, the discipline of ethnology was defined as researching ‘everyday life and culture’. She explains how culture at the university in Ljubljana was divided into three subcategories: a material one, a social one and a spiritual

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11 Čupa, plovilo slovenskih ribičev (“Čupa, the Vessel of Slovene Fishermen”), online source: http://www.etno-muzej.si/sl/cupa-plovilo-slovenskih-ribicev-0
one. “So social and spiritual culture is more or less similar to what we call now intangible cultural heritage”, she continues, “which is in fact a political invention”.

**The invention of traditions**

To describe the processes of portraying (national) symbols and rituals as ‘old’ traditions, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) coined the concept of ‘invented tradition’. They argue that many of what we call traditions appear or are claimed to be very old while in reality they are quite recent in origin. It has to be noted however that the clear distinction between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ is in itself an invention. The phenomenon of creating traditions to underline or increase the credibility of a common past becomes particularly clear in the development of nations. This is a paradox as the shaping of nations is in itself a fairly contemporary development. In nationalism, invented traditions promote national unity and are used to legitimise certain institutions or cultural practices, Hobsbawm and Ranger argue. During our conversation, Ema pointed out that she believes intangible cultural heritage to be a political invention, as if it is created to serve an ideological goal. The Slovene Ethnographic Museum, when approaching it in these terms, takes part in a broader political and ideological network through it’s interactions with cultural heritage. By having this status, it consequently embodies a sense of responsibility and accountability for the content it offers to visitors.

The concept of ‘invented tradition’ has been criticized for being ambiguous. In his review of *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), Burke (1986:316) poses the following questions; when comparing ‘invented’ traditions against ‘genuine’ traditions, where should we draw the line between those two? If we agree that all traditions are changeable, what is the relevance or use of trying to make this distinction? In another review, Handler (1984) argues that the distinction between invented and authentic traditions is ultimately a distinction between ‘the genuine’ and ‘the spurious’. He states that this distinction does not make much sense as all traditions are humanly created and in that way “spurious” rather than naturally given, or “genuine”. Also, it has to be noted that meaning of something being ‘authentic’ or ‘genuine’ is in itself ambiguous and under discussion.

To Ema, it is not a main concern whether cultural heritage is genuine or not. What she is more focussed on is the connection to the present that she hopes will become more apparent in the museum. She believes that some exhibitions at the museum are quite present day oriented.
However, when an exhibition has a clear focus on the past, she tried to still make a connection to contemporary society by including for instance filmed portraits of people. She is not alone in her preference for exhibitions that relate clearly to the present. Most museum employees that I spoke to expressed similar opinions. To Ema, it is clear that video, as an additional medium in the museum, is especially needed to communicate in an understandable way to younger people. “I think that the older generation can find so much more in the exhibitions that they can relate to”, she explains, “it is so much easier for them on one side”. Those who have less direct connection to the exhibitions need something more to make the most out of it. Audio-visuals are making their way into the museum’s network and could potentially fill this void.

**In conclusion**

According to Dubuc (2011:505), one of the museum’s most underestimated vocations is its symbolic function. She refers to the idea of the museum as a heterotopia, a neologism by Michel Foucault that he introduced in a text that he presented in 1967 (which was unpublished until 1984). In this text Foucault describes utopias as ‘spaces without a real place’ and heterotopias as ‘real and effective places, places that were disigned within the institution of society’. In other words, heterotopias are some kind of utopias that have actually been created. Museums are one of those places, and people come there to perfect themselves symbolically (Foucault, 1984[1967]). As I have shown throughout this chapter, museum employees experience tensions in their attempts to represent Slovene cultural heritage ‘correctly’. They see this as one of the main repsonsibilities of the museum. In a way, museums always shape ‘utopian’ images.

In this first ethnographic chapter it has become clear that the value of cultural heritage lies not merely in its economic worth (which is usually unknown to museum visitors) but for a big part in the memories and emotions incited by them. I have described how employees interpret the role of the museum as a representer of culture in terms of responsibility. Through the approach in ANT of non-humans as possessing some form of agency, we can analyse museum objects as well as intangible cultural heritage in terms of their political and ideological impact. This is shown in the relationships between cultural heritage and the shaping of nostalgic, romantic, or exotic images of the ‘past’. Finally, I have described the recently developed attention to intangible heritage and audio-visuals, as a new actants, in the
museum’s exhibitions. In the next chapter, we will have a look at how the location of the museum within the city of Ljubljana and its status as an urban institution influence its identity and outreach to the public. The specific location of the museum in a developing new cultural centre and its connection to the public sphere, or rather the difficulties that museum employees see with attracting visitors, influences the credibility of its content and its validity as a scientific institute of importance.
5. Network

After having pointed out different actants within the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in the previous chapter, it is now time to direct our attention outwards. This chapter revolves around an analysis of the location of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. I describe how this placement defines its identity and influences its relevance according to museum employees. The museum is looked at from three different angles within different networks; its specific location within the urban environment of Ljubljana, its position as an urban institute in relation to museums outside of the city and its reach across the state border of Slovenia.

In the first section, the impact of the museum’s transition towards having its own buildings within the urban cultural centre of Metelkova is the focus point. I discuss what museum employees expressed as negative and positive influences of this location within the city of Ljubljana on the relevance, popularity and workings of the museum. The surroundings of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum are taking part in the process of defining its identity. Museums are not what they are just because of the things that they hold, but also because of the spaces that they have to showcase these things and the whereabouts of these spaces. This section ends with a reflection on the position of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum as being an urban cultural institute. The second section of this chapter reflects on the museum as being ‘without borders’. The main focus through this concluding section is a discussion on the relevance and responsibility felt by museum workers to address Slovenia’s migration past in relation to today’s refugee crisis within the museum. Finally, I describe several political and institutional ties of the museum.

5.1 Urban setting

Metelkova

Tanja is pouring me a coffee just after the opening time of the administration building. She asks me if I need anything in it while she puts the small white cup in a hasty manner in front of me. It is early in the morning, around half past eight, and she needs something to wake her up. We are sitting at her working desk. Behind Tanja, windows are looking out over the museum square and the entrance of the exhibition building on the right side. It is a bright room with a fair amount of natural light. In a second room behind me, connected to her
private working space, there is a big wooden oval conference table. I see that there are two small flags standing on it, a European one and a Slovenian one. It is not a secret that Slovenia would rather be seen politically as a part of ‘Western’ Europe instead of the Balkans. Tanja is 51 years old and became the director of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in September 2015. She is still getting used to the job and is usually very busy. Living outside of Ljubljana and traveling to her work for an hour by train every day takes a lot of her energy. She seems rushed and politely apologizes to me for being a bit late for our interview appointment. Her spacious office is on the first floor of the building. There is a small entrance hall connected to it, which is the territory of her receptionist. There was nobody else there except for the receptionist and me before Tanja arrived. Flyers and books about the museum are lying on a low table, with some places to sit close to it, to occupy those waiting for their appointment. Upon entering the building on the ground floor, every visitor has to go through a first ‘check’ and make the reason of visit clear to the security personnel that is sitting behind the reception desk, or otherwise can be found smoking a cigarette outside next to the glass entrance doors. This routine seems a bit stiff at first, but after getting to know some faces and showing my own face regularly to the museum employees, this initial formal routine started to become less uncomfortable. A security guard is usually also present in front of the exhibition building, or inside of it if the weather makes standing outside for a while unbearable. These men, as well as the routine that you need to go through before being able to enter the administration building itself, signal a sense of authority and value. They are actants in a network that sustains the image of the museum as being of great importance.

At first, I thought that the Slovene Ethnographic Museum is not far out. Taking only ten minutes by foot from the market square, to me it felt like it is centrally located. However, inhabitants of Ljubljana experience this differently. To them, it does not feel central. Many of those living in Ljubljana moved to ‘the city’ at some point. They often did not grow up in an urban environment and “it is far away if you’re not from a big town”, explains Ana. She tells me that the area of Metelkova used to be a “less nice” area. It was poor, closely located to the train station and is by some people still associated with the military. “Twenty years ago, it was a bad neighbourhood. It was not a place where you would easily go to, that was attractive”, she explains to me, “for example, in the evening we didn’t walk around here”.

The buildings that house the museum used to function as army barracks and were occupied by the armies of the former Yugoslavia, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The buildings were
originally built for the Austro-Hungarian army in the late 19th century. They were abandoned shortly after the breakup of Yugoslavia. After the independence of Slovenia in 1991, the Slovene government had to make new plans for this urban area. The northern part of Metelkova was squatted in 1993 by a group of underground artists and intellectuals to prevent its destruction, changing the character of the urban landscape drastically. This is still an autonomous area within the city of Ljubljana. The Slovene Ethnographic Museum, as well as several other cultural institutes, applied for residence at the southern part of Metelkova. The museum got the space and already partly moved in 1997, followed by the opening of its exhibition building in 2004.

According to Tanja, the history of the buildings is not important to the museum. “It is just buildings. We have great buildings and enough space but we are not connected otherwise to this”, she tells me full of confidence. Interestingly, nothing around the square is pointing towards the historical functions of the buildings at Metelkova. To me, this demilitarization process seems something that would be worth mentioning, as it clearly has influence on how the area is perceived by those living around it. These buildings are actants that shape the identities of the museum as well as the neighbourhood. Ana agrees that the history of the place should be communicated to those who do not know about it. She thinks that older people remember what the place was before but that it is a pity that young people most definitely do not know about it. She continues by explaining how she was already thinking about how it could be used before:

“Also, all these streets around here are named after important Slovenian persons… it could be connected somehow with this culture site and heritage. Yeah… this court is not very well functioning as you realized probably. It could be so much better. But nobody is feeling responsible for it. It is important to put information up [about the history of the buildings], for sure!”

The area is named after Franc Serafin Metelko, a priest who tried to reform the Slovene language (and did not succeed) in the 19th century. He proposed a newly created alphabet, which stirred discussion and got rejected. His name and the ‘Slovene Alphabet Wars’ remained in public memory mostly because of a series of critical poems written by France Prešeren, especially the most well known one that is titled “how to write the word porridge”.

Ana is 58 years old and is working as a librarian at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. She is educated as an ethnologist. She grew up in Ljubljana but lived for a few years in Belgrade,
Serbia, when it was the federal capital of Yugoslavia. Her father studied and worked there and
the whole family moved with him during that period. They moved back to Ljubljana when
Ana was eight years old. At that time she lived quite nearby where the museum is located at
present. That is why she knows the neighbourhood well. Ana has a strong personal connection
to the complex, which becomes more apparent when she talks about her father, who worked
for the army and was stationed in these buildings, and her grandmother, who was imprisoned
in another part of the complex that was turned into a temporary prison during the Second
World War. This family history is an actant that shapes her connection to the place. I ask her
when she went to the museum for the first time, and she needs to think a little. “Aha, I believe
it was in 1974, when there was an exhibition about kitsch. I was around 16 or 17 years old”,
she says. At that time this was quite an unusual topic for an exhibition, especially for an
ethnographic museums, she tells me. Nowadays, this might not be such a surprising or
refreshing subject to visitors. Times have changed and the networks, and actants, shaping the
museum have changed along. This first exhibition that Ana saw was presented at the old
location, where the national museum is now. The museum only had a small hall for temporary
exhibitions back then so this was just a one-room exhibition. She starts laughing and says that
she went to the museum by herself and did not even know that there existed something like
the study of ethnology or ethnography.

When I ask her how she feels about the museums buildings now, and how she perceives the
changes of the area, she tells me:

“I don’t remember really how… well… I remember how the buildings looked but I didn’t go
to this part very often. But I remember that the courtyard was very nice. There were huge
trees. They cut them down, that’s a pity”.

There are pictures of the museum buildings showing how they looked before the renovations
at the museums documentation centre. Now the square is empty and covered with stones. It
looks deserted. In the summer it becomes very hot and in the winter it is cold. If the trees
were still there, it would be a more pleasant place to hang around. One special tree was
planted on the square after the rebuilding at the right side of the entrance of the administration
building. It is a lime tree, the national symbol of Slovenia. These trees were traditionally
planted in the middle of villages. Ana explains to me that this is a symbolic site. There are
blocks of marble put around the tree. “Every stone symbolizes a different part of Slovenia.
They come from mines in all different regions. It is meant as a connection to the people”, she
tells me. “And then I remember when they were renovating those buildings, when I started to
work here in 2000. It was a big construction site here. All the machines and all that…” Ana continues. The buildings were not falling apart, she tells me, not that many things were changed. The administration building stayed more or less the same, because the walls were ok. “The construction is quite solid, more solid than nowadays”, she laughs, “because of these bricks, you see, these strong walls”. They had to make more changes to the second building, to make it suitable for the exhibitions.

Ana tells me that the army complex was obviously never inviting, but even now it is more modern and changed drastically, she feels that it is still not an ideal place. She thinks that it is good that other museums also have moved to the square and she points out that Ljubljana is growing. At some point, this area will be embraced by and included in the centre of the city. Ana explains that there were some disagreements about the current location of the museum:

“Fortunately, our previous director was smart enough to grab that opportunity [moving SEM to Metelkova]. I know that some people were not really happy with it, but she was very pragmatic and said, ok, we better take it or otherwise we don’t get anything, you know? So I think we have good conditions. Every curator has an own office and so on. There are high standards”.

The previous director of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum is Bojana. She became director of the museum in 2005 and made place for Tanja about half a year ago. She reflects on the tensions that came up after her predecessor made the decision to move the museum to this part of Ljubljana. Bojana was responsible for the redefining of the museums goals and the designing of the museums exhibitions and programs after the change of location. She tells me that it was a very intensive time. “It is quite interesting, the idea of using these army barracks in the cultural sector. I mean, this is very contemporary. It is very nice”, she says. Bojana is in favour of this transformation from a military usage towards an open cultural use that is available to everyone. It is a process of transforming a closed area to a more open and accessible space. However, she told me, there were some problems in the first period after the museum moved:

“In the beginning we had quite a lot of… sometimes… it was not very pleasant because we were not recognized as an important national institution because we are here in Metelkova… because of the comparison with this northern part, which is part of this alternative culture.”

In a softer voice she tells me how this was a bad area that was, and still to some extend is, associated with addicted drugs users and drug dealing. This is a legacy of the area being an independent quarter, run by the people that squatted it. During the day the area is empty.
However, during the evening it feels different, as it transforms into an area where young people party, hang out and drink in public. Or, when there are no events, it becomes a bit of a dark scary place. Bojana never had a problem with this and proudly tells me that she believes that it is a good fusion with the institutionalized culture that the museum is part of. She admits that the transition to this location was tough, but also likes to think that the area is getting a better reputation. Bojana distances SEM from some other cultural institutions in Ljubljana, underlining a desire for the museum to be accessible and feel approachable to everybody. The real ‘elite museum culture’, as Bojana calls it, is located in a different area of the city, around Prešernova cesta. She concludes that:

“It was quite difficult to start here because it was neglected, it was terrible. These houses were really in a terrible condition. It was a lot of work. But, you know, such changes need time. I think it is a good location. After all, I can say that it is a successful story.”

Even though it is much smaller in size, the northern part of Metelkova is compared to the area of Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen, Denmark. Its official name is ‘avtonomi kulturni center Metelkova mesto’ [Metelkova city autonomous cultural center]. I ask Tanja about the connection between the parts of Metelkova where the museums are located and the northern, squatted, more alternative part. To me the differences between the institutionalized and liberal part are quite apparent. She tells me that they are not connected at all at this time, even though there is potential. This is process that will take some time. In some way, however, they are already connected through the influence that the reputation of this squatted part has on the image of SEM. After we finish our interview, Tanja turns around and looks out of the window and chuckles. “Still nobody…”, she sighs. Everybody working at the museum notices the lack of visitors at this time of the year.

The development of the southern part of Metelkova into a well-functioning cultural quarter is still unfinished. It is under construction, according to Tanja. She tells me how it is a challenge to develop the area and make it more attractive to visitors. In the afternoon she has a meeting about this, with people from the museum of contemporary art and the national museum, which are also located on this square. They are planning on creating a programme with the title ‘the three M’s’ to combine programmes of all three museums to create more connection between the different institutes. They see the urgency in creating a tighter network, connecting the museums to strengthen their purpose and increase the popularity of the location. However, Tanja makes clear, the development of this southern part of Metelkova is
also very much related to what the ministry of culture wants and how the municipality of Ljubljana would like to have it. They are additional actants that influence the development of the area and the individual museums. The Slovene Ethnographic Museum is the national ethnographic museum and is financed by the state. Tanja explained to me that it is part of a museum net around the country, which consists also of regional museums. Each regional museum has an ethnographic department with ethnographic collections. That this museum is the biggest and most prominent ethnographic museum in Slovenia does not mean that it is the most visited one. I will get back to this in depth in chapter 6, when I discuss the problems that the Slovene Ethnographic Museum faces in attracting visitors.

“They don’t care!”

Around noon my bus arrives in Škofja Loka, a medieval town with about 30,000 inhabitants northwest of Ljubljana. At the bus station I wait for Ines, one of the students working at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. She waves at me as she appears around a corner. We cross the river to the old part of the town. It is sunny, so we decide to sit outside to have a coffee. Ines grew up in Škofja Loka and is studying cultural studies in Ljubljana. She is working at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum for one and a half year now. She can’t continue working there as soon as she is not a student anymore. The museum has to pay more taxes and a higher salary for graduates. Financial means define its functioning as it limits the employment of those that the museum might need. Several museum curators made clear that they wish for a better connection with the younger generation. A logical first step in the right direction seems to employ more young people, who might have different ideas about how to increase the museums reach.

Ines also works at the castle museum of Škofja Loka, one of the regional museums that are part of the national museum network. Even though this museum is very out-dated, it attracts a lot more visitors than SEM. “You could do so much more with this museum here, as well as with SEM [Slovene Ethnographic Museum]...”, she tells me. Ines shares with me that she felt disappointed when she went to the Slovene Ethnographic Museum for the first time. She expected much more of it. This feeling that ‘it could be so much more’ has been reoccurring in interviews and informal conversations with multiple employees. It illustrates both a desire to develop the museum as well as unhappiness with its impact on society and how it is shaped at present.
We finish our coffee and Ines takes me to the castle museum of Škofja Loka to show me around. We pass some craft workshops and art galleries. A lot of people living here do something with traditional craftwork, Ines tells me. It is not that busy at this time, but in the weekends and public holidays Škofja Loka is full of tourists. Especially in summer it is bustling. It is a popular day-trip destination and the government is investing a lot of money in the development of the town. Many old buildings are being renovated. Interestingly, the towns’ museum is not being that actively worked on by those working there. According to Ines, “they don’t care!” She explains to me that the people working at the museum have a stable contract, and don’t bother thinking about innovation. Ines thinks that is it just lazy. I wonder if the same applies to employees at SEM, despite the talking about making change and staying up-to-date. Lights automatically turn on as we make our way through the museum. Open fires are burning, creating a cosy atmosphere. Ines shows me a room that is skipped during tours given by museum employees and that is usually not visited by anyone. She explains to me that it is an exhibition space about the Second World War, which was created by partisans. “Ok, this one I would definitely change”, she says. The recent history of Slovenia is not always that clear and for that reason difficult to properly discuss in exhibitions. “There is no consensus about that period, you know?” Ines notes. This could be a reason why recent history is also not discussed much in SEM.

It is interesting that this old and relatively small town museum is more popular than the new Slovene Ethnographic Museum that is located in the capital. The exhibitions in the museum in Škofja Loka take you back in time through its content, but also through its presentation techniques in the majority of exhibition rooms. It feels like it has been exactly the same for decades. In comparison to SEM, this museum seems to not require, or instigate, as much movement between and reshaping of actants. Obviously, the lack of different options for a visit to a cultural institute in Škofja Loka could be a reason for its popularity. A visit to this regional museum seems a logical part of itinerary of the average tourist visiting the town for a day. Also, as Ines pointed out, the out-dated status of the museum is in a way also its charm.

Could the visitor numbers in Škofja Loka also have to do with the backgrounds of the visitors? Bojana explained to me that she feels that people living in urban centres are less interested in Slovene cultural heritage or their ‘own history’. Most other people I spoke with throughout the fieldwork share this sentiment. For instance, Irena told me that she believes
that young people on the countryside know more about their heritage, but that they lose this knowledge and interest as soon as they move to the city.

5.2 Without borders

Museums everywhere interact at a number of levels with the cultures that sustain them (Anderson and Winkworth, 1991:147). As such, we cannot see them as entities that exist individually. They are actants that are connected to a broader network. State borders do not define the Slovene Ethnographic Museum anymore like they used to do. The ties that the museum has with nationalism have not completely faded, but have changed. In this section the ideas of ‘borderlessness’, as pointed out by some informants and shown in the collections of the museum, will be the focus.

‘Brothers and sisters’ from another motherland

Irena explained to me how she interprets the differences and similarities between people from the countries that were part of former Yugoslavia, and what influence she believes state borders have on the ideas we shape about diversity. We were sitting next to each other in one of the exhibition spaces of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. The topic of international movement came up in our conversation in response to the refugee situation that Slovenia, like many other European countries, is faced with. When talking about Slovenia’s migration history, Irena mentioned two major emigration waves of Slovenes. She told me that she believes that Slovene people, because of their countries ‘own’ violent past, should understand that everybody fleeing from somewhere should be welcomed and offered a safe place to live. The first emigration wave of Slovenes took place between the two world wars, when there was an increase of people leaving the country for mostly economic reasons. After the Second World War, another wave occurred. This time it was militia, especially from the Domobranci, who were fighting against the Slovene partisans, who had to flee the country. Irena explains to me that many of them were returned by English army forces and killed without trial in the karst regions in Slovenia. These disappearances are still not openly discussed in Slovenia. Argentina was welcoming to those that succeeded at finding their way out.

Irena made clear to me that these Slovene communities in Argentina are very proud of their Slovenian heritage. According to her, they use traditional clothing and other things considered
to be Slovene heritage to keep their connection to the country they fled from alive. I do not have in depth knowledge of these migrant communities overseas and their sentiments towards their home country. However, one kind of object that is presented in the permanent exhibition space of the museum is clearly linked to Slovenia’s emigration history and these Argentinean Slovenes in particular; hand-painted Easter eggs. They were gifted to the museum and brought from Argentina. The recent past is not discussed in the permanent exhibitions of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Despite the lack of explicit communication about the political history of the communities that still produce these crafted eggs, I believe that the inclusion of these objects in the exhibition is in itself a statement. It is making clear that these people are not forgotten and are still considered to be Slovenes, even after all these decades. While talking about this past, I think Irena hinted at three different kinds of responsibilities. First of all, she spoke about a responsibility to not reject or ignore these kinds of artefacts that have a political connection in the museum. Secondly, she described a responsibility to educate about processes of migration, and to make people understand their own connection to this phenomenon through national history. Finally, Irena hinted at a feeling of being responsible for those who undergo the same today, coming from an understanding of their situation based on narratives that come closer to home.

These feelings of responsibility also came back in a conversation I had with Lucija, this time not in connection to the countries emigration, but related to the immigration that it experienced after the break-up of former Yugoslavia and the wars in Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. Lucija told me how her grandfather gets angry at the way people treat those seeking refuge nowadays. He experienced how many refugees were welcomed in during the 90s. He is confused about why it is apparently so different now, and thinks that it is ridiculous. For Lucija it is quite clear that it has to with the better-defined connection that there was between Yugoslavian ‘brothers and sisters’. These feelings of belonging to an extensive imagined community (Anderson, 1983) are not applicable to this new wave of immigrants. They are part of a different network of associations.

The refugee crisis came up during the majority of my interviews. For Nika the biggest issue that Slovenes, and others in Europe, are facing in relation to the growth in immigration is a lack of empathy. She believes that people don’t have the ability to emphasise with people that are coming from another place. Nika thinks that the museum could play an important role in
helping people with obtaining the reflexive skills necessary to place one in somebody else’s shoes. She explained:

“I think this [showing in the museum that life was hard for people in the past] is really important just in our situation, that we are now. Because if people knew that, if people had a better consciousness and knew that Slovenes had to migrate to another country, for economic reasons or just like for religions, you know... they had to move because of a war or different things. And if they had this better idea, if they could connect, through Slovenian history, to this kind of empathy... then they could understand better this situation that people are now fleeing to our country.”

For Nika the representation of a ‘honest’ image of Slovenia’s past is key in this process, showing that life in Slovenia has also been hard and that people used to move to other countries as well to in the hope of making a better living. She is convinced that this can have a positive impact on people that have difficulties to relate to those who come from abroad and hold other religious beliefs. Reflecting on similar situations in ones ‘own’ past can encourage openness to the troubles and worries of others.

Andreja, another museum employee, worries about two major problems in the museum. She has been working there for quite a while and did not see much improvement over the past few years. The first problem she describes to me has to do with collections-based research at the museum. As described in the chapter 4, the collections of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum are mainly based in the 19th century and the first part half the 20th century. According to Andreja, the curators at the museum only focus on these collections, and then usually only in their area of expertise. This research, which is only focussed on objects and limited collections, is problematic. A second problem that Andreja pointed out to me has to do with the connection to contemporary issues that play in society. She wants the curators to reflect more on the political activism that is defining the discussions about migration and to take Slovenia’s broader migration past into consideration. Andreja seems frustrated with the lack of in-depth research on topics like this. Even when the museum is a scientific institute, that could do valuable work looking into trends related to contemporary issues, its research scope is limited. Both the focus on artefacts and the focus on a past without a connection to the present are in need of rethinking. Andreja shared with me that she thinks that it would be great if the museum develops an exhibition on refugees, but only when extensive research will be done on the underlying reasons for this change of attitude towards migrants as a part of the project. That way, misconceptions can be avoided. The question is whether it would be
possible to find a curator within the museum that has the knowledge and the motivation to do this job.

**Let’s talk culture politics**

On one cold afternoon in February, I decided to spend some time in the museum’s library. This library is located on the ground floor of the administration building. I shared the reading space only with Ana. I asked her about some old brochures for exhibitions and other informative documents, which are actants in a communicative network promoting the museum. She went to look for them in a separate room, which is filled with bookshelves. After a short while she came back with some material, and handed it over to me. As I sat down at the island of four tables in the middle of the room to go through it, we started chatting a bit. She tells me about how the museum has always made use of its political and cultural ties to other countries. This is a continuous characteristic of its network, even though it changed along with the political history of Slovenia. According to Ana, when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia, an important factor in this international network was the non-aligned movement. I asked her to explain to me what this meant for the museum. She told me that the museum made extensive use of its political and cultural connections. For example, through the non-aligned movement, it had collaborations with Indonesia and several African countries. Ana explained to me that students from these countries would come to Yugoslavia with scholarships to study. The University of Ljubljana also accepted students through this network. They would also help in the museum, by giving tours and helping curators with the descriptions for objects. These students are no active actants within the network of the museum anymore. However, this kind of international collaboration remains.

The contemporary international political connections of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum become obvious when looking at the collaborations with different embassies in Ljubljana. Even when Slovenia is not a member of the non-aligned movement anymore, which has been a significant actant in the historical network of the institution, these kinds of culture politics

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12 The non-aligned movement (NAM) was established in 1961 in Belgrade. Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito initiated the first conference of the movement. As the name suggests, its members are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. One of the central principles of the movement is cultural equality. It advocates against (neo-)colonialism and imperialism. Slovenia left the movement after its independence from Yugoslavia. Nowadays, the NAM consists of 120 members and 17 observers. For more information, see for instance: [http://glossary.mg-lj.si/referential-fields/geo-politics/non-aligned-movement](http://glossary.mg-lj.si/referential-fields/geo-politics/non-aligned-movement).
continue to have an influence on the network as it looks nowadays. The museum works together with the ambassadors of Indonesia, India, Nepal and Italy, among others. This intercultural cooperation benefits the museum through the support in the development of temporary exhibitions. Representatives from the embassies attend the opening and closing ceremonies of these exhibitions, which attributes to the museums institutional collaborative status. The ties to political officials increase the image of the museum and its exhibitions as trustworthy and give it an impression of importance. This sense of importance, which I interpret in terms of authority on subject matter, still seems to be seen as an attribute that the museum needs to brand and market itself. However, I believe this also distances the museum from some of those who want to visit. It creates a boundary that could make people uncomfortable. This relates to the perception of ‘the museum’ as a knower and the user (or visitor) as a learner, which creates a power hierarchy. We will look into this in more detail in chapter 6.

Ema referred to the connection between the museum and the university, another actant, when I talked to her about her job at the museum and what kind of projects she is working on. She told me that she would meet somebody who teaches visual anthropology at the university soon to talk about collaboration. Ema had been working for a while on a project involving filmed portraits of people and shared with me that that she would like “the students [of visual anthropology] to work on these portraits from people from abroad that are here for some years. That they know the language, that they are incorporated into Slovene society already”. She explained to me that this would be a beneficial project not just for the museum, but also for those people who are interviewed and for the students. “They can learn a lot, they can help the society! For the museum it is also nice because we could have these portraits, like a bunch of them, and have a programme and discussions with it and so on”, she continued. I did not hear how her conversation with the professor went and whether this project is incorporated within the museum today.

Nevertheless, this idea that Ema shared with me shows us several things. First of all, it illustrates the relationships between two institutions in the museum’s network – the museum on the one hand and the university on the other hand. Also, what this project of portraits would ultimately be about is not the win-win situations between the students, the university, the museum and the interviewed people. Rather, it is about the creativity to work together to achieve a common goal: giving museum visitors an interaction, which they would maybe not
get outside of the museum. It is about broadening their horizons by doing so and making the voices heard of those who are being prejudiced. This project underlines the double workings of the museum; it has the power to produce and enforce both hierarchies of difference as well as understandings of similarity.

Another institutional relationship between actants that is important to look at involves the museum and the ministry of culture. In the summary of the National Programme for Culture (Nacionalni Program za Kulturo) for the period of 2014 to 2017, the Slovene Ministry of Culture wrote that it wants to:

“ensure a higher level of protection of cultural rights within the framework of human rights protection, a higher degree of cultural integration of minorities at the territorial level and within specific disciplines, and encourage the cultural activities of members of groups that are vulnerable in multiple ways.”

Under the header of “Cultural Heritage” it is furthermore stated that it envisions an interdisciplinary approach in which individuals and their free participation in the cultural life is at the heart of the activities. The desired partnership with local communities is also mentioned. These plans are all in line with the thinking of New Museology. However, are these just empty policy words or are they also acted upon?

According to museum employees, this ministry has a last say in quite a few things within the museum. As such, it is a decisive actant within the network. The relationship between these two institutions is one that is defined by financial means. Bluntly said; the museum depends on money from the people who do politics. They are ultimately the ones who decided whether a woman I talked to would get her job at the museum or not. If the ministry does not want to invest more in the cultural sector, then no new positions will open up within the state museums. In a way, the ministry decides what the museum can or cannot do. As such, national politics is an integral part of, and active actant within, the museum. In another interview it was made clear to me that the ministry finances non-controversial, traditional, exhibitions more easily than provocative or too politically loaded exhibitions. However, since the majority of employees at the museum that I spoke to would like to have more of the latter, this creates a tension between different networks and actants. For instance, one employee who told me that she was very disappointed that a majority of Slovenes voted against same-sex marriage some months before I started fieldwork articulated this tension. She shared with me the wish to work on an exhibition about LGBT rights but that it would still take a lot of effort
to get it off the ground. She is convinced that an exhibition like this could possibly make people more understanding and accepting of same-sex marriage.

**In conclusion**

In this chapter is has become clear that the location of the museum influences its identity, image and how people relate to it. First of all, I have described the tensions related to the museums new urban location and the development of the cultural centre at Metelkova. It became clear that there are contrasting views among museum employees about the importance of the historical identity of the buildings that house the museum nowadays. I argue that the museums location is of defining importance to its development as a destination. The network of the museum underwent considerable changes with its acquisition of bigger permanent exhibition space. The image of Metelkova became a new actant, as well as the buildings themselves and their difficult history. Secondly, I have described how the museum’s position as an urban museum, in comparison to the castle museum in the small town of Škofja Loka, might have influence on its popularity. Even though the employees at this smaller museum ‘don’t care’ about innovating it, it still attracts more visitors than SEM. It has been hinted that it could also be that those living in ‘the city’, Ljubljana, are not interested in Slovene cultural heritage. Furthermore, in the last section, I have reflected on the wider network that the museum takes part in. First, I described the wish of employees at the museum to do something in response to the refugee crisis and how a reflection on the ‘own’ migration history could help people empathize with those seeking shelter in Slovenia nowadays. This national migration past is becoming a part of the museum’s network, through the desires of its employees to address Slovenia’s recent immigration wave. Finally, I have reflected on the different institutional and political connections of the museum; through the non-aligned movement, different embassies in Ljubljana, the university of Ljubljana and the ministry of culture. This network of institutions is one that went through key changes after the independence of Slovenia. The actants it consists are influencing the museum’s policies. To make an impact through for instance a discussion on migration, the museum has to make sure that people interact with it. In the next chapter we will look in more detail at the different visions that museum employees have for the development of the museum and how they reflect on the problem it has with attracting visitors.
6. Visions

Lucija sits down with me in the museum shop on a cloudy afternoon in March. She is one of the students working at the museum and is regularly responsible for guided tours with children. Today she is on duty as receptionist, but she jokingly says that it would not matter whether she would be there or not as there is probably nobody entering the museum anyway. Lucija is 24 and came a couple of years ago from a small village to Ljubljana to study at the university. She is studying for a master degree in cultural anthropology. After having worked in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum for a while and developing a critical relationship to it, she shares with many other museum employees that I have spoken with the view of ethnographic museums as not being ‘just institutes’. She believes that they hold a responsibility as institutes, because of the influences that they have on visitors coming to its events and exhibitions. Lucija becomes a bit more serious when she tells me; “every museum has a role that can be dangerous or positive”. She underlines to me that the museum is responsible for every exhibition it makes and that it should know exactly what it is doing. In her opinion, one of the responsibilities of the museum is to connect people to each other, to make them see their similarities instead of their differences.

The interaction between the museum and its public is one that is not fully equal, or horizontal. There still exists an idea of the museum as ‘above’ society, holding a powerful authority in which it has the power to define what can be seen as culture or heritage of importance and what not. This position of the ethnographic museum is shifting, as they adapt to an increasingly interconnected world. The networks that are defining it are changing. This world has different needs and requests than one that is defined primarily by state borders and nations.

In this last ethnographic chapter I describe different tensions that are felt by employees at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. They feel that the museum has not reached its full potential. Employees encounter struggles in realizing an inclusive and participatory approach and offering a safe space for dialogue that everybody feels truly welcome to. In the first subchapter I bring up the imbalances between the museums collections and the selection that is accessible to visitors in its exhibitions. I relate this to a broader discussion on the cultural heritage field on processes of remembering. In the second subchapter I describe the concerns
that employees expressed about the low visitor numbers and what they perceive to be possible explanations for the questions why the museum attracts relatively little people. The last subchapter contains a reflection on the visions of the museum as a platform for dialogue. The concerns about accessibility and inclusivity in museums connects ultimately to broader discussion about the role and the use of knowledge in society, in particular to questions relating to the extent of which knowledge should be structured and mediated by professionals and institutional interpretations.

6.1 Forgetting or reshaping?

Tanja is impassionedly ticking with her pen on her working desk. She is explaining to me in a clear voice what her ideas about the Slovene Ethnographic Museum are and how she envisions its future development. She strikes me as a highly ambitious woman and she seems to have big goals. When I ask her what her mission for the museum is, she starts telling me enthusiastically how she first of all wants the collections to be more mobile and inclusive. She wants the cultural heritage that the museum safeguards to communicate more with the public and society in general. With a worried tone, she tells me that only ten per cent of all the material owned by the museum is presented at the moment. This is a problem that many museums around the world, not just ethnographic ones, are facing. According to Ames (2014:98), there is a very limited public access to museum collections. He states that usually only one to five per cent or less of the total collections are made available to museum visitors. This issue might have seen some improvement a little in the past years, due to some museums opening up their depots and others increasing their exhibition spaces. However, the imbalance is still apparent, as museum collections usually keep growing and do not decline. We could say that, essentially, a lack of space is a defining actant that shapes this tension between accessibility and abundancy. If there is too much material and too little exhibition space, how to choose what is more important to show?

The depot problem

In his book ‘Oblivion’ (2004), the French anthropologist Marc Augé highlights the importance of forgetting in processes of remembering. He shows that forgetting is an essential part of the process of the shaping of memory. Our memory would be saturated very quickly if we would remember every moment of our day, every person we speak to, and every detail of
the places we pass through. What we are left with in our recollection is the product of an erosion that is caused by oblivion. Augé describes it in the following way: “memories are crafted by oblivion as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea”. We can get to know a lot about this shore and how it changed over time by studying the process of erosion. Following the same line of thought, I believe that we can learn a lot about the museum practices by not only focusing on what is presented in public exhibition spaces, but also on what is left behind in the depots.

According to Ames (2014:103), one way to increase the relevance of museums is to increase the public access to the collections and the information they contain. This way, he states, people can become more familiar with the full range of their heritage. One way to achieve this is through accessible storage. Ames (2014:100) writes about a the ‘visible storage’ space at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA, Vancouver). He explains that this sort of ‘open depot’ works well for students and scholars (the group for whom it was primarily designed), but that it is not very successful as a popular entertainment. It requires effort and knowledge from the visitor to make use of this museum space. He points out three main criticisms that are raised against the idea of open depots: 1. It is said to expose collections to increased environmental and security risks; 2. It is said to make it difficult to interpret the objects properly (as so many are displayed) and 3. It undermines the responsibilities and authority of the curational staff (Ames, 2014:103). Ames (2014:103) tackles the first two problems by making clear that these are essentially mechanical in nature and can be resolved fairly easily by making use of modern technology. The third problem however, he states, is a different matter. People are more difficult to change than practical systems, and it became apparent that accessible storage threatens the curational profession.

According to a popular view in museum circles, a museum should interpret or explain carefully chosen specimens, and preserve the bulk of its collections in restricted storage areas (Ames, 2014:104). Some reasons why artefacts should not be seen without the expert’s interpretation are: because it is a museum’s mission to educate, because the public is believed to need guidance or to be not interested in uninterpreted objects in large collections, and because recreating the original context of the objects helps to justify, or pay for, the fact that they were removed from their cultural context in the first place (Ames, 2014:104). According to Ames (2014:104), not creating a cultural context within a museum exhibitions is seen as a
failure and a crime of ‘decontextualization’, or even worse, a blasphemy against the culture from which the objects were obtained.

That museum practices are selective and that exhibitions can never be all encompassing is nothing new. However, what is important to keep in mind is that, as Augé makes clear, these processes of selecting ‘memory’ are not unconscious. On the contrary, decisions about what to leave behind is a decision made in full awareness. In a museum, it is not possible to ‘just forget’ about a part of the past. Decisions about what can or should be shown are made by a few people that hold the authority. These decisions are made in relation to or directly influenced by external factors. We have seen in chapter 3 that traditional ethnographic museums in most cases have a contested and difficult past. As described throughout chapter 4, the presentation of ‘a past’ is open to alteration according to, for instance, a political agenda. It has been illustrated how cultural heritage can be used ideologically and how employees of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum view the attention to a ‘correct presentation’ as one of the main responsibilities of the museum. However still apparent in museum policies and selected governmental funding for certain more ‘traditional’ topics, the promotion of a national identity is not one of the main driving forces of the sustaining of ethnographic museums anymore as it used to be in the early history of these types of institutions. This actant has given space to others. As no museum can present its complete collections at the same time, certain objects are always left out or put forward in exhibitions. This selection process is a constant actant within the museum’s network. Going through a selection process is unavoidable, as there is simply too much material to accommodate in these exhibition spaces. Even though there are highly educated professionals working for the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, this does not mean that their work is free of limitations.

**Museums as “living organisms” and radical preservation mania**

Tanja wants to put the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in the framework of modern society. She says; “museums are living organisms. They are always changing and there are different tasks of museums in different times. And I see in this particular moment that the most important thing is to give a beauty and a value to this modern society”. She continues to explain that the museum, in her opinion, should be receptive of the recent needs that the modern society has. She wants it to communicate about and with contemporary situations and recent problems or discussions. These are idealistic ideas and could be difficult to practically
implement in the museum. However, that does not mean that these ideals should be given up on or mumbled away. We can see that museums around the world make attempts to reach goals that are in line with new museology. One idea that Tanja has on how to achieve this connection between the museums artefacts and contemporary society is to present a museum object as a mirror of a certain way of life together with a similar object from contemporary society. “Like an antipode, you know?”, she says. This way, visitors could see cultural development not in just a historical way but also draw the line further to connect to their own environment and lives.

A provoking view on the relationships between memory and heritage is presented by archaeologist Cornelius Holtorf in his widely discussed essay “Can less be more? Heritage in the age of terrorism” (2006). Where Augé argues that memory goes hand in hand with the process of forgetting, Holtorf poses the idea that less heritage can mean more memory. This view is in sharp contrast to what is commonly thought within the heritage field. Holtorf describes how the loss of heritage does not necessarily take away its value. He is critical towards the obsession of the Western world with preservation and conservation of cultural heritage. This ‘fundamentalist ideology’, as he calls it, is full of contradictions as he is convinced that consuming heritage can involve both destruction and preservation. Destruction and loss are not the opposite of what heritage means, but part of its very substance, he argues. As he phrases it; “the current appeal of preservation is more a product of history than the appeal of history could be said to be a product of preservation”.

Holtorf gives as an example the ‘stealing’ of parts of the Berlin wall. According to Holtorf, this illegal act does not take away the value of the heritage but is a way of living with it and shaping it. The answer to his question where less [heritage] can be more [memory] is a convincing “yes”. However, this was not well-received by many of his colleague-archaeologists, underlining in a way his description of the cultural heritage field as being fully focussed on a ‘saving’ from destruction or loss. This obsession with ‘saving’ reminders of our past for a future generation is also part of the identity of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, as we have seen in chapter 4. I agree with Holtorf that cultural heritage is fluid and changeable over time, and that it is not only defined by preservation. Within the cultural heritage discourse we can find a clear ideology of ‘heritage-preservationism’ (Holtorf, 2006). This is also visible in ethnographic museums, especially in their history as institutes to collect and preserve artefacts from ‘disappearing cultures’. As a result, museum depots are still
growing, even when the majority of these artefacts will most likely only get in touch with those working in cultural institutes.

The concept of ideology is in more ways applied to cultural heritage and museum studies. Bourdieu’s concept of dominant ideology (1976) has for instance been adapted to this field. When thinking about ideologies and their connections to the field of cultural heritage, it is important to see how ideology can have both positive and negative outcomes, as Lucija also pointed out when she said during our interview that museums can be dangerous or have a good side. Hardy (1988) points out that cultural heritage can be interpreted as having a double function. According to him, in one way it can be a conservative force that supports and reinforces dominant patterns of power. This happens for instance when it is used in strengthening a sense of nationalism. On the other hand, heritage can also be a radical force that challenges and attempts to subvert existing structures of power. He writes that “heritage is a value-loaded concept, embracing (and often obscuring) differences of interpretation that are dependent on key variables, such as class, gender and locality; and with the concept itself locked into wider frameworks of dominant and subversive ideologies (where the idea of heritage can be seen either to reinforce or to challenge existing patterns of power) (Hardy, 1988:333).

I suggest that within the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, and the museum world in general, we can see the initiation of a theoretical shift from this conservative approach to a radical approach. The practical shift is more carefully following. It is no easy task to successfully implement this change in practice. The museum’s networks are still to a great extend defined by a conservative image of cultural heritage. It has been argued that this shift to a radical approach is necessary. The concept of the ‘museum’ could lose it relevance to the public otherwise. For the Slovene Ethnographic Museum to remain relevant in present-day Slovenia, it needs to be in line with a more ‘sustainable approach’, according to Tanja. As a part of this sustainable approach, she wants museum objects to communicate more intensively with the public. She believes that this is not happening enough. She tells me;

“To be more inclusive is the first point. This is a very responsible task. How to give all this treasure, really, to society? This is the point! Not that all this material, these museum objects, beautiful objects, all these different collections, stay in depots. They are there for the people!”
In line with the thinking of new museology, being there ‘for the people’ would not mean being there for the Slovene nation, but for all people. Key to reaching this more open environment that Tanja envisions, is working on making everybody feel welcome to the museum and offering all visitors, no matter what their background or social status is, to have a say in what is being discussed and what is represented in which ways. Wider access to collections is associated with ideas about ‘de-schooling’ the museum. It wants to decrease rather than increase institutional arrangements between object and viewer (Rowan, 1978; Illich, 1971). This new approach suggests that the relevance of museum in contemporary society is likely to be determined by the degree to which they are democratized (Ames, 2014:98). Democratization in this view on museums is determined in terms of participation and by the extend of which museums increase opportunities for independent thought and action in cultural matters.

Even though the museum is making steps in trying to be more inclusive, how much has it achieved so far? Lucija feels like there is a tension within the museum when it comes to this aim to be more inclusive. It portrays itself as more and more open to everybody but in reality, she thinks, this is not how things go. What it means to be inclusive is not as straightforward as it seems. In the next subchapter we will have a look at the concerns that museum employees expressed when discussing the difficulties in attracting visitors to the museum.

6.2 “Exhibitions can be boring even if you are interested”

When I asked Tanja what she misses the most in the exhibitions, she answered immediately that she would like to see them being more interactive. She does not want the museum to be just about the objects. Tanja has been the director of the museum of recent history in Celje before starting her job at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. The museum there attracts more visitors and according to her this has a lot to do with the innovative character of the programmes offered. She opens the website of the museum and starts showing me proudly a part of the museum which she designed. We giggle when she appears on one of the promotional pictures. She developed a crafts line within this museum, a street that you can walk through. Which she explains feels a bit like time travel. “It is not just an exhibition where you watch and observe. It is very popular for different generations. For the children and for the teenagers but of course also for the older generation”, she tells me. There are real people explaining everything to the visitors. According to Tanja, this is the best exhibition in
Slovenia, but she also lets me know that she is aware of her bias. It was opened in 2000 and according to Tanja it is still very alive and popular. But to develop something like this is hard, she tells me. It would attract more visitors to the museum if they would do something like that here, too. That is something Tanja is certain about. The exhibitions in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum do not have this interactive ‘experience’ factor.

**The generational gap**

Lucija told me that she feels that it is mostly elderly people or tourists entering the Slovene Ethnographic Museum during her working hours. Other than that, as a guide she is regularly in contact with children from kindergarten and primary school up until around the age of 13 in the museum. Young adults or students seem to be missing. This is something I noticed more often when I talked to people around my age in Ljubljana. They not always knew about the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and usually did not seem to be interested in going there. Anthropology students seem to be an exception, which can be explained both by their academic interests as well as by the free pass that they get to enter the museum.

Andreja also feels that there is a big difference between the generations in Slovenia. The first thing she thinks about when we discuss this together is the difference in the teaching of languages. The younger generation in Slovenia speaks English perfectly, and it is now a part of the curriculum for children in school. However, in her time this was unthinkable, Andreja explains: “we did not learn English in the socialist country. We did not need it”. The English language is a new actant that was not of importance before the dissolution of Yugoslavia. This change shapes the way the museum communicates with visitors. In Slovenia, the older generation usually speaks German and/or Serbo-Croatian besides Slovenian.

Young and old visitors interpret the museum in different ways. Their expectations of and ideas about cultural heritage are not the same. The perceived importance of cultural heritage and the interaction with it differs from generation to generation. The actants within the broader network of the museum are divided by age. A usual stereotype image of the ‘youth’ is that they are ignorant, also about their national heritage. Irena underlines this when she answers resolutely “no, not enough, for sure”, when I ask her if young people in Slovenia know about Slovene cultural heritage. She nuances her statement and tells me that young people on the countryside sometimes take part in some folk traditions or competitions. As an
example she gives competitions in hand mowing. I ask her why she thinks that it is a bad thing if people are not so interested in cultural heritage. To her, cultural heritage is inherently linked to processes of identity formation. She tells me:

“I don’t know… well, it makes you rich if you know. If you know what is going on, your children will know and your grandchildren will know. People must celebrate. And you have to know what you are celebrating. Not just costumes. Also things that you learn from ancestors… they have value. They give you your identity”,

Lucija told me about a summer school project for anthropologists that she did a while ago. This generation gap is exactly what she looked into, as she also noticed it. Together with some other students she went to Celje to do research on why young people are not that attracted by or interested in museums. They interviewed students between the age of 16 and 25. Lucija told me that one of the main things that they found out was that there is a disconnection between museums and this generation when it comes to promotion strategies. She explains that museums need to invest more in a name on social media. Promotion via channels like Twitter or Facebook would reach young people. They do not read the brochures handed out, according to Lucija. As such, social media are replacing older means of promotion as actants that are able to reach the younger generation. For the museums network to stay up-to-date it needs to conform to these relatively new online actants.

The lack of visitors in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum is striking, as the museum seems to have everything needed to become a tourist destination (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) at first sight. Tanja shared with me that she believes that the low visitor number has a lot to do with finding the balance between offering interesting content and having a successful way of communicating information about this. “It is a fight. It is a package” she sighs. This connects to the idea that a museum needs to be branded as a destination, as is discussed by Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1998). Being a visitor, you can be very excited to learn more about a certain topic or type of object but this eagerness of people to visit does not mean that an exhibition will be a success. Or as Ana put it; “exhibitions can be boring even if you are interested”. There has to be something done with the things in the museum to make them appealing to people. Just putting everything there in glass boxes for visitors to stare at does not do the trick. The museum items, whether tangible or intangible, need to be seen in relation to the networks that they are part of. Otherwise they will not be able to transmit their stories. The actants are dependent on each other. In the end, it is mostly the stories that people are
interested in when visiting the museum, as Bojana explained to me. Valentinčič Furlan (2015:189) also stresses the importance of storytelling. According to her, “narrating is an ancient traditional manner of transmitting knowledge and experience, values, feelings and identities; at the same time, it also creates and strengthens human bonds”.

*“I talk, you listen”*

Besides the problems with promotion, Lucija noted that there is another main finding of her research in Celje. This is that the stereotype image of museums as ‘boring’ also plays an important role in the question why young people are not coming to museums. According to Lucija, this stereotypical image of museums is passed on to children early on in school. When I ask her what this stereotype means, she told me that it has to do a lot to do with the idea that the museum is a place where there is a certain authority that makes you feel like you don’t have an opinion. Lucija feels like it has to do with the idea “that the museum is all about ‘I talk, you listen’, you know, that kind of attitude”. She is trying to create a more relaxing and open atmosphere for children when she is guiding them through the museum. This is one of the reasons that she really likes guiding small children. As she fully understands how impressive a visit to the museum must be when you are so young, having experienced those feelings when she was a child herself, she feels responsible to make sure that children visiting the museum feel safe to ask whatever comes to their minds.

Lucija tells me that she had a bad experience with museums when she was young. She remembers that they always had to drive for a long time, about one and a half hour, to Ljubljana to the museum. Then, after getting there, you had to listen for such a long time. She remembers mostly just feeling impatient to go outside. She describes how it felt being asked questions; “if anybody was asking you something it was like in that way – ‘what is this? Tell me. No, it is not that [sounding very strict]’, you know?”. She continues by explaining to me that it felt like being attacked, and that she did not want to give an answer because you could be foolish, or completely wrong. Her goal is to make the children that she works with at the museum feel like it can also be fun. This example given by Lucija illustrates a hierarchical relation between the museum and its visitors. The ideal of a horizontal, dialogical, relationship is not reached yet. The museum can feel like an authority on knowledge, and makes you feel inferior or ignorant as a result. In order to change this hierarchy, fundamental changes in its network need to be achieved.
This tension point has a clear connection to the high status of ‘science’ or ‘being scientific’. One employee told me one afternoon that she believes that some employees at the museums do not take the work of Boris Kuhar, who was the director of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum from 1963 to 1987, seriously “because he started as a journalist and only later came into ethnology”. When I asked her what this meant, she explained that “he was not so scientific because he believed that you make films for the general public”. We can see clearly here the dualism between a prestigious “science” and that that is not a part of it – in this case an urge to present to a “general public”. Of course, this is a problematic distinction as science and the general public are not two different entities, but in fact are more closely related than one might think. The most interesting point here is that searching for an active connection between science and a general public is seen as something negative, which affects ones trustworthiness and perceived “scientific” abilities.

In ANT this interconnected relation between science and the ‘real world’ is discussed in depth. Bruno Latour writes:

“the point I insist upon is that the very way we think of what constitutes a similarity and a difference is modified once the base line used until now – universal nature known by a scientific voice from nowhere – has vanished” (2013:561).

He is critical of the idea that science and scientists are seen as somewhat unconnected to and uninfluenced by their subjects and objects of study. In the same text he writes that he agrees that the ‘relational’ definition of cultures has already been present in anthropology, as has been pointed out by anthropologists in response to ANT. However, Latour states that anthropology still has a long way to go before it gets to the point where it can ‘associate’ freely with all sorts of other entities (2013:561). I believe that the museum, as a scientific institute, has an equally long way to go.

**A friendly museum**

Bojana, like Lucija, also believes that museums should be more approachable:

“It must be interesting. It must touch you. It must raise your curiosity. I think this is important. And friendly! Friendly… Not complicated. Available. It should be easy to go through.”
That the museum should not be so ‘difficult’ or ‘boring’ is something that seems to be common knowledge. Still, even when they have evolved, many museums are still interpreted as such by those that might not even have been there. According to Bojana it is important to work with visual language. As it has been made clear that reading and listening do not necessarily do as much with visitors as was thought before, curators started working with other senses. The entire ‘mood’ or ‘feeling’ of an exhibition has to be taken in account. She explains that the museums are all about objects, but that something has to be done with them. They have to be put in a context and they need to be explained to visitors. “But not just with the text, people don’t read, heh!” she points out. Where the English language itself is an important new actant shaping the younger generations in Slovenia, written text is no decisive actant within the museum’s exhibitions.

That people don’t read the texts in the museum could have to do with the way that texts are presented in exhibitions. In the case of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, this is mostly done for a Slovene audience. Explanatory cards of the exhibition text translated in English can be found here and there but are not clearly presented, in my experience. In addition to this the audio tours in the museum are not always working well. I talk to Sanja, Tjaša and Nika, three students working at the museum, about this. They inform me that it is free for visitors but that it is not used that much. When I ask them in which languages it is available, they start summing up immediately; Slovene, English, Spanish, German, Hungarian, Croatian… “Could be even more?” one asks the others.

During my fieldwork I have not seen many international tourists at the museum. Of course, this has to do with the tourist seasons. The visitor numbers are usually not high in the first couple of months of the year. People do come when there is a special event, for instance a ceremony opening or closing an exhibition. Also, visitors come when there is no entrance fee to the museum. This happens on special days and on the first Sunday of each month. There are many opportunities for people to visit the museum without having to pay. Andreja, who is single-handedly working on the development of programmes for visitors at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, listed some of these special days for me when I met her one morning. It seems like there are many opportunities for people to visit the museum without having to pay. There is no entrance fee at for instance the 3rd of December, the date of birth of national hero Prešeren, and the 8th of February, which is national culture day and marks the date of the death of Prešeren. Especially national culture day is a well-known day in the museum world.
in Slovenia. This is the only day that the museums around Ljubljana are fully packed at this time of the year. Even when the entrance fee is not very high, it could be an actant that limits the museum’s accessibility.

The day after the national culture day I meet with Andreja in her office on the top floor of the exhibition building. The office is like an island of light when you enter it from the dark attic space. Andreja is extremely talkative whenever I see her and eager to show me around. She always wants to tell me whatever comes up to her mind and she thinks I should know for my research. We reflect together on how everything went at the museum yesterday. At first, she is very enthusiastic and happy about the many visitors. Yesterday 1433 people came to the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Normally the museum gets about that amount of visitors in a month. However, her tone changes suddenly. It seems like a lot, but actually it is not that good. In a little bit of a sad tone Andreja explains to me that there are equally many visitors per day in the St. Niclas church ‘in town’, especially in busy months. She tells me that they only receive about 2000 international tourists per year here in the museum. She thinks that it is strange that the museum is not attracting more visitors and jokingly urges me to find out why.

That people suddenly visit museums when there is no entrance fee is not a surprise to Maša, who tells me in a bright voice that the thinks that people don’t care as long as they don’t have to pay. This idea came up during interviews with more people. It can also have to do with the idea that Slovenes are ‘outdoor’ tourists, they like to go hiking and spend time in the fresh air whenever they are free, Irena told me. One informant told me that she feels that there has maybe not developed such a ‘museum-going-culture’ in Slovenia, yet. Ames (1992:100) writes that visiting an important museum is a highly acceptable and socially visible way of validating and demonstrating one’s status in the community. This might be true in many contexts. However, going to a museum is not popular or seen as such a ‘big deal’ in Slovenia.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the northern part of Metelkova is receiving quite some tourists and is mentioned in most of the guides to Ljubljana. Ana thinks that “maybe some tourists just go for that part because they see it in the Lonely Planet”. Maša also mentioned using tourist guides and online blogs when she prepares for trips abroad. She told me that she feels excited to visit museums and those kinds of places when she travels somewhere, but does not feel that need in Slovenia. Still, more national tourists than international tourists visit
the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Irena mentioned that this could have to do with the national pride that Slovenes come to look for when they come to the museum. She explained to me that some people come to the museum to get taken back into time, and remember the ‘good old days’, as described in chapter 4 when I discussed how the past is romanticized within the museum. This special appeal is not there for international tourists who usually have no direct connection to the Slovene past.

**When is inclusivity reached?**

Ana believes that the Slovene Ethnographic Museum became more open as an institute. “Before, people were just afraid to come to the museum”, she told me. According to her, the museum has changed its function and there has been a shift in the approach to visitors. Ana explains that there is no such thing as a visitor anymore, but that the people coming to the museum are users. I asked her how she would describe this idea of museum users. She explains me that she thinks people are now users “because they don’t come just to see the things but they also find some information and some knowledge. They know exactly why they are coming. Not only to the exhibitions but also to other departments. To the library, to the documentation, for example. They also find a lot of documents on the internet. People are searching on the internet”.

So, the people coming to the museum nowadays want more than just looking at pretty things. They want to gain something more. The expectations of visitors, as actants within the network of the museum, have changed. Ana is convinced that they are actively looking for more.

Accessibility is nowadays a highly important concept within the museum world. It could be seen as some kind of ‘buzz-word’ even. Of course, the content of the museum is there for people to see. However, not everybody would agree with Ana that the museum became so much more open recently. Unfortunately, museums still do not always feel as welcoming to visitors as they would like to be. Lucija shared with me her doubts about the trustworthiness of the intentions of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum to become more accessible and inclusive. She gives as an example a recent project at the museum, which worked with accessibility for those who are blind or bad-sighted. A selection of museum objects in the permanent exhibitions was copied and put next to the original for those with problems with their vision to touch. This idea is very interesting and also ties into the stereotypical
connection that many of us have with museums as places where you can only look, and never touch.

The museum collaborated with visually impaired people during the time the project was running. However, Lucija told me that she did not see any people who fit the target group of this project visiting the museum after the official project time was over. This is where the question ‘when is inclusivity reached?’ comes up. It is difficult to define where the goals lie. Is the goal a certain amount and diversity of visitors? Does it have more to do with the possibility of everybody to be able to visit the museum? Of course, more people are attracted to visit the museum when they are directly approached. This could be an explanation for this change after the project finished. Still, Lucija is critical and shares with me that she feels like those projects are first and foremost carried out to be able to show that the museum is working with inclusivity, and not primarily out of honest interest in reaching this full openness and accessibility. She believes that it is a lot about the image of the museum but not about the actual achievements.

This reflects back on the responsibility of those working at the museum to work towards a non-momentary but sustainable accessibility. What could be called the traditional museology privileged both its collections-based function and its social links to the cultural tastes of particular social groups (McCall and Gray, 2014:4). However, the museum still focuses on specific target groups. Lucija told me the following:

“I think that also the curators and the other people who work in the museum are interested in that kind of profile of people [intellectuals]. They are making it interesting for them”.

There is a tension between the process of finding a way to attract all kinds of people and the interests of the curators in designing the exhibitions. They seem to play into the preferences, or gaze (Urry, 1990), of mostly the intellectual visitors. The expectations of a few that the museum wants to be associated with shape the reality for all. McCall and Gray (2014:15) note that the greatest difficulty with all of the expectations of museums lies in the fact that these expectations are always subject to the interpretation by those who have responsibility for implementing them. Each agent in the policy process has his or her own professional and personal values and experiences that can influence implementation (McCall and Gray, 2014:15).
Furthermore, Lucija pointed out that there are some small but very significant things in the museums strategy that are also still not tackled. As an example she gave the differences between stating that people without a job can enter the museum for free and in practice making this feel like an acceptable and not shameful thing to do for those who want to make use of this. Now, people have to state this out loud at the reception, or fill in some kind of paper while there is a stigma on being jobless. This paper is an actant that shapes the network as a little more accessible. However, accessibility does not only relate to a physical availability and openness. It is more than that. Even when a place is practically open to everybody, this may not always be interpreted or feel like that by all of those who want to come.

Sarraf and Bruno (2013:94) argue that participation in curatorial practices fulfils the social function of museums and transforms the museum into an adequate space for socialising, leisure activities and cultural growth. However, they make clear that in many museums in Brazil, their area of research, vertical authority structures still govern conservation and communication. They state that “when it comes to preserving and disseminating scientific knowledge and cultural heritage, decision-making tends to be delegated to curators and researchers, and due importance is not given to understanding or seeking to meet the needs, concerns and wishes of diverse audiences” (Sarraf and Bruno, 2013:94). However in a different context, I believe the same basic pattern applies to the Slovene Ethnographic Museum.

6.3 Platform for dialogue

Ana explained to me what she understands as an “inclusive museum”: “I see it like that we include some groups which usually wouldn’t come to the museum.” She talks about a project with Roma people that was running at the museum and a project that they have now with migrants and that they had the two-year-long project for people with disabilities:

“This is how to include these kind of people so they themselves can get something from the museum and on the other side, we, who work for the museum can also learn a lot and also other people who come to visit the museum. For example this project with the Roma people, they are going now already for several years and I find them very valuable because we also work on some prejudice… because people have a lot of prejudice about these kind of people and so on… so we try to get rid of these stereotypes and prejudice, yeah…”
In the end, this inclusivity has besides accessibility a lot to do with openness to listen to other people’s stories, opinions and experiences. In other words, without dialogue this is impossible to achieve.

According to Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the construction of cultural heritage is a civil right. In the first part of the article, it states that:

“Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.”

So, it can be stated that all individuals, regardless of origin, social class, prior experience, disability or any other socio-economic factor that may classify them as minorities or belonging to socially excluded populations, have the right to enjoy and participate in the creation of cultural heritage (Sarraf and Bruno, 2013:94). Karima Bennoune (2016), a professor of international law and UN Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights, also describes cultural heritage as a human rights issue. This shows the undeniable importance and impact of cultural heritage. It underlines that it should be accessible and open for everyone. Access to heritage can be interpreted as a democratic right. This can mean access to the objects themselves and to information about those objects (catalogue data) in addition to, or perhaps even instead of, pre-packaged curatorial interpretations (Ames, 2014:105).

**Pretentious contact zones**

In ‘Museums as Contact Zones’ (1997), James Clifford reflects on museums as open spaces for discussion. He proposes a model in which dialogue and exchange are put above extraction. However, could discussing cultural issues on a museums ‘territory’ preserve the hegemony of the museum? It could be that dialogue in this space still gives privilege to the museum. How can those who are in a weakened position ‘exploit’ the museum in any meaningful way, for instance when they want to reclaim objects that are no longer in their possession? I have not encountered discussions about the repatriation of specific artefacts at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum during the time of my research. However, I am certain that these issues play at any museum with an origin in any colonial discourse. Robin Boast, one of the leading figures in contemporary museum anthropology, describes how he walked with James Clifford through the Papuan Sculpture Garden at Stanford University when Clifford mentioned that he thought that the Papuan artists who were invited to create the sculptures expected something more long term out of the exchange (2011:63). Even though they were
walking through what is a perfect example of a contact zone, it was not one of equal reciprocity and mutual benefit but a space of asymmetric appropriation (Boast, 2011:63). Bennett (1998:212) argues that Clifford’s contact zones are based on an overly optimistic view of cross-cultural dialogues. He sees this idea as nothing more than a subterfuge (Bennett, 1998:213; see also Harrison 2005a, 2005b). According to Boast (2011:65) it is easy to see how this instrumentality is a form of neocolonialism. Appropriation of resources while falsely claiming collaboration is defining neocolonialism (Marshall, 1998; Nkrumah, 1965).

Anthony Shelton (2009), director of the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in Vancouver, Canada, states that ‘cultural dialogue is an effective way of maintaining one’s incredulity and scepticism, helping to transform our narrative practices by adopting other viewpoints and epistemologies and even ocular regimes’ (2009:8). However, there is still insensitivity towards cultural understanding apparent in the museum world. In dialogue with communities, exhibitions could change and become more receptive of the wishes of people. In this sense, the museum can facilitate social change in society, and society also encourages change in the museum. There is a two-way communication possible.

However, Ang (2017) argues, in response to Levitt’s book *Artifacts and Allegiances: how museums put the nation and the world on display* (2015), that “museums (as cultural institutes) are too deeply embedded within the nation state to be able to present cosmopolitan narratives that go beyond the biased particularities of the nation”. She is convinced that there is an enduring friction between cosmopolitanism and nationalism – it is not a continuum. According to her, this friction is the basis of a continuous challenge for museum around the world in their efforts to tell stories suited for our mobile, global times. She relates this to the recent refugee crisis and takes Sweden as an example. According to her, the immigration experience does not receive much attention in European museums (2017:3). Even in Sweden, which has taken in more asylum seekers per capita than any other European country, anti-immigrant forces are on the rise (Traub, 2016). Ang argues that “no matter how cosmopolitan Sweden’s style of imagining itself as a nation, the nation’s self, or Swedishness, is still defined in homogenous and exclusionary ways” (2017:3). In other words, there is still a limit on how cosmopolitan a nation really can be. Ang (2017:5) writes that museums are still places that are mostly and predominantly visited by those who we ascribe to be part of the ‘educated middle class’, despite the relatively recent emphasis on inclusiveness in museums. This is also visible in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Ang (2017) questions whether museums
actually “encourage empathy, curiosity, tolerance, creativity, and critical thinking” (as is argued by Levitt, 2015:8).

**Aesthetics vs. participation**

In addition to the tensions in the communications between museums and users, Ines expressed her worries about the internal dialogue at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum to me. She wants the employees to work better together as a team. According to her, there is not a lot of circulation in terms of those working at the museum. People are there for a long time, having long term contracts, and this results in a lack of new initiatives and fresh ideas. This network of employees seems to be not as changeable as it ideally should be. Lucija also made her concern about this clear. I asked her what she would change about the museum if she had the power to change anything within the snap of a finger. She did not have to think long before clearly stating that she would invest in more diversity within the long-term museum employees. She would employ young people in particular. Without this, she thinks, there is no point in working for a museum that connects better to society. How to do this when you don’t work with people that make out such a big and important part of society?

Another informant shared with me her feeling that there is a strong dichotomy when it comes to the views that employees have about the purpose of the museum. At the one hand, many employees want to have a participatory approach, which she believes has mostly to do with inclusion and giving opportunities for people to be heard. On the other hand there are some employees that focus more on aesthetics. One example where tension between these two views is very clear among the employees is an exhibition on fashion that the museum hosted. Many of my informants were unhappy with the execution of this exhibition as it gave too little information and was too much about “just pretty things”, nice dresses and such, according to them. When I asked around how the division between those two approaches is, the answer I got was “a little bit here, a little bit there”. Some employees have a very strong preference but there are also those who are indecisive, as one informant told me. What is most important in the end, and thwarting the achievement of increasing accessibility and open dialogue, is the lack of a clear direction and agreement between the museum employees.
In conclusion

In this chapter I have brought up different tensions as felt by museum employees when they described their dissatisfaction with the reality of the museum in relation to its potentials. They struggle with realizing the ideals as proposed by new museology, which the majority of museum employees support and would like to see implemented further in the museum. First, the problem with the growing of museum collections in relation to the available exhibition space has been brought up. This relates to a wider discourse in the cultural heritage field on what Holtorf (2006) describes as the ideology of ‘heritage-preservationism’. Furthermore, different reflections from museum employees on the visitor problem have been discussed. These are related to a generational gap, the authority of the museum as a scientific institute, and the lack of a museum-going culture in Slovenia. This has been followed by a discussion on when we can say that “inclusivity” is reached – and what the true underlying motives of the museum behind the wish to work towards this goal could be. In the last section of this chapter I have reflected on potential of the idea of museums as contact zones. Finally, the internal differences in visions between museum employees, either focussing on aesthetics or on participation, have been noted.
7. Concluding discussion

In this thesis I have looked at how museum employees at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum interpret and relate to their workplace. Throughout the ethnography in chapters four to six, I have described the responsibilities and relevance of the museum, the networks that it consists of and takes (or took) part in, as well as a variety of tensions as felt by my informants and shared with me during my time in Ljubljana. In doing so, actor-network theory combined with new museology has proven to be a fitting and useful theoretical model and analytical tool.

According to Cuno (2007), curators and other museum staff have to look at the hidden power relations that characterize museums as state apparatuses and use their expertise to demystify this power. He argues that employees should take responsibility for their productions and knowledge distribution and be actively involved in the development of the museum as an educational facility (Cuno, 2007:511-516). In this last chapter I attempt to present concluding answers to the research questions as formulated at the very beginning of this thesis:

1. How do employees at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum perceive the relevance and responsibilities of the museum?

2. In which ways do their understandings of and interactions with the Slovene Ethnographic Museum relate to the changing (theoretical) ideas about the position that European ethnographic museums should occupy in society?

‘Correct’ representation

I have illustrated how knowledge is shaped within the Slovene Ethnographic museum and in which ways employees think critically about their work. As shown in the fourth chapter, to (re)present cultural heritage as ‘correctly’ as possible is articulated by many informants as one of the main responsibilities of the museum. As an official state institution, the museum is part of a dominant institutionalized heritage discourse. I have discussed how communications about cultural heritage and discussions on the meanings and understandings of the past are based on selected narratives. These narratives are actants. Some of these narratives can be built upon romanticizing interpretations of the rural past, others relate to the apparent
nostalgia towards Yugoslavia. The objects and intangible heritage in the museum are also actants. They are of crucial importance in the process of transmitting these narratives to museum visitors. As such, the museum, an actant in its totality in a wider network, has a powerful position as a shaper of public knowledge about the past. As George Orwell famously wrote in his dystopian novel *1984*: “who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past”. Shaping knowledge comes with power and with power comes responsibility.

**Responsiveness to actuality**

Sandell (2002:3) defines social agency as “the ability to influence and affect society”. He argues that it is a part of the social responsibility of museums to function not as tools of government, but as advocates for the contemporary values of society, particularly social equality. This thinking is in line with the ideals presented by the new museology movement. I argue that cultural heritages are social agents that, as actants within continuously changing networks, have the ability to leave significant marks on society. Especially in relation to the refugee situation in Slovenia, the majority of museum employees that I have spoken to expressed that they see educating and spreading awareness about current discussions in society as another major relevance and responsibility of the museum. As illustrated in chapter 5, they strongly feel that the museum can, and should, be responsive to these kinds of issues. A major tension that became apparent throughout my fieldwork has to do with a dissatisfaction related to the idea that the museum “could be so much more”. The museum as it is now is not a finished product but is constantly transforming and developing. This happens in response to what is seen as appropriate in the (international) museum world, dominant political ideas, and other societal trends. The various networks that the museum is a part of shape the abilities of the institution to implement policies relating to its visions. They can both limit and facilitate the museum’s work towards change.

**The curator’s dilemma**

Museum employees connect the relevance of the museum to its responsibilities. Its status and relevance as a scientific institute, for instance, causes friction in connection to the responsibility to create an accessible and open atmosphere that everybody can feel welcome to. Ames (1992:30-31) has pointed out several tensions that come into being when
academically trained anthropologists and ethnologists are employed in museums. He reminds us of the differences between scholarly work and being engaged in public service. The first is typically individual and competitive while to do museum work one has to participate in highly interdisciplinary and collaborative work. This is described as the ‘curator’s dilemma’ (Fenton, 1960:335) or, more dramatically, ‘curatorial schizophrenia’ (Squires, 1969). An approach that interprets museums as spaces of dialogue, interaction and participation of all social groups, which can represent themselves in the museum, puts the role of the curator as a museum authority in a confliction position that demands redefinition (Barrett, 2011). This dilemma is also apparent in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. This connects in particular to the second research question. In chapter 6 we have gotten familiar with the difficulties as faced by the employees at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum that come with holding up the status of a ‘scientific’ institute while also trying to leave behind the hierarchical perception of knowledge and becoming more open and accessible to all groups in society.

**Dreaming of being inclusive**

In their research, McCall and Gray (2014:11) experienced that museum workers often discussed the importance of user\(^{13}\) involvement, but that there were few specific examples of where the feedback of those visiting had any impact on the day-to-day activities of the museum. They conclude that new museology has had less practical effect than the museology literature might anticipate. I would suggest that this is also the case at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. I have shown that museum employees say that they want to make change and reshape the museum as a platform for dialogue, but that this has not been convincingly achieved so far. Even though some changes towards a more inclusive environment have been made, this does not mean that the museum truly feels more open to everybody.

Where the object and curator are decentred, the museum user has new opportunities (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992:214). In the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, with the growing recognition of the importance of intangible cultural heritage, the object is in the process of becoming

\(^{13}\) As also described in chapter 6, in museology and heritage studies it is becoming increasingly usual to refer to ‘users’ instead of ‘visitors’ to underline the status of those coming to museums as consumers of constructed and sometimes commodified heritage. This terminology is an attempt to get rid of the hierarchy between visitors and institutions. It means to illustrate that museums need to cater to visitors to remain relevant in the so-called ‘heritage industry’.
decentred. However, changing the position of the curator within the institute is a completely different challenge and might not be possible. The network of the museum is drenched in power hierarchies related to the construction of knowledge. Curators embody the relevance of museums as scientific and representing a ‘truth’. Not all curators might be willing to share this position with non-scientists, or, those coming from outside of the museum. This threatens their status as experts. Furthermore, for those who are willing to share their authority, the museum might not allow it. Hanging onto the prestigious position as ‘scientific knowledge institute’ while proclaiming to strive to reshape as platforms of inclusivity and dialogue is paradoxical. To describe this in terms of ANT: the old network is slowly developing and changing into a new network but some actants struggle to make place or change along. Here we see the core tension that I believe makes it so difficult for museum employees to achieve the ideals of new museology.

Sandell (2007) makes clear that museums can be, and have been, seen to take an active role in tackling discrimination and inequality within society. However, significant visible results of the (envisioned) more active position of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum remain to be seen. In the end, a core question is whether it is really up to museums to make people come together and participate in an inherently institutionalized construction of cultural heritages. What if people are simply not interested in this? Furthermore, it is interesting to ask: what would a museum without any political agenda look like, how would we shape it?

7.1 The future of ethnographic museums

What matters is not the past in itself, but the relationship that we develop to it (Hewison, 1987: 159). According to Edson (2014), museums are the ideal laboratories for social, scientific and cultural exchange and transformation. As such, he argues, they have a responsibility to challenge stimulate and inform visitors (Edson, 2014:13). He states that an immediate and critical challenge that museums face today is one related to museum identity (Edson, 2014:15). He points out that museums must not only benefit the public as places of social and cultural value, but that all aspects of their operations should reflect that commitment. At present, ethnographic museums are having an identity crisis. It is unclear what kind of positions these institutes can, should or want to take in society. Professional values based on traditional measures may no longer meet the needs of the museum community, and replacement measures are often poorly defined and selectively applied.
(Edson, 2014:7). As described earlier, this is also visible in the apparatus of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum.

Kreps (2003:155) notes that sharing authority and power should not diminish the role of professionalism in the museums. This statement is problematic. As I have argued before, professionalism in the museum is inherently linked to authority and power. Sharing this authority with others simply does not go hand in hand with professionalism and the hierarchy of knowledge that is constructed as a result, as has been described in chapter 6. We would probably already have seen a much wider success in the implementation of the ideals of new museology if this were no issue. Kreps (2003) proposes as a solution that museums should widen the field and make room for the inclusion of other forms of knowledge and expertise. However, I wonder if it is possible within the museum to make room next to the heritage discourse that is presently dominant. As many of the proposals made in new museology, this is easier said than done.

Ames (2014) states that the more museums democratize their operations and increase public access to their resources, the more likely they will appeal to wider audiences. However, at the same time, museums still cater almost exclusively to the more highly educated classes (Ames, 2014:99). The increase of museum visitors over the past fifty years is most likely because the level of education has increased, not because museums are catering to a broader spectrum (Ames, 2014:99). Still only a selective group is represented by and welcomed into museums. As I have shown and problematized before, this is also visible within the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, where employees express a desire for a more inclusive and activist museum but at the same time still design their exhibitions with focus on a selected, highly educated, public.

As discussed in the chapters 1.3 and 3, ethnographic museums are continuously trying to cope with their colonial and imperialist pasts. Boast (2011:67) sees that there is a key problem that lies deep in the assumptions and practices that constitute the museum today, one inherently connected to neo-colonialism. As such, he calls for a complete redrafting of the museum. “Where the new museology saw the museum being transformed from a site of determined edification to one of educational engagement, museums of the 21st century must confront this deeper neo-colonial legacy” (Boast, 2011:67). A variety of scholars have argued that the new museum, one based on the idea of a contact zone, is used instrumentally for the masking of
fundamental asymmetries, appropriations and biases (Phillips, 2007:18; Bennett, 1998; Lonetree, 2006; Mithlo, 2004; Ashley, 2005). Boast (2011:67) proposes that museums should learn to let go of their resources, at times also their objects, for the benefit and use of communities and agendas beyond its control. Again, as much of the proposals in line with new museology, I wonder whether this is a solution that can be reached in practice anytime soon. As shown in chapter 6, the Western obsession with heritage-preservationism (Holtorf, 2006) might stand in the way and the theoretical approach of the museum as a contact zone (Clifford, 1997) turned out to have less effect in practice than we thought.

As brought forward in chapter 1, memory wars in which cultural heritage is deliberately used within ideological frameworks continue to define the cultural landscape of former Yugoslavia. Heritage can be viewed as a powerful instrument in processes of the building of nations, but also as a tool and a target in their destruction. There is a fine line here and there are many cases of intentional targeting of cultural heritage within war. Morel (2013) reflects on the potential role that cultural heritage can have in processes of peace building and economic development in Kosovo. She argues that heritage can be used as a way of fostering respect and dialogue between cultures still recovering from the effects of conflict. In this way, cultural heritage can be seen as a facilitator of social change. According to Morel (2013:11), this position is ever more accepted today, with modern politics and diplomacy increasingly considering culture and heritage as “instruments for peace and reconciliation”. She explains that this position is based upon an underlying understanding of nations as not simply being ideological or political concepts, but also as cultural phenomena. Heritage protection, conservation and restoration are playing a key-role in any society, but particularly in one attempting to overcome the sense of displacement caused by conflict (Morel, 2013:12). I believe that ethnographic museums could play their part in these processes of reconciliation. These spaces have the potential to grow into platforms for dialogue. However, as I have argued before, museum professionals need to share the same visions and be able to give way to the knowledge and concerns of those outside of the museum. Only when this is achieved could museums transform into places that do not only appear to be inclusive but also truly feel like this to everybody.
7.2 Recommendations for further research

While my research has provided some answers, at the same time many new questions have popped up. The scope of this thesis did not allow me to discuss all interesting leads in depth. As such, I have selected some suggestions for further research.

In general, I can first of all state that more research needs to be done on the actual implementation of the ideas of the new museology within Western museums, as is also pointed out by McCall and Gray (2014). Additionally, the relationships between the implementation of new museology and processes of decolonization of ethnographic museums calls for further investigation. Clear protocols, presenting practical suggestions, need to be developed for museums that want to achieve the ideals of new museology. This requires more in-depth visitor research. In order to appeal to people, we need to know what they want. However, we have to keep in mind that these same institutes cultivate the expectations of museum visitors and the societal ideologies related to them. Museum audiences are still exceedingly understudied, also within the field of museum studies (Ang, 2017:5).

Specifically, there is a need for more research on the impact of new museology in the former Yugoslavia. This is an area where cultural heritage is highly politicized and contested. There has been some interesting and relevant research done on monuments and (collective) memory, as well as on the ideological targeting and destruction of cultural heritage during the Yugoslav wars. However, it would be valuable to see more studies of (contemporary) responsibilities and possibilities related to the impact of national museums in post-socialist countries. As the political landscape has been rapidly changing, I believe that it is of great importance to study the roles of and attitudes towards institutionalized representations of heritages.

Furthermore, little comprehensive investigation has presently been done relating to the history of ethnology and ethnographic collections in Slovenia. Finally, additional research is needed on the differences between the development of ethnographic museums in ‘Western Europe’ and ‘Eastern Europe’. Possibly related to this, an interesting lead that came up during my fieldwork has been the idea of Slovenia as not being a ‘museum-going’ culture. Different reasons are given for this by my informants, one of them being that most Slovenes enjoy the outdoors and would prefer leaving town in their free time above visiting cultural institutions. Perhaps a Yugoslav heritage is also partly responsible for this preference?
References


Čupa, the Vessel of the Slovene Fishermen. Research and screenplay by Polona Sketelj and Nadja Valentinčič Furlan, directed, filmed and edited by Nadja Valentinčič Furlan, produced by SEM, 2006, 17 minutes.


Cambridge.


Oxford: Oxford University Press.


Appendix 1: maps of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum
2nd floor

Jaz mi in drugi: Podobe mojega sveta
I, we and the Others: Images of My World
Stalna razstava / Permanent exhibition
Med naravo in kulturo
Between Nature and Culture
Stalna razstava / Permanent exhibition