

Interview with EEGA Postdoc Fellow Nataša Jagdhuhn

Please present yourself and your research project

I have studied art, art education and museum studies in Belgrade, Vienna, Ljubljana and Berlin. As an artist, curator, art and history facilitator I have conceptualized and organized numerous exhibitions and conferences dealing with the topic of memory constructs in the successor states of Yugoslavia. From 2015 to March 2018 I worked as a research associate and doctoral candidate at the Europäisches Kolleg Jena. In January 2020, I successfully defended my PhD thesis “Broken Museality: Reframing World War II Heritage in the Post-Yugoslav Transition” in the field of Southeast European Studies at the Friedrich Schiller University Jena.

My main research interests involve the interface between museum studies, memory studies and performance studies. I am especially interested in the transitional stages of museums in post-socialist European countries and in the reshaping of theory and practice within the museum following the trends of decolonial debates, particularly in the Global South.

Some of my most recently published articles are:

1) “Post-Yugoslav Kaleidoscope: Curatorial tactics in the (ethno-)nationalization of the Second World War memorial museums of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in: Badescu, G., Mazzucchelli, F. and Baillie, B. (eds.) *Synchronous Pasts: Transforming heritage in the former Yugoslavia*. Palgrave (forthcoming);
2) “The Memorial Center Lipa Remembers – From a ‘museum of the people’ to a ‘museum of the community’: Auto-reflective models for curating public history”, in: Berger, S., Dierks, D. and Kesteloot, C. (eds.) *Public History on the Battlefield of Europe. Dealing with Painful Pasts in the 20th Century*. De Gruyter (forthcoming).
As a postdoc fellow (February–July 2020) of the Leibniz ScienceCampus “Eastern Europe – Global Area” at the GWZO (Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe) in Leipzig, I concentrated on my research project titled *Collecting and Exhibiting Nonalignment in Yugoslavia*. The aim of my postdoctoral project is to shed light on the requirements for decolonialization of museum theory and practices which were initiated through meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement (hereinafter NAM) countries and to demonstrate the institutional forms that were supposed to fulfill this vision.

The first case study for this research project concerns the analysis of the political and museological negotiations behind the establishment of the Museum of African Art: The Veda and Zdravko Pečar Collection (*Muzej afričke umetnosti: Zbirka Veda and Zdravko Pečar*, hereinafter MAU) and understanding them as a product of Yugoslav cultural politics influenced by the NAM. Focusing on the MAU’s newspaper archive, and contrary to previously published studies, this case study analyzes the process of establishing the MAU not from the perspective of its objects and exhibitions, but rather the ideas and values on which it was built.

The second case study addresses the establishment of the Gallery of Art of the Non-Aligned Countries “Josip Broz Tito”. Using the interpretative framework of cultural transfer theory (according to Michel Espagne), my analyses focuses on the process of meaning-making and the resignification of the art objects caused by the foundation of the first transnational institution for culture and arts of the NAM countries.

The aim of this study is neither to declare that “non-aligned museology” existed as a school of thought, nor to analyze the art collections in the case studies as a “third modernity”. On the contrary, the effort of Yugoslavia to translate its NAM cultural politic(s) into museum institutions and discourse is observed as an entanglement of diverse epistemic practices, i.e. knowledge systems.

How did you come up with your research project?

In working on my dissertation, particularly writing about the development of the museum laws, journals, councils and the first museology departments in Yugoslavia, I came to the conclusion that the Cold War period saw the formulation of the theoretical postulates of museum theory which are still relevant today. The foundation of the International Committee for Museology of the International Council of Museums (founded in 1977) provided an opportunity for dialogue between museum theorists from both sides of the Iron Curtain. During the last decades, this interconnectedness has had a continuously universalizing effect

throughout the Global North and its spheres of influence. The International Council of Museums, a global network of museum professionals, has recently set decolonizing museum collections as one of its primary tasks of reform. Consequently, in September 2019 this year its members will vote on a new definition of what constitutes a museum.

I began my research project from the premise that to fully understand the causes of the post-1989 museal turn, it is necessary to place the role played by the history of the Cold War in defining museology as an academic discipline within a wider global context, one which includes not exclusively East-West rivalry, but also the world's multiple Souths as a counterpart to conflicting geo-political powers. The aim of my study is to demonstrate that during the 1970s and the 1980s, the Non-Alignment Movement raised the idea of decolonization in museum theory and practice, thereby establishing a third voice in the development of museology discourse.

How did you get to know EEGA ScienceCampus?

During 2013 and 2014 I was enrolled as a PhD student at the Graduate School Global and Area Studies (GSGAS) at Leipzig University. In this period, I participated in numerous seminars and colloquiums organized by GSGAS and through this I became familiar with a range of methodological challenges within certain approaches to global history. I also began to take a keen interest in thinking of possible methodological tools which could be employed in cross-disciplinary research on culture (as) transfer, an interest which I am continuing to pursue in my current research. During my time as a PhD student at the University in Jena, I first heard about the EEGA ScienceCampus (in 2017). Also, some colleagues and dear friends of mine were EEGA fellows and they had only excellent things to say about the institutions which hosted them, especially the GWZO. So as soon as I submitted my dissertation, I wrote an application for the EEGA fellowship.

What are the links between your research project and EEGA ScienceCampus?

The issues that drive my project belong to two of GWZO's research focuses: "Interweaving and Globalization" and "Knowledge Transfer and Networking". Furthermore, research on the development of the history of museology from the perspective of the Global South – the topic of my postdoctoral project – fits perfectly with the EEGA's research area: "Cultural and Intellectual Perspectives and Identifications". My research takes an interdisciplinary approach that combines history, museology, art history and ethnography. Consequently, it combines historical, museological and ethnographic strategies to identify and generate evidence and observations that capture the transnational nature of the case study museums.

Particularly, my research can thematically and methodologically contribute to broadening academic perspectives on South Eastern Europe's changing role in historical processes of globalization in following ways:

- 1) the examination of cross-cultural exchange between Yugoslavia and the countries of the NAM, as well as museological thinking as an outcome of it, requires a global lens.
- 2) it opens the possibility of seeing the Global East and South, and especially the East-South relationship, as an *active* player in the foundation of the theoretical framework of "global" museology during the Cold War.
- 3) The projects open up the possibility of looking at museum histories beyond the paradigm of the national state; rather, these institutions are investigated as contact zones beyond national borders.

What is the EEGA ScienceCampus for you?

EEGA ScienceCampus represents a network of scholars working on themes related to Eastern and Southeastern Europe in a global context. Taking into the consideration that EEGA fellows come from various disciplines, the ScienceCampus serves as a platform for exchange between Postdoc scholars interested in the methodological challenges of global history as a research field. Especially for young scientists, who have just

recently finished their PhD, the residency as an EEGA fellow provides the chance to develop and shape their research ideas into research proposals in order to apply for postdoctoral university positions, fellowships, or grants.

I believe that a postdoctoral project is crucial for the continuation and career development of a young researcher. In this context, taking part in the Postdoctoral fellowship at EEGA ScienceCampus was a chance for me to not only advance my research, but also to continue my academic career.

The benefit of EEGA ScienceCampus to me is ...

The biggest benefit of EEGA ScienceCampus for me was that it provided me with a period of 6 months to work exclusively on my project. The first two months, before the working space for guest researchers as well as the library at the GWZO was closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, I spent collecting and reading literature related to Yugoslavia's cultural diplomacy within the Non-Aligned Movement. Also, I had a chance to conduct research into the Archive of Yugoslavia and the Archive of the Museum of African Art, searching for documents on this same topic. The material I collected in the archives served as the basis for me to write several conference proposals and to develop an Exposé for further postdoc applications.

I have been accepted as a speaker for the three conferences (The 52nd Annual ASEES Convention in Washington, "Refreshing Memory" organized by Council of the Serb National Minority in Zagreb, GWZO Annual Conference 2020 "Asymmetries of a Region: Decentring Comparative Perspectives on Eastern Europe" in Leipzig) and also as chair of the panel at the EEGA/2nd BASEES Regional Conference in Leipzig.

My residency during the postdoctoral fellowship also served as a preparatory stage for my funding application to the Individual Research Grant Program at the German Research Foundation (DFG) as well as other applications for different types of grants and positions. The chance to cooperate with EEGA fellows and colleges at the GWZO was very helpful, both on the level of academic counselling as well as on the level of sharing practical information related to different forms of postdoc applications. I also used my time as a fellow to build up my profile as a scholar and to improve my academic network.