

## Four Museums for One (Hi) Story

**Authors :** Sheyla Moroni

**Abstract :** A number of scholars around the world have analyzed the great architectural and urban planning revolution proposed by Skopje 2014, but so far, there are no readings of the parallels between the museums in the Balkan area (including Greece) that share the same name as the museum at the center of that political and cultural revolution. In the former FYROM (now renamed North Macedonia), a museum called "Macedonian Struggle" was born during the reconstruction of the city of Skopje as the new "national" capital. This new museum was built under the "Skopje 2014" plan and cost about 560 million euros (1/3 of the country's GDP). It has been a "flagship" of the government of Nikola Gruevski, leader of the nationalist VMRO-DPMNE party. Until 2016 this museum was close to the motivations of the Macedonian nationalist movement (and later party) active (including terrorist actions) during the 19th and 20th centuries. The museum served to narrate a new "nation-building" after "state-building" had already taken place. But there are three other museums that tell the story of the "Macedonian struggle" by understanding "Macedonia" as a territory other than present-day North Macedonia. The first one is located in Thessaloniki and primarily commemorates the "Greek battle" against the Ottoman Empire. While the first uses a new dark building and many reconstructed rooms and shows the bloody history of the quest for "freedom" for the Macedonian language and people (different from Greeks, Albanians, and Bulgarians), the second is located in an old building in Thessaloniki and in its six rooms on the ground floor graphically illustrates the modern and contemporary history of Greek Macedonia. There are also third and fourth museums: in Kastoria (toward the Albanian border) and in Chromio (near the Greek-North Macedonian border). These two museums (Kastoria and Chromio) are smaller, but they mark two important borders for the (Greek) regions bordering Albania to the east and dividing it to the northwest not only from the Ottoman past but also from two communities felt to be "foreign" (Albanians and former Yugoslav Macedonians). All museums reconstruct a different "national edifice" and emphasize the themes of language and religion. The objective of the research is to understand, through four museums bearing the same name, what are the main "mental boundaries" (religious, linguistic, cultural) of the different states (reconstructed between the late 19th century and 1991). Both classical historiographic methodology (very different between Balkan and "Western" areas) and on-site observation and interactions with different sites are used in this research. An attempt is made to highlight four different political focuses with respect to nation-building and the Public History (and/or propaganda) approaches applied in the construction of these buildings and memorials tendency often that one "defines" oneself by differences from "others" (even if close).

**Keywords :** nationalisms, museum, nation building, public history

**Conference Title :** ICMSPH 2023 : International Conference on Museum Studies and Public History

**Conference Location :** Lisbon, Portugal

**Conference Dates :** September 18-19, 2023