

# MULTIVOCALITY IN NEW REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SOVIET PERIOD: THE CASES OF LATVIAN AND ESTONIAN MUSEUMS

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## **Abstract**

The article examines new representations of the Soviet period in central museums of Estonia and Latvia, focusing on the challenges and opportunities of applying the principle of multivocality on the conceptual and organizational levels. Multivocality is achieved by making use of the biographical method and including the experiences of diverse national and social groups as well as applying interactive exhibition methods. Both cases demonstrated that in order to balance the curators' voices, efficient teamwork, clear viewpoints of the leading curators, and broad-based collaboration are needed.

**Keywords:** *museums, multivocality, Soviet period, Latvia, Estonia.*

## **Introduction**

This article is concerned with recent exhibitions at the National History Museum of Latvia and the Estonian History Museum. The possibility for such research is unique as the celebrations of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of two neighbouring countries created suitable conditions for comparing representative exhibitions dedicated to the same period in history, staged close in time. The permanent exhibition *My Free Country*, which opened at the Estonian History Museum (EHM) in Tallinn in February 2018, is dedicated to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Estonia. The National History Museum of Latvia (NHML) opened the exhibition *Latvia's Century*, dedicated to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Republic of Latvia, in May 2018.

These exhibitions serve as cases to compare two major comprehensive endeavours to mediate the Soviet period.<sup>1</sup> Since the exhibitions *Latvia's Century* and *My Free State* were staged by the central history museums of both countries, they presumably reflect the current situation of recent history representation in Latvia and Estonia. These exhibitions were created in the spirit of contemporary museology, including interactivity and engagement, presenting the perspective of different groups in society. Therefore, an essential analytical concept from which we proceed is multivocality. We use it for examining the different views resulting from the exhibition team's versatility as well as the attempt of the contemporary museum to give voice to the representatives of different groups, which could be considered as a shared authority. By comparing the two exhibitions we aim at revealing the overall picture created by presenting the same period of history.

The Soviet period is a topical and contested issue in research in post-socialist societies, yet in museum exhibitions studied incomprehensively and mainly from the aspect of political history and consumption [see Badica 2010; Sarkisova and Apor 2008]. Our main research question is, what are the opportunities and challenges of representing different communities through multivocality? Is it a useful tool for analysing and communicating the complicated heritage of the Soviet time?

In this article we understand multivocality as providing a platform for "voices" of diverse groups of people in the exhibition, which is designed to challenge dominant interpretive narratives, favouring the coexistence of potentially conflicting approaches. Respecting and enhancing the inherent value of multiple perspectives and experiences simultaneously complicates one point of view [Barnabas 2016: 691; Pegno and Brindza 2021: 346]. Such an approach in exhibitions (and collections) policies shows a desire to alleviate the authoritative voice of the museum – for indigenous peoples, for different segments of society and for visitors in general [Maranda 2015; Barnabas 2016; Harris 2018]. Museums are increasingly recognizing the need to serve all the diverse audiences in their community, thereby looking for approaches that can be used to introduce minority or previously ignored segments of society in a non-offensive way.

Nevertheless, there is ongoing debate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century museum landscape on museums trying to maintain their "authoritative voice" versus adapting the idea that "there are multiple voices that need to be heard" [Maranda 2015: 59, see also Longair 2015, Wood 2019]. If a couple of decades ago the situation in which only the "curator's voice" was heard in exhibitions was criticized [Hooper-Greenhill

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<sup>1</sup> Although the National History Museum of Latvia presents the Soviet period at their permanent exhibition too, we based our comparison on the newer special exhibition *Latvia's Century*. The Latvian permanent exhibition has a much wider time frame, and it has been set up years earlier than the comparable Estonian permanent exhibition.

2000], today practice has also shown that, if the curator withdraws, the designer's and project leader's voice can likewise become one-sided [Viau-Courville 2017; Reidla 2020]. Museologist Graham Black [2012: 275] raises the issue of shared authority which must be "underpinned by the understanding that with such authority comes trust – the trust of museum users in the content provided." Thus, Black suggests addressing the issue of maintaining control over content delivery at the beginning of any potential partnership. He emphasizes that reflecting multiple perspectives does not necessarily lead to harmony due to competing versions of history, and previously excluded communities do not always want to be involved but prefer to create a separate museum [ibid.].

The approach of multivocality is complicated by the aspect that while museums have to abandon their colonial and other stereotypical views, they also have to challenge notions that only previously marginalized groups can provide authentic information about themselves [Zimmermann 2010: 33]. Thus, there is the risk that the current stereotypes will be replaced by new ones, even though they are created by previously excluded groups [Black 2012: 275; Zimmermann 2010: 33]. An important question in the context of this article is, how multivocality practiced in the museum space can accomplish some unity in such diversity? In the context of contemporary Estonia and Latvia we also ask, whether and how do museums succeed in communicating a more analytical and nuanced approach to this period than popular culture and the media, at the same time addressing different social groups?

For our study we applied qualitative methods including content analysis of the exhibitions and the printed and web texts related to them. We conducted fieldwork in both museums in the years 2017–2020 by repeatedly visiting the exhibitions, by recording and mapping the exhibited materials. We talked and conducted altogether five interviews with the curators.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this, we used interviews with curators published in the press, popular and research articles published by curators, and materials from the exhibitions' catalogues and websites of museums. We chose the two cases from Estonia and Latvia since they offered a unique opportunity for comparison due to the similar cultural-political background and parallel tendencies in the development of museological methods and practices. Instead of classical studies of museum collections, we focused on critical analysis of exhibits and museum cultures as this type of research is best suited to questions about the role of museums in society, their relationship with various constituencies and how museums create knowledge [Tucker 2014: 342].

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<sup>1</sup> They all remain anonymous in the article as requested; the notes and recordings of interviews are in possession of the authors.

### Tuning: Starting points for exhibition projects

The exhibition dedicated to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Republic of Estonia at the Estonian History Museum was staged after a thorough renovation of the historical castle, to replace the former one dedicated to the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Estonia. The project was led by a project leader together with two chief curators from the museum administration. The team involved both researchers from the museum and scholars from other museums and universities.<sup>1</sup> By the time the working group assembled, the chief curators had already drawn up the main structure of the concept as well as topic divisions. First the team worked together; in the final stage the topic curators met separately with artists, film makers, and chief curators. The leading group seized initiative also at meetings with designers. On the other hand, designers played an essential role in creating the architecture of the exhibition, making decisions about the walking space and the space for displaying exhibits, the colour solutions and structural division of the rooms, as well as sculptural accents. So, the volumes of text and exhibits largely proceeded from the design. A significant role in editing the text was played by the research director and a copywriter hired from outside the museum, whose style aroused resentment among the curators. The interviewed curators<sup>2</sup> found that the copywriter had oversimplified their text and thereby distorted their ideas. However, the text that was finally displayed in the exhibition hall was a compromise.

The purpose of the permanent exhibition at the EHM was to mediate history through “the stories of our people” – the people in Estonia.<sup>3</sup> In the concept the museum promised to “jointly discuss whether a hundred years is little or much for a country, how the contemporaries reacted to ground-breaking events and what they thought about the then life and leading figures”; it says that “the exhibition is interactive and playful, yet it also displays unique artefacts” [Paatsi 2018].

The concept of the EHM focused on Estonians and Estonia as a territorial and state unit. According to the chief curator, the new exhibition was supposed to differ from the former ones by the “attempt to introduce the individual’s level” and “how one or another person acted or what they thought while facing a choice in reality”. The concept also deemed essential – based on an earlier visitor study – to display so-called symbolic items of the era and artefacts with a special or longer biography. The expression of the concept was largely based on the collections. A clear conceptual standpoint was expressed in the chief curator’s words: “...big victories and harsh sufferings will always be part of a small nation’s history narrative” [Maarits 2018].

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<sup>1</sup> *My Free Country*, EHM’s permanent exhibition website. <https://www.ajaloomuuseum.ee/exhibitions/permanent-exhibitions/mini-vaba-riik> (viewed 23.01.2021).

<sup>2</sup> Two curators interviewed by authors, digital recording, 30 and 31 October 2017, Tallinn.

<sup>3</sup> *A Hundred Years of the Republic of Estonia* website. <https://www.ajaloomuuseum.ee/exhibitions/permanent-exhibitions/mini-vaba-riik> (viewed 23.01.2021).

The exhibition *Latvia's Century* was a joint project of 68 Latvian museums, coordinated by the National History Museum of Latvia. The general leader of the project was the research director of the NHML. The ten-member leading group involved, in addition to the researchers and the educator of the NHML, experts responsible for different topic areas from the seven Latvian museums.<sup>1</sup> The initial concept was formulated, on the basis of joint discussions, by a head of department of the NHML, who also curated five topics out of ten and who was supposed to observe the continuity of the concept and final editing of texts.<sup>2</sup> After the concept had been introduced to a wider circle (all Latvian museums and certain people from outside the museums), some changes were made in it.

In formulating the concept, no existing exhibits were taken into consideration, but rather what aspects to emphasize and what to bring to the fore.<sup>3</sup> Later on additional artefacts were collected and more interviews were conducted for biographies. The joint work of museums involved an advantage for the curators – extensive material diminishes the danger of the shortage of exhibits for a topic – but also a disadvantage, as these choices had to be more thoroughly substantiated. The biographies displayed were chosen from different regions of Latvia, various nationalities are represented, and exhibits originate from different museums.

The exhibition concentrates on the identity-based history concept: “Our understanding of history is linked to our identity, both collective and individual, and this creates an inseparable connection to the present...”. The museum presents alternative visions of Latvian identity and future from the nineteenth century up to today. According to the curators’ concept, the diversity of individual experience demonstrates the complexity and difference of history periods, as well as the continuity of experience of Latvianness, certain values and ideas [Latvia’s Century 2018: 20]. This approach was chosen as, according to then research director,<sup>4</sup> the mission of the NHML is, by speaking about history, to help the citizens understand their country and state: “Why am I as I am and where do I belong in this state?” She also stressed that the national museum cannot experiment or follow trends but has to proceed from scientific research.

When we compare how working groups operated, at the NHML the main right to decide was conferred on museum professionals. Experienced museum researchers jointly discussed all the essential issues, but one of them participated in all the meetings dedicated to sub-topics (for example, with designers), in order to keep focus on the initial concept, and also edited texts for the exhibition. Collaboration

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<sup>1</sup> *Latvia's Century* website. <http://latvijasgadsimts.lv/?lng=en> (viewed 23.01.2021).

<sup>2</sup> Curator interviewed by authors, digital recording, 5 December 2018, Riga.

<sup>3</sup> Curator interviewed by authors, 5 December 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Curator interviewed by authors, digital recording, 7 November 2017, Riga.

of museums in offering exhibits and sharing the concept to get opinions can be regarded as an example of an inclusive museum, which resulted in multivocality. The EHM applied a stronger top-down leadership, which freed the curators from direct communication with the designers, yet also decreased their overview of the ways that material was presented.

### **Multivocal Soviet period and curator's position**

Below we analyze which topics the museums have highlighted from the Soviet period and what means they have used to do it. How have the curators expressed their concepts through artefacts, digital means, accompanying texts? To what extent has multivocality been expressed and how does it work?

So far, the presentation of the Soviet period at Estonian and Latvian museums has been limited to illustrative rather than analytical overviews. In the 1990s, the Soviet period was of little interest in the museum landscape of the Baltic countries, and the few exhibitions preferred topics from the traumatic past, for example, Stalinist repressions. The beginning of the twenty-first century saw the first exhibitions that focused on the aspects related to everyday life of the Soviet period – design, food, and youth culture [see in detail Jõesalu, Nugin 2012]. In comparison with other post-Soviet countries, Estonia and Latvia manifest little Soviet-period nostalgia. On the other hand, the remembrance and representation of the topic have generated active public discussion since the beginning of the 1990s [Jõesalu, Kõresaar 2013; Kõresaar, Jõesalu 2016; Kõresaar 2016]. Popular culture and the media disseminate a simplified approach to the Soviet period, which mainly brings everyday mythology and symbols to the fore. Therefore, especially the younger generation lacks a deeper understanding of the operating mechanisms of the Soviet society and the real challenges that people had to face. Against this background, the new museums had a major role and responsibility in displaying the Soviet time.

Modern memory studies emphasize the dynamics of memory in time and its role “as a platform for negotiating different versions of the past” [Misztal 2003]. In the studies of the period of socialism, the perspective of the individual and biography take up an important position both in history and in social sciences. These approaches are in line with the principles of multivocality and dialogism emphasized by the museums.

### **National History Museum of Latvia**

At the Latvian permanent exhibition, the Soviet period has been chronologically divided into four parts, whereas each period in turn has a thematic focus: I resistance and migration; II ideological pressure and kolkhozes; III home and nature; IV memory recovery and national symbols. Each part mediates a certain aspect

of collective experience: managing poverty and political pressure, life in the countryside, expression of the feeling of homeland (Latvia), and awakening of the civil society. The curators have managed to open up the dynamics and diversity of the Soviet period as well as the necessity to constantly adapt oneself to the circumstances.

Similar to the growing interest in material culture in anthropology [Greene 2015], artefacts have once again occupied the place of honour in museum exhibitions. Mario Schulze has shown, on the example of German museums, how during the past fifty years the role of artefacts has changed from “authentic portrayals of yesterdays” to “mediators and agents of the topic displayed [2014: 51]. The social life of the artefacts displayed in the Latvian exhibition has been as dramatic as was people’s life during that period. Artefacts operate as bridges connecting periods of time, by means of which the curator directs the visitor to think back and forth in time. The curator’s text is important; for example, an elegant chest of drawers from the 1920s–30s, holding a porcelain coffee set, glass carafes, vases, photographs, and clocks, is not just a stylish embellishment as the curator’s text tells us how after the Second World War, “going through old keepsakes from peacetime, one could sense the living standard of the past”. By means of recycled items, for example, a handbag made from document folders and covered with a towel, or rubber galoshes made from tyres in forced exile in the 1940s, the curator shows people fighting hardships as active agents, not as victims of the system. In addition to objects as carriers of memory, the exhibition also highlights landscapes, physical (home) and spiritual spaces (literature, music) as anchors of the continuity of Latvian identity. In comparison with the EHM, the Latvian exhibition uses more visual arts and design, as well as excerpts from literature and music to illustrate emotions and the spirit of the era – this successful synthesis is probably a result of the museums’ collaboration.

Biographies occupy a crucial role in the Latvian exhibition. Here, curators’ choices are intertwined with the subject’s own voice: letters, diaries, reminiscences of the family and friends are displayed, and, if possible, also flashbacks in the form of text or film clips. The clear structure of presenting biographies throughout the exhibition makes it easier to embrace multivocal information. Biographies mediate the intertwining of eras, parallel and similar developments. They open up the subjective and emotional side of history.

The approach to totalitarian ideologies of the years 1940–45 proceeds from the viewpoint of Latvia and Latvians; therefore, Soviet and Nazi propaganda are displayed side by side, as well as materials from prison and concentration camps. In the display of the Stalinist period the topic of kolkhozes has been presented reasonably in detail, as it was in the countryside that the upheaval in everyday life and changes in the landscape were the most radical and the consequences are most palpable today. The voice of the curator speaks about country people’s obligations

and the pressure, and the essence of the era is well expressed in the selected symbols – the writing desk of the head of the collective farm, and behind his back a window with bars in the shape of sunrays.

The dilemmas of the era are opened from the aspect of the average person also in the treatments of the periods of thaw and ‘mature’ socialism of the years 1953–85. Curators focus on the relationship between the public and the private, which also occupies an important position in academic approaches to the socialist era [Bren, Neuburger 2012; Siegelbaum 2006]. From the point of view of private life, the concept of ‘normalizing’ Soviet power is disputed. Although in private life people did not suffer from so severe repression and hardships anymore, “personal Latvia included independence lost after occupation, families on the other side of the Iron Curtain, concealed cultural heritage, memories of repressions, and fears of Russification” [Latvia’s Century 2018: 170]. Along with this, groups supporting public rituals and social control are introduced, such as pioneers, veterans, and work heroes.

The deeper meaning of everyday life and the domestic world of things are illustrated by an expressive sub-heading *Latvia as a Personal Space*. The privacy of family life and participation in cultural life helped to preserve Latvianness and distinguish it from the Soviet reality. In the private sphere an alternative experience of history and culture existed. The content of the unit furniture in the living-room is fascinating for the visitor, yet it is not a mere curiosity. The curator’s text reveals the essence of the system – shortage economy made people to stockpile fabrics, cleansers, and alcohol. The cupboards also held goods brought from abroad or sent by relatives, as well as those obtained from the black market. This way the cupboard symbolizes well the half-closed world, which was still permeated by alternative materiality and spirituality. The displaying of the domestic interior, literature, and art distinguishes the Latvian exhibition from that in Estonia, where interiors are not so impressively represented.

Both in Estonia and Latvia, important sources of national identity during the Soviet occupation were emotional contacts with nature and folk traditions. Latvian curators have extended the metaphor of home also to environment – Latvia was perceived as the homeland, not as a Soviet republic. Despite the binary structure of the exhibition, the design solutions, exhibits, and relationships between them rather talk about the intertwining of the public and private spheres in the Soviet everyday life, as has also been highlighted by cultural-theoretical research [Crowley, Reid 2002; Kurg 2014; Yurchak 2005]. In the mediation of this period, the topic of cultural continuity has also been considered as essential, by showing how poetic language could express more than other texts. Freedom could be retained through culture creation, yet the EHM exhibition overlooks it.



The Latvian exhibition has brought the last years of the Soviet period (1986–1991) into focus as a social movement towards independence. The curators have taken the position that political freedom was not a lucky chance but a result of the nation's mission-oriented fight and the continuity of memory, which involved opposition and dramatic choices.

So, the Latvian exhibition focuses on the evolution of the national idea through multinational actors. Social, ethnic, and geographic diversities are expressed in biographies. The items related to families highlight dramatism in history and the personal dimension of events. The museum has managed well to accomplish some unity in the multivocality method as the curatorial text provides comprehensive information. So, the curatorial voice is analytical rather than neutrally charged, asking questions and making one contemplate. The texts are visitor-friendly and short, informative, and in one style throughout the exhibition, describing collective experience as a chronological line at the bottom of the exhibition panels. The foreground is occupied by people as active shapers of history, interpreters of processes, who deal with problems and choices in different ways.

### **Estonian History Museum**

The EHM presents the Soviet period in two subdivisions out of nine, whereas the different stages of the period are not distinguished. Thematically, it is divided into two parts: *World War II and the end of independence* and *Life in the Soviet Union*. In terms of proportions, it means that nearly half of the hundred years is displayed on a quarter of the exhibition space. In this compressed volume, such topics as the paraphernalia of communist ideology, collectivization of agriculture, atmosphere of terror in the totalitarian regime, and the dissonance of ideology and reality are highlighted. As a result of compactness, the real differences between the decades of the Soviet period are not as clearly outlined as at the NHML. Pictures of Lenin inherent in this era are numerous displayed both in Estonian and Latvian history museums: the EHM has displayed large vases which belonged to the nomenclature of presents, while the NHML displays wooden intarsia wall plates. While in the Latvian exhibition these serve, along with the substantial narrative, as a detail of political aesthetics of the era, at the EHM they occupy the central place and constitute, together with the trumpet-playing pioneer and pervading red showcases a symbolic dominant.

Gas masks remind us of the atmosphere of terror during the occupation, yet there is an interactive panel that mediates the diversity of social terror tactics even more deeply. The topic of the national armed resistance in Estonian and Latvian history in the 1940s–50s is presented rather similarly to the NHML, and it remains illustrative. On the other hand, within the educational programme, one can pack a

forest brother's<sup>1</sup> rucksack and, with the help of the educator, realize the dramatic meaning of such a choice.

As everyday aspects, some of the most popular commodities produced in Estonia are displayed, some of which, as, for example, toys, arouse nostalgic joy of recognition in today's adults, and some, on the other hand (non-attractive underwear), melancholic-comic memories. The visitor is presented, from an interesting aspect, the context of the era in a montage of the propaganda shots from the Soviet Union of the 1960s–70s, side by side with photographs showing real life, accompanied by the curator's text. This reveals the hypocrisy of the Soviet system: valuation of historical heritage versus letting it dilapidate; the illusion of free travelling versus the border zone; thriving economy versus queues at shops; recognition of national idiosyncrasies versus Russification and migration; importance of natural resources versus pollution of the environment.

The theme of home is relatively overshadowed at the EHM, although the exhibition starts with dollhouse-format models of flats from different eras, among which is one from a block of flats built by standard design. This part of the exhibition demonstrates the peculiarity of the Soviet-period home in comparison with earlier and later ones. The curator's text describes the Soviet-period shortage of dwelling units, lack of space, and the resulting rather standard furnishings. The analogue of the Latvian unit furniture at the EHM is the home larder – a similar place for stockpiling all kinds of supplies, which in the situation of chronic shortage presented a cross-section of different eras and therefore a repository of family history. The displayed commodities help to open up the Soviet Union as a closed information and economic space, where the supplies preserved in cupboards and larders offered people a certain sense of security. In view of the modern museum's aspiration to make its visitors think and contemplate, the Latvian exhibition presents a detailed list of the displayed items with their names, manufacturers, and years of production. At the EHM, on the other hand, the visitor is allowed to touch the items on the larder shelves; they are offered sensory, not data-based information. Thus, the two exhibitions complement each other in an interesting manner.

This exhibition seems to focus more on the interactive involvement of the visitor. Interactivity in a modern museum does not have to be expressed only through technological solutions; it is as important to offer new experiential knowledge or discovery options by means of hands-on approach and sensory design elements [Dudley 2012]. The EHM has consciously invested in offering hands-on activities, yet this shows, above all, in the group work led by an educator. The visitor is offered a possibility to put themselves in the shoes of the former generations, to weigh the available options set as concrete examples from history by the curator. The design of

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<sup>1</sup> Partisans who hid in the forest and waged a guerrilla war against the Soviet rule.

the EHM exhibition is pervaded by questions and examples of choices – moments in history when people were compelled to make decisions about places of residence, turn in the career, or political mentality. Probably the voices of choices are better heard in group visits, when people can discuss things between themselves. The potential for involvement exists, yet it may not be realized for each visitor.

The subtopics feature different examples of the individual experiences of historical events through object narratives or biographical elements. In comparison with the *Latvia's Century* exhibition, this one has the longer and 'newspaper-style' illustrated wall texts. The design concept is strong, and the content has been adapted to form, not vice versa. The curators of the EHM have preferred the format of classical narrative, diversifying it with film language, stories accompanying artefacts, and sensory experience. Although the concept of the EHM does not emphasize multivocality, it is represented by individual memories used to illustrate history. Yet, the dimension of national, social, age, gender, etc. diversity remains marginal. This is partly inevitable due to the lack of space and may be developed further by means of educational programmes, catalogues, etc.

### Conclusion

The fact that both Estonian and Latvian museums have simultaneously staged exhibitions that deal with recent history, thereby complementing each other, is a unique possibility for visitors as well as from the aspect of museological analysis. The treatment of the Soviet period at these museums leans on extensive collection work and research as well as contemporary academic discourses. The curators have faced a great challenge to address different social groups, to meet the expectations held by their own people, to offer comprehensive information to foreign guests and programmes for schools.

While usually the idea of multivocality is used by museums in the context of postcolonialism, the Estonian and Latvian museums demonstrate that it can also be used to interpret the experience of the Soviet occupation. Both new exhibitions make use of the biographical method that also contributes to multivocality and thus to a broader, yet also to a more nuanced and individualized representations of the Soviet time. Exhibiting individual history experience demonstrates the democratization of museums – they have brought to the fore not the biographies of historical figures but, above all, the changes that occurred in ordinary people's everyday life. In the case of the NHML, the principle of democracy was also expressed in the involvement of the extensive network of local museums, due to which the cultural and memory heritage of all Latvian regions was represented. Multivocality is also represented through the experience of national minorities and diaspora communities at the exhibition of the NHML whereas the EHM focuses mainly on Estonians and Estonia as a territorial and national unit.

The key elements of contemporary exhibiting trends used like interactivity and sensory experience contribute to the presentation of multivocality and appear in both cases studied. The case of the EHM revealed that interactivity does not have to be expressed solely through technological solutions. At the same time, this exhibition seems to need more “live” guidance compared to the Latvian one.

Our analysis demonstrated that in the two museums the harmonization of the voices of the exhibition teams has been carried out on different levels. In the case of the EHM, the design solutions had a greater role in shaping the messages of the curators. Consequently, the general impression/visual effects highlighted the contrasts between the historical periods and added dramatic tension to the important turning points, but the overall impression remained more fragmentary. At the Latvian exhibition, the voice of the leading curators was dominant resulting in a coherent and comprehensive picture of the Soviet period, emphasizing continuity of the idea of national and cultural independence.

Both cases demonstrated that in order to balance the curators’ voices, efficient teamwork, clear viewpoints of the leading curators, and the cross-museums collaboration are needed. The inclusion of a wide circle of curators and different institutions is justified, if the museum wants to offer the visitor rewarding multivocality. Despite the challenges on both organizational and content level, the two exhibitions provide an innovative and complementary picture of the recent past in the Baltic countries.

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