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Changes in Cultural Strategy and Cultural Policies in Slovakia in the 20th Century and at the Beginning of the 21st Century: Museums and Other Memorial Institutions in a Socio-Political Context

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Abstract

This paper deals with cultural strategy and cultural policies in Slovakia in the 20th century and changes in these areas after the socio-political transformations in the 1990s. It describes cultural strategy and policies through different important stages – the period preceding the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, the interwar period, the Slovak Republic (1939–1945), a brief period after the Second World War (1945–1948), the communist regime before “normalization” (the 1950s and 1960s), the communist regime during “normalization” right up to the fall of the Iron Curtain (1970–1989), and the transformative period from 1990 to the present day. This paper is focused on perceptions of museums and memorial institutions by the public. It explains the ways in which public policy affected museums, and how museums and museum associations could influence international, regional, and national policies concerning cultural institutions. This paper seeks to present the laws regarding museums that have formed the legal framework of institutionalization and the existence of museums and memorial institutions and that have established the basic rules for public authorities that manage museums and associated financial matters in Slovakia.

Keywords: Museum; memorial institutions; museology; heritage; Slovakia; history; cultural policies.

1. Introduction

Cultural policy is a set of goal-oriented measures creating the conditions for the further development and direction of culture. As a relatively young nation-state and a member of the European Union, Slovakia forms its cultural policy in line with European legislation. However, there are certain specifics in cultural strategies in Slovakia which from many perspectives are related to the historical development of culture as a central European phenomenon, and this is not an isolated matter. This is the result of the social development from which it emerged and which it reciprocally influences. Culture and the cultural environment engulf Slovak society; they have a significant impact on social regulations, the upbringing of new generations, successive consumers of culture, and disseminators and creators of cultural heritage. The social and political understanding of culture is an expression of the identity and uniqueness of the society within which it develops and is a demonstration of that society’s level of advancement. Therefore, there is an interest for any society to develop culture as well as an interest in its protection and the creation of conditions for its dissemination and (self-) presentation.

The foundations of cultural policy in Slovakia define culture as a complex collective unit including knowledge, belief, art, the law, morals, habits, and all other abilities and customs which society has acquired in the past. The basic processes of creation, conservation, and dissemination of cultural values are constituted in the preservation of cultural heritage, support for the arts, and the preservation and development of the media environment. These are the long-term aims and strategies of cultural policy in

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Slovakia, which are specifically complemented by the support and preservation of the cultures of ethnic minorities in the country. When looking at the declared core principles of cultural policy in Slovakia, it is necessary to firstly mention the freedom of dissemination of cultural values; the freedom of expression, equality, and democracy; efforts to support training and education in the cultural and arts professions; and support for the development of cooperation between the public, non-profit, and private sectors in cultural areas ([Legislatívna, 2005: 4-7](#)).

2. Materials and methods

The core of the study comes out from the scientific literature, that deals with the partial problems of the cultural policy in Slovakia within 19 and 20 centuries. The solving of the research tasks was carried out by generally used methods, as the historical comparative method and the principle of historicism. Syntheses and analyses have an important position. We emphasize interpretation and overview single phenomenons. In this environment, what place in Slovak cultural policy is there for memorial institutions, i.e., museums, galleries, libraries, and archives? Has their status and role in society changed over the last 100 years? How has the relationship between society (i.e., the public) and memorial cultural institutions developed in Slovakia? This paper will try to answer these questions.

3. Discussion and results

3.1 The character of Slovak museums and memorial institutions in the 19th century and at the turn of the 20th century

Until the end of the First World War, the territory of today's Slovakia was a part of the Kingdom of Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. There was a sense in Slovakia of belonging to the conglomeration of ethnicities which were suppressed in this Habsburg monarchy by the German and Hungarian linguistic and cultural environments, and this influenced the formation and direction of cultural policy in Slovakia for a considerable period.

In the Kingdom of Hungary, the beginnings of institutionalized museum management stretch back to 1802, when a group of leaders of the Hungarian reform movement centred around Ferenc Széchenyi established the National Museum in Budapest ([Waidacher, 1999: 64](#)). This museum was supposed to document the natural environment and the history of the Kingdom of Hungary. However, from the very beginning the museum had an exclusive focus on the documentation of the Hungarian-speaking population with the role of presenting the kingdom as a Hungarian nation-state.

Even though the idea of establishing a museum as an institution which would document the national development and status of the Slovak people was expressed for the first time at the end of the 18th century, such attempts were practically unsuccessful in Slovakia until the second half of the 19th century. Institutionalized museum management in Slovakia was formed on state, regional, and national levels ([Mruškovič et al., 2005: 32-39](#); [Zouhar, 2016](#)).

After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 and the attempts of the Hungarian government to transform the Kingdom of Hungary into a Hungarian nation-state, there was a strengthening of efforts to develop these endeavours through cultural institutions. The Hungarian government supported the establishment of state museums as a tool to strengthen the identification of the population with the Kingdom of Hungary and Hungarian ethnic consciousness. In 1872 the Museum of Upper Hungary in Košice was established; its modern-day successor is the East Slovak Museum. The most numerous types of museums at this time were those focusing on cities and towns (e.g., Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Kremnica, and Trnava) which documented the history of Slovakia's important royal free cities (see e.g. [Florek, Jurkovič, 1945](#)). Many museums were founded in regional administrative centres (i.e., counties) and documented the history and nature of the given region (e.g., the Gemer-Malohont Museum in Rimavská Sobota and the Spiš Museum in Levoča).

In the Kingdom of Hungary, Magyarization took on a conspicuous form particularly after the issuing of the Nationalities Law (1868); this process peaked at the beginning of the 20th century with the "Apponyi laws" (1907), which gave preference to Hungarian as the language of tuition at schools. In the cultural sphere, the Nationalities Law encouraged the formation of cultural institutions and directly supported them in the spreading of state Hungarian (i.e., "Greater Hungarian") culture ([Kačírek, 2011: 295-302](#)).

In the Slovak national movement, collection activity particularly focused on folk culture, intangible cultural heritage (legends, myths, fairy tales, lyrical and epic texts, and songs) and the collection of original arts and crafts. These collections were primarily built up by means of gifts and collection efforts in rural areas. The briefly-open Matica Museum and its collections, which were developed from 1863, when the Matica slovenská cultural institution in Martin was established, were halted by the state supervisory body in 1875. The museum's collections that were deemed to be "pan-Slavic" – here understood as promoting Slavic culture above Hungarian or "Greater Hungarian" culture – were confiscated. Further development in collection activity in the Slovak national movement took place at the end of the 1880s and early 1890s, and led to the establishment of the Slovak Museum Society in 1893 and particularly to the establishment of today's Slovak National Museum, which is based in Martin. As the Nationalities Law did not recognize the Slovak people as a separate national entity, but rather as a part of the Hungarian nation, this museum was a

regional museum focusing on the natural environment and the population of the Upper Hungary region (Maráky, 2012: 6-7; Podušelová, 2013).

In the Kingdom of Hungary, supervision of the activity of museums and libraries, which were mainly placed in university settings, was entrusted to a special inspector of museums and libraries. For archives, which came into being due to administrative work in the public sector and in self-governing regions, the role of methodological body was assumed by the National Archives of Hungary in Budapest (*Magyar országos levéltár*, established in 1723, now known in Hungarian as *Magyar nemzeti levéltár*). If an institution was working in the state interest, it could make a request for a subsidy to support its development and activities (Tišliar, 2013: 43-44).

By the end of the 19th century, many museums had been opened in Slovakia and primarily had a focus on national geography and history as well as on the regions where they were located. In addition to the museum in Košice, the county museums in Bardejov and Nitra became state institutions and were able to develop their activities to the greatest extent (Mruškovič et al., 2005: 63). By contrast, association museums, which were numerically dominant in Slovakia at the time, were reliant on uncertain subsidies and primarily on members' contributions. Therefore, they acted more like protected depositories and had a significantly lower level of activity and public access. Many scratched out a living from their very beginnings and had next to no contact with the public. The public started to recognize the first museums in Slovakia only in terms of active exhibition activity, which was mainly achieved by state and certain regional museums, which appealed to the inhabitants of the larger towns where they were located as well as to the surrounding area. The gradually developing activity of museums and other cultural institutions at the beginning of the 20th century was negatively affected by the First World War, which entirely suppressed their activity until the end of the conflict.

3.2 Slovak museums and memorial institutions in the interwar period

From a number of perspectives, the establishment of Czechoslovakia, which saw a number of separate parts of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire join together, saw a different situation emerge with respect to memorial institutions. Initially, there was a focus on building the core foundations of a functioning polity in the new state, and culture was not seen as an area of great importance. However, one important cultural agenda which did make its way to the highest level of national politics in the first days of the new republic was the protection of cultural heritage and ensuring that such material remained within Czechoslovak borders. Despite all efforts, this drive was not entirely successful. Some museums in Slovakia saw significant parts of their collections taken to Hungary, and not even the peace negotiations, which included a discussion on the division of the cultural heritage of the old monarchy, were able to meet their aims in this regard. Indeed, many artefacts and documents from Slovakia which relate to its history still remain in Hungarian memorial institutions (See e.g. Ciulisová, 1996; Orosová, 2013; Tišliar, 2013).

After the stabilization of internal conditions, a state cultural policy began to be formed. While this policy focused on a number of areas, for the present work it is important to note that in part the policy dealt with memorial institutions. The establishment of Czechoslovakia saw the end of Magyarization and the commencement of the free development of language and culture as a part of the Slovak people's own identity. However, the character of the new state, which included a significant share of ethnic minorities, was oriented towards the formation of an artificial "Czechoslovak" nation. This idea of "Czechoslovakism" established itself relatively quickly, even though it had many opponents, especially in Slovakia; it manifested itself, for instance, in the search for common themes between Czech and Slovaks, particularly concerning their common history and cultural intertwining. This understanding of a joint "Czechoslovak culture" also started to be reflected in the activity of memorial institutions. This is how the establishment of Czechoslovakia contributed to a new phase of forming Slovak museum management. Those museums which had been established on an association basis continued to function with varying levels of activity. The development of Slovak museum management in the ethnic understanding was hit by a duality which arose from the political situation; the struggle between the Czechoslovak government and Slovak national interests was expressed in the political sphere and penetrated into the cultural sphere as well. The Slovak Museum Society in Martin, which had been administering the Slovak National Museum, represented the national interests of Slovak museum management and was a symbol of Slovak national identity. However, it still functioned as an association and struggled with a lack of financial resources. A rival to the museum in Martin was presented by Bratislava, which was the newly formed capital of Slovakia and the location of its political bodies and educational and cultural institutions (Kačírek et al., 2013: 29-31). In 1924 the Society of Slovak National Geography and History Museums was formed in Bratislava, as was the government-supported Slovak National Geography and History Museum and the Agricultural Museum, which was a branch of the Agricultural Museum based in Prague; both of these museums competed with the Slovak National Museum in Martin in terms of their collection activity.

After Czechoslovakia was founded, two types of museum continued to operate in Slovakia: there were state museums – which from 1927 included the City (Mining) Museum in Banská Štiavnica – which were subsidized by the state, and there were association museums, whose economic situation in most cases did not change all that much after the establishment of Czechoslovakia. Membership dues and the small subsidies which these museums could apply for were inadequate to secure their development. This is why a lot of

museums remained inactive and their collections were expanded only through gifts and collection drives; only in exceptional circumstances were new collection items purchased. Some museums underwent no development at all and just became collection “warehouses”, which were often inadequately protected and inappropriately run. The inactivity and poverty of a lot of museums, which employed only volunteers as guides, custodians, and curators, often meant that they did not hold any exhibitions of their own, resulting in a practical lack of interest in these institutions among the wider public. Museum attendance, which often was possible only for groups who booked in advance, therefore rose very slowly in this period.

The largest museums which developed their activities were concentrated primarily in Bratislava, Martin, and Košice. In addition to the Bratislava City Museum, the 1920s saw the establishment of three other significant museums: the abovementioned Agricultural Museum, the National Geography and History Museum, and the Forestry Museum, which was rapidly incorporated into the Agricultural Museum. At the same time, all three institutions were based in the new building of the Agricultural Museum and unhurriedly moved towards affiliation and unification in 1940. The establishment of the Agricultural Museum in Bratislava was a political decision. It was part of a propaganda campaign by the Agrarian Party, which was one of the strongest political parties in interwar Czechoslovakia. The National Geography and History Museum in Bratislava was established as an institution bound to the newly-founded Comenius University and had the ambition to have a presence throughout Slovakia. The museum in Martin, which at the end of the 1920s was renamed the Slovak National Museum, declared that it had a presence throughout Slovakia and a national geography and history profile. This museum was run by the Slovak Museum Society, which, after the establishment of Czechoslovakia did not engage in any significant activity even though its ambitions reached towards having a managing and methodological role in museums throughout Slovakia. In terms of the organization and methodology of museum management, the 1920s saw the significant engagement of the Czechoslovak Union of National Geography and History Museums, which was linked to the central Czechoslovak government in Prague. Despite its efforts, it did not become the central managing and methodological body for Slovak museums. The union had a minimal influence in Slovakia and only a few Slovak museums became members. The exchange of experience between the western and eastern parts of Czechoslovak museum management took place for the most part at museum congresses, which were alternately held in the Czech and Slovak parts of the country (Mruškovič et al., 2005: 74). There is no doubt that the united methodological management of museums and their overall development were strongly slowed down by their association character and a lack of finances; this brought about a minimal level of professionalism in museums, which remained mostly reliant on volunteers. There was no regulating legislation which would determine the space and role of museums in culture, and so underdevelopment, stagnation, and, in most cases, the passivity of the museums meant that these institutions were not significant cultural actors. Instead, this role was primarily taken up in the interwar period by various theatrical, musical, and dance troupes, and the gradually expanding network of public libraries which had publications in the Slovak language, which at that time were not very common.

In contrast to museums, archives and libraries were under a form of supervision from 1919, at least in a formal sense, by inspectors who were allocated to different parts of Czechoslovakia by the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment. However, given that these were state bodies which were only run by individuals, the effectiveness of their work was very low. Archives and libraries in Slovakia were not separately organized, and they lacked a logical structure and methodological management. The legislation concerning libraries from the 1920s required there be a local library established in every municipality, but these rules were not adhered to due to financial constraints. Libraries and archives lacked an executive institution which would systematically regulate their activity. Furthermore, archives were scattered, and, in addition to a lack of legislation in the interwar period, there was no successful attempt to establish an effective network of regional and supra-regional archives (Tišliar, 2013).

3.3 Changes in cultural policy under the 1938–1945 totalitarian regime

The constitutional changes which began with the Munich Agreement, signed in the autumn of 1938 and which led to the breakup of Czechoslovakia on the eve of the Second World War, also brought changes to cultural policy in Slovakia. Whereas memorial institutions had not been focused upon much by the state in the interwar period, there was a different approach in cultural policy during the existence of the Slovak Republic from 1939 to 1945 (Falathová, 2017: 61-62). A big role was played by the character of the state itself, which was a Nazi German satellite and to a certain degree copied developments in that country. Nationalist and, in many respects, extremist opinions found fertile ground among a lot of high-level state representatives; in cultural policy, there was a very rapid strengthening of an emphasis on Slovakia's own culture and own national identity, which was promoted to a significant extent at the expense of the cultural development of ethnic minorities. Even though the new constitution of the Slovak Republic of July 1939 declared the free and undisturbed cultural development of minorities, in reality there was a case-by-case approach to ethnic minorities and their culture. Whereas the state was compliant and patient with ethnic Germans, who strengthened their demands to cultural autonomy, ethnic Hungarians experienced strict reciprocity in relation to the situation faced by the Slovak minority in Hungary itself. Jewish culture faced great oppression, which culminated with the deportation of this part of the Slovak population to concentration camps outside Slovakia's borders (Tišliar, 2014: 121-127).

Museums, which documented, preserved, and provided access to Slovakia's cultural heritage, became more important institutions from the state's point of view than they had been beforehand. However, a disadvantage and obstacle to their further development was the continually unresolved financing of museums and the prevalence of their association character and activity being done on a voluntary basis. Museum exhibitions reacted to internal developments in the country to a considerable degree as well as to the circumstances of the Second World War. State propaganda found a place for itself in museums as a new element which had not been used in such institutions in previous periods except on exceptional occasions. The primary centre of cultural life remained in Bratislava, where in 1940 the Agricultural, National Geography and History, and Forestry Museums all merged into one institution which was officially known as the Slovak Museum (Machajdíkova, 2015: 18). Newly formed museums in Bratislava, such as the Museum of Hygiene, established in 1940, and the Military Museum, established in 1941, took on an ideological character. These museums were supposed to build a positive relationship among the population to the new state, cultural and civilizational development, and newly-formed military traditions. However, both of these museums ceased to exist at the end of the Second World War. In 1938 the East Slovak Museum in Košice became a part of Hungary, much like other museums which had been based in the south of Slovakia along the Slovak-Hungarian border (Karpáty, 2015: 30). During the Second World War, the Slovak National Museum in Martin was mostly stagnant and did little to engage in active development.

The newly-founded Union of Museums was an executive body which was supposed to influence multiple areas of museum activity in Slovakia. This organization replaced the formally operating Czechoslovak Union of National Geography and History Museums and took over control of the system of organizing nationwide (now Slovak) museum congresses (Palárik, 2011; Palárik, 2015). Museums were categorized according to their importance and status, which significantly corresponded with their activities and visitor numbers.

3.4 The post-war period

As the conflict zone passed through Slovakia before the end of the Second World War, many memorial institutions were affected. Damage was done to museum buildings as well as to the collections within them. The post-war period initially focused on war damage and a reorganizing of collections; a serious discussion also began on nationalizing museums and creating conditions for the development of libraries and archives (Takáčsová-Bányasová, Tišliar, 2017: 71-72; Prelovská, 2011: 94).

The post-war period witnessed a definite split between Czech and Slovak museum management, which partially resulted in the creation of separate Slovak public authorities and commissions, although these commissioners were factually subordinate to the relevant Czechoslovak minister and implemented the central ministry's business in Slovakia. The Union of Museums continued its activities as a professional institution bringing together the association and state museums under one umbrella and creating a space for methodological assistance. Museum congresses remained of great importance.

From 1945 to 1948 there was a considerable increase in the size of museum collections. This was due to the confiscation of property from the expelled ethnic Germans, some ethnic Hungarians, and later on from "class enemies". The protection of new collections was complicated by a continued lack of a suitable workforce.

In 1948 there was a socio-political change in Czechoslovakia which had a notable effect on culture for a long time. Political power was seized by the Communist Party, and gradually culture became subject to politics and exploited for propaganda and the ideologization of society. At the end of the 1940s, and particularly in the 1950s, there was a degree of destruction of Slovak cultural heritage. This was largely caused by the post-war nationalization of buildings and other areas which had previously belonged to the nobility and the church. There was destruction of the internal features of manor houses and monasteries as well as of historical libraries. Important heritage buildings also suffered from being used for things other than their original purpose. Often these buildings were used as grain storehouses and social, educational, and healthcare facilities of various types.

The congresses of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia provided the stimuli for building new foundations for post-war cultural policy. Beginning with the ninth party congress, and alongside other decisions, there was attention paid to the "cultural revolution" and the need to train a new intelligentsia in Czechoslovakia which would work for the needs of the state and the state ideology (Tišliar, 2016: 75-76).

It is possible to evaluate the creation of the foundations of a strong system of memorial institutions in this period in a positive way. During the 1950s, there was a gradual nationalizing of association museums and the building up of a regional network of museums focusing on districts. Already at the end of 1948, the Slovak National Museum in Martin had been nationalized, as had the Slovak Museum in Bratislava; this significantly helped both institutions in the area of personnel and in terms of professionalization (Elišová, 2011: 18). In 1948 the Slovak National Gallery was established in Bratislava, and in the same year the Slovak Technical Museum in Košice opened its exhibitions to the public in the east of Slovakia (Mruškovič et al., 2005: 80). The promising development of memorial institutions continued at the start of the 1950s, with the establishment of the Slovak Central (now National) Archive in Bratislava as the top-level national institution of its type. Additionally, archives operating on a regional and district level and with dedicated employees were also created (Fialová, Tvrdoňová, 2013: 58-59; Tišliar, 2016: 82-83). A national network of libraries

also started to be actively established at the beginning of the 1950s. However, there was a considerable change in this area with the passing of the Libraries Act in 1959 (Katuščák, 2000) with the National Library in Martin being the managing library and methodological centre. However, on an institutional as well as partially on a personnel level, these positive developments were countered by the negative aspects of the new role to be assumed by memorial institutions. From the beginning of the 1950s, this role was one of strong ideologization and pro-regime propaganda, which affected the activities of these institutions, which now had the Soviet Union as the desired model for their activities. There began to be an emphasis on cultural and educational activity, and on the raising of public awareness and reach by memorial and cultural institutions. Based on the Soviet model, memorial institutions in Slovakia, like elsewhere in Czechoslovakia, began to be perceived as a tool for spreading the new state ideology. Therefore, topics connected to the history of the workers' movement, the history of the Communist Party, the social history of class relations, and similar matters came to the foreground (Tišliar, 2016: 84). This affected museums, where exhibitions began to be created with themes dealing with these areas. In addition to this, archival documents were prepared and processed which dealt with the history of the workers' movement and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Libraries faced a prescribed purchase of books where 15% of new literature had to have a political (i.e., a Marxist and communist) character. Understandably, the public reaction to this ideological direction was varied. After the political trials of the 1950s, which sought out and liquidated opponents of the new regime in Czechoslovakia, there was no emergence of serious resistance to the state's cultural policy, its raising of public awareness, or state propaganda (Tišliar, 2016: 77).

In addition to nationalizing them, the regime intervened in museums' activities in 1951 by having the activities of museum associations banned and the associations disbanded. This was a necessity arising from the Voluntary Organizations Act of 1951. This act created the legislative conditions for the formation of new voluntary organizations, known as "Associations of Friends of Museums", which were under state control and which were to function on a local and regional level. For a while, the Union of Museums avoided closure, but in 1960 it stopped its activities. According to the new regime, the structure of the network of museums was supposed to be aligned with the territorial structure of the state administration. For this reason, the 1950s witnessed the emergence of regional museums as a new phenomenon in Czech and Slovak museum management (Kačírek et al., 2013: 32; Prelovská, 2011: 125).

In addition to the Libraries Act, there was a new act on archives in 1954 and one on cultural monuments in 1958. However, it took a long time for an act to be prepared that would organize the work of museums and galleries. Over the 1950s, a separate network of galleries was gradually established in Slovakia (Adamčíaková, 2000: 94). State ideology also played a big role here; however, out of all the mentioned memorial and cultural institutions, galleries were probably the least affected by the state's efforts at educating the public.

3.5 Building socialism in the 1960s

For museum management in Slovakia, the end of the 1950s witnessed a finalization of the fundamental aspects of the Museums Act. This act was passed in 1961 (No. 109) and completed a long period of development in Slovak museum management (Kačírek et al., 2013: 33; Eliášová, 2011: 25-32). The structure and typology of museums was regulated and their activities, significance, and role in society were specifically determined. At this time, the network of museums was made up of (1) national geography and history museums and specialized museums with a scope of authority throughout Slovakia; (2) national geography and history museums and specialized museums which were administered by regional and district national committees, which had a scope of authority at the regional and district levels; (3) municipal museums with various thematic specializations; and (4) monuments and memorial rooms which were run as branches of specific museums. For the purposes of the current paper, it is important to remember that the relationship of museums with the public was perceived primarily through their cultural and educational role and through their informal means of educating society, of course, in accordance with the state ideology, which from 1960, with the passing of a new socialist constitution, sought to build and develop a socialist society. For more than twenty years, this law formed the legal basis for the establishment and development of museums and galleries in Slovakia. From the perspective of significant institutional changes, it is important to note the merger of the two largest and most important museums in Slovakia (the Slovak National Museum in Martin and the Slovak Museum in Bratislava) into one institution, which was named the Slovak National Museum in Bratislava. This institution had a scope of authority throughout Slovakia and was internally divided into several museums which began to specialize from the 1960s onwards (Mruškovič et al., 2005: 81; Lalkovič, 2005: 98-100).

Public attendance at museums had begun to increase after the end of the Second World War. This was a result of the increased activity of museums and an increase in their number, and was also due to the direct communication of museums with educational institutions. School groups became a significant part of visitor numbers. School excursions were organized as a result of joint efforts by the ministries of culture and education. This cultural strategy had the primary aim of acquainting children and youth with the history of class society in accordance with state ideology (Tišliar, 2016: 81-82).

The interconnection between museums and the public administration after the museums' nationalization at the beginning of the 1950s was ensured by the organization of national committees, which

functioned as offices connecting the state administration with regional authorities. In the regions, there were district national committees which initially gave the responsibility of cultural activity to cultural officers and later on to specific departments focusing on education and culture. Regional and local libraries were also subject to inspection by these offices. After administrative regions were formally established in Slovakia in 1949, the public administration was complemented by regional national committees which contained departments dealing with education and culture. Archives, which from the beginning of the 1950s had been established in districts, were now monitored by a department for internal affairs; regional archives fell under the jurisdiction of these offices in regional national committees. During the 1950s, the system of museums, libraries, and archives in Slovakia adapted to the administrative division of Slovakia. The executive body for museums, galleries, and libraries in Slovakia was the Commission for Culture, subsequently known as the Commission for Education and Culture, which was run by the central government ministries responsible for these areas. Archives were the responsibility of the Commission for the Interior until separate Slovak commissions within Czechoslovakia were abolished in 1960. After this time, their administration became the responsibility of central Czechoslovak ministries of the interior, education, and culture, which were all based in Prague (Tišliar, 2016: 76).

The second half of the 1960s witnessed a loosening up of the social atmosphere in Czechoslovakia. After Stalinism, the cult of personality, and the political trials that had taken place were condemned in the Soviet Bloc, this political liberalization had an impact on Czechoslovakia. However, this more liberal atmosphere only lasted for a short period. In 1968 it was stopped by the military occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces. The second half of the 1960s also saw memorial institutions become more active than previously. The relaxed atmosphere appeared to be most vividly reflected in the presentation of museums, which sought to present much more diverse themes for exhibitions than what had been previously allowed (Akčný program, 1968). In spite of this, museums were still seen by the public as being pro-regime institutions spouting propaganda which spread the state ideology. It is undoubtedly of interest to note that this opinion and public feeling in the late 1960s reappeared after the social changes that took place at the end of the 1980s. It is therefore clear that museums did not have an easy position in Czechoslovak society.

3.6 Normalization and the abatement of the totalitarian character of cultural policy in Slovakia (the 1970s and 1980s)

After the reestablishment of socio-political conditions at the end of the 1960s, there was a return to the more pronounced ideologization of the social status of museums; this was part of a “return to normal”, which was also reflected in the name (“normalization”) used to describe the period. Museums at this time focused more and more on cultural and educational activity; this was often at the expense of other important roles and purposes of museums, such as their work with collections. For political reasons, there were significant changes in museum personnel, particularly among those in positions of responsibility and leadership. Supervisory authorities undertook ideologically-charged inspections of museum exhibitions for ideological reasons (Mruškovič et al., 2005: 95).

One positive result of the end of the 1960s was the change in the Czechoslovak constitution, which brought about a federative arrangement in the republic and which saw the creation of an independent Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Socialist Republic. This new ministry started to directly manage the largest Slovak museums and provided methodological guidance to other museums in Slovakia, particularly those operating on a regional level. This period also saw a significant strengthening of the professionalization of museums. This trend, which had started unhurriedly in the 1960s, was connected to the promotional and educational activity of museums. There was a quantitative increase in the number of museum staff and a qualitative improvement with the increased employment of people with a university education. At this time, there was an increase in the number of collected items at museums, but this partially took place at the expense of their expert processing. In addition to the organization of various courses, the higher qualification structure of museum staff led to the opening of postgraduate studies in museology, which in Czechoslovakia was provided by the Department of Museology at the university in Brno (Mlynka, 2006, Dolák, 2016; Jagošová, Kirsch, 2017). This department trained museum workers from Slovakia, and the most prominent Slovak experts in the field lectured there. The increase in the quality of work in museums was also reflected in improved visitor numbers.

From the start of the 1980s, there was a greater emphasis on the documentation of contemporary and modern history (Dolák, 2014; Prelovská, 2016), which in practical terms meant the documentation of the socialist period. This impacted the work of other memorial institutions, archives, and libraries, which began to take into account documents from the socialist period when making their own acquisitions. From a museological perspective, this positive trend existed mainly for political and ideological reasons and led to a growth in collections, albeit sometimes in a rather spontaneous and unsystematic way, such as in the collection of items of factory manufacture. However, given that most of the national population did not identify with the socialist regime, the actual everyday life of people was not adequately documented. In the 1980s, the network of museums was fully developed and gradually the focus moved towards increasing their scholarly work.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The process of transformation after 1989 and visions for the future

There were fundamental changes in Slovak museum management after the events of 1989 which reflected changes in society as a whole. The liberalization of the political atmosphere had a positive effect on the activity of Slovak museums, which were no longer under ideological pressure. On the other hand, the transformational, economic, and social changes brought about a reduction in subsidies from the government as well as a rapid fall in visitor numbers and revenue. The lowering of public interest in museums and the fall in visitor numbers were the result of the public perception of museums as ideological institutions linked to the former regime and a significant drop in museums tours being ordered by travel agencies. Another negative development for museums was the passing of the Restitution Act, which obliged museums to return buildings (mainly church buildings) and collection items (also primarily church property) to those who had had this property confiscated from them under Communist Party rule (Dolák, 2010). A new era in cultural development was brought by the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of Slovakia as an independent republic on 1 January 1993.

The Slovak government and the Slovak Ministry of Culture prepared several strategic documents to support the development of cultural policy. The main aims of cultural policy stemmed from relevant historical and social contexts, international and European standards, and multilateral and bilateral agreements which Slovakia had signed up to. This process accelerated after 1998, when Slovakia made a concerted effort to become a part of European structures. The most important transversal directions in national cultural policy are the presentation of Slovak culture and art abroad, support for the culture of Slovaks living abroad, and supporting culture for children and young people. Within the project of implementation of cultural policy, one of the priority areas is the protection of cultural heritage, which includes memorial assets and the historical environment, intangible cultural heritage, museums, galleries, and libraries (Strategies of State Cultural Policy). State archives in Slovakia have been practically managed by the Ministry of the Interior since the 1950s. However, their cultural value, cultural purpose, and significance for Slovak society has not been affected by this fact.

An initiative to support changes in cultural affairs came from those who worked in the area themselves. At the beginning of 1990, representatives of Slovak museums approved the Action Programme for Slovak Museums, which evaluated the negative and positive developments of Slovak museum management during socialism and which set out goals for the future. One of the more urgent tasks was determining the status of museums on a scholarly, cultural, and social basis, and their role in protecting and developing cultural and natural heritage. A positive development was the attempt of the cultural community to forge relationships with international institutions focusing on cultural heritage.

In May 1990, the Union of Museums in Slovakia was established as the professional interest group of museums in the country. Its aim is to represent museums; advocate, defend, and develop their common rights and interests; and support the running of museums. Its partner organizations include the Council of Slovak Galleries (established in 1990); the Slovak Museum Society, which renewed its existence in 1993 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of its founding; and the Czech Association of Museums and Galleries (established in 1990).

After the establishment of Slovakia as an independent state in 1993, separate Slovak committees of international institutions were created. In 1994 the Slovak Committee of the International Council of Museums was formed (in 1946 Czechoslovakia had been one of the council's founders, and in 1991 the Czechoslovak committee of this council was formed); among other things, the committee represents and coordinates the interests of museums, galleries, and other collection institutions in Slovakia and their relationship to other countries. Slovak museum workers are present in various sub-units of the International Council of Museums, such as the Committee for Education and Cultural Action, and the International Movement for a New Museology. Since 1992 Slovakia has been a part of the European Heritage Days, which take place with the support of the Council of Europe and the European Union.

The new political climate led to the passing of new laws concerning memorial institutions and cultural heritage. The key laws are the Museums and Art Galleries Act (No. 115/1998, replaced by Act No. 206/2009), the Libraries Act (No. 183/2000, replaced by Act No. 126/2015), the Cultural Heritage Monuments Act (No. 49/2002, updated by Act No. 238/2014), and the Archives and Registries Act (No. 395/2002, updated by Act No. 266/2015). These laws stemmed from international documents which Slovakia had signed up to.

The 1990s were a time of searching for the role of museums within the state's cultural policy. In 1996 Slovakia was divided into eight higher territorial units, which saw a degree of decentralization in public administration and the creation of self-governing regions. In most cases, regional museums passed into the trusteeship of these higher territorial units. Already at the turn of the millennium, it was possible to notice a certain stabilization of museums and a gradual tendency in the improvement of their status.

After 1989 there was a more noteworthy expression of interest by the public towards local history, traditions, and figures. This resulted in the establishment of memorial rooms and museums. Small memorial rooms in rural areas were not covered by any legislation until the passing of Act No. 38/2014.

The socio-political changes brought about by November 1989 led to a certain turnaround in collection activity. The documentation of contemporary topics was reduced in favour of other topics which had been pushed into the background in previous periods. There were also significant changes in the way that

museums presented themselves. Immediately after the changes in 1989, museums began to hold temporary exhibitions and other exhibitions focusing on topics that had been previously considered taboo or had been incorrectly interpreted (Kačírek, Tišliar, 2015).

In the 2010s, there has been a lot of attention paid to the electronic processing of collections and the digitalization of collection items within the Digital Museum and Digital Gallery project. The Slovak government has also been paying special attention to the further development of museums in terms of their scholarship and research activity, the protection of collection items, and their presentation activities. Furthermore, exhibitions are obliged to make their facilities available to those with health issues, senior citizens, and socially disadvantaged groups as much as is possible (Development Strategy for Museums and Galleries in the Slovak Republic to 2018).

Since the stagnation of the 1990s, museums and galleries have managed to overturn negative trends in terms of visitor numbers. Museums have made efforts to form their own marketing strategies and museum identity. However, with the expansion of what they offer to the public, new museum programmes with a commercial content have been prepared which often do not correspond to the museums' purpose (e.g., note the criticized International Festival of Ghosts and Spirits at the Bojnice Castle Museum, which is part of the Slovak National Museum). Gradually Slovak museums have begun to accept suggestions from abroad in this area, and they have started to expand their activities in museum education in formal, non-formal, and informal (life-long) ways. Museum programmes are being developed in the Living History project, which builds upon local history and historical stories as well as art education mostly focusing on galleries, which looks at how exhibitions are interpreted by visitors. Attention is also being paid to individual age categories (students as a part of compulsory school excursions, parents and children, and senior citizens), professional groups, and the disabled (Kaluzníková, 2013). Special attention has also been given to the cultural policy concerning ethnic minorities, which in the 1990s saw the institutionalization of several museums under the banner of the Slovak National Museum. Independent museums thus now exhibit the culture of Slovakia's ethnic Hungarians, Germans, Croats, Rusyns, Ukrainians, and Jews (see e.g. Darulová, Košťalová, 2010; Dolák, 2006; Krišková, 2016).

Similarly, Slovak libraries and archives underwent expansive transformational processes which have affected their main activities; they had their ideological basis removed and they opened up to the public as memorial and cultural institutions engaging in the spreading and development of Slovak culture. Currently, there is lively cooperation between these memorial institutions in Slovakia. This is particularly well developed at the regional level (museums, archives, and libraries), which are reacting to public stimuli and the public demand for the clarification and documentation of regional history (Ragačová, 2011).

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