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Specialus numeris „Atminties institucijos ir valstybė: susiejant istoriją, suprantant dabartį ir kuriant ateitį“

Special issue “Memory Institutions and the State: Connecting History, Understanding the Present, and Building a Future”

Introduction to the Special Issue of “Aktualu rytoj / Relevant Tomorrow” on the Interaction between Memory Institutions and the State

Dedicated to the 105th Anniversary of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

Ingrida Veliutė

Chair of the Scientific Committee of the conference “Memory Institutions and the State: Connecting History, Understanding the Present, and Building a Future”

Konferencijos „Atminties institucijos ir valstybė: susiejant istoriją, suprantant dabartį ir kuriant ateitį“ mokslinio komiteto pirmininkė

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania
Lietuvos nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo biblioteka

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Abstract. The introduction presents the special issue of the journal “Aktualu rytoj / Relevant Tomorrow” titled “Memory Institutions and the State: Connecting History, Understanding the Present, and Building a Future,” compiled on the basis of an international conference of the same name held on November 7–8, 2024, at the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania. The Statehood Center at the National Library of Lithuanian, which organized the event to mark the library’s 105th anniversary, invited participants to analyze the dynamic relationship between memory institutions, the nation, and the state in various contexts. The author of introduction discusses the significance of galleries, libraries, archives, and museums in the life of the state, as well as their impact on democratic society, cultural policy, historical memory, and public opinion. Particular attention is paid to the ongoing Russia’s war in Ukraine, which has revealed the role of memory institutions in documenting wartime experiences, safeguarding factual knowledge, and strengthening society’s resilience to disinformation. The articles show a broad geographical and thematic range of research into the interaction between memory institutions and the state.

Keywords: memory institutions, state, historical memory, cultural heritage, public opinion, heritage resilience, Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania.

Įvadas į „Aktualu rytoj / Relevant Tomorrow“ specialųjį numerį, skirtą atminties institucijų ir valstybės sąveikai

Santrauka. Įvadiniame straipsnyje pristatomas žurnalo „Aktualu rytoj / Relevant Tomorrow“ specialus numeris „Atminties institucijos ir valstybė: susiejant istoriją, suprantant dabartį ir kuriant ateitį“. Jo pagrindas – 2024 m. lapkričio 7–8 d. Lietuvos nacionalinėje Martyno Mažvydo bibliotekoje vykusi tarptautinė mokslinė konferencija

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tokiu pačiu pavadinimu. Lietuvos nacionalinės bibliotekos 105 metų sukakčiai skirtą renginį organizavęs šios bibliotekos Valstybingumo centras kvietė įvairiuose kontekstuose analizuoti dinamišką santykį tarp atminties institucijų, tautos ir valstybės. Straipsnyje aptariama galerijų, bibliotekų, archyvų ir muziejų reikšmė valstybės gyvenime, jų poveikis demokratinei visuomenei, kultūros politikai, istorinei atminčiai ir viešajai opinijai. Ypatingas dėmesys skiriamas Rusijos karo Ukrainoje kontekstui, atskleidusiam atminties institucijų vaidmenį dokumentuojant karo patirtis, ginant faktinį žinojimą ir stiprinant visuomenės atsparumą dezinformacijai. Pristatomi specialaus numerio straipsniai atskleidžia platų geografinį ir tematinį atminties institucijų bei valstybės sąveikos tyrimų lauką.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: atminties institucijos, valstybė, istorinė atmintis, kultūros paveldas, viešoji opinija, paveldo atsparumas, Lietuvos nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo biblioteka.

A Gathering of Scholarly Kindred Spirits from Around the World on the Occasion of the National Library's of Lithuania 105th Anniversary

A special issue of the journal "Aktualu rytoj / Relevant Tomorrow" on memory institutions and the state (compiled and edited by Dalia Cidzikaitė, Ilona Strumickienė, and Darius Žiemelis) grew out of the international conference of the same title, dedicated to the 105th anniversary of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania (hereinafter, the National Library of Lithuania) and organized by the Statehood Center at the National Library of Lithuania on November 7–8, 2024.[1] The anniversary became not only an opportunity to review the history of a single national institution, but also provided an occasion to raise broader and more varied questions about the role that galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (hereinafter, GLAM) play in the life of the state: their contribution to society's self-perception, democracy, and the formation and implementation of cultural policy, input in getting to know and acknowledge a complex, often painful, and uncomfortable past, and making it possible to scrutinize many other aspects. Researchers from all over the world analyzed fields curated by GLAM from a wide range of perspectives. Together with the practitioners they discussed multilayered processes and examined the dynamic relations between the nation and the state. After the conference, they were invited to publish their insights in a special issue of the journal.

Uncomfortable and brutal heritage, cultural policy and its reflections have been part of my personal and professional field of interest for more than two decades; therefore, the opportunity to speak openly about complex topics at this conference seemed like the fulfilment of a long-awaited meeting with like-minded colleagues scattered around the world. GLAM has the capacity to look deeply into the matter and to present painful themes openly. When visuality is lacking, theater and other forms of visual art can be successfully brought in to communicate the desired theme. Not long ago, in Warsaw, I had the opportunity to watch the performance "Trzecia wojna" (The Third War) devoted to the encounter between new technologies and historical memory. As the creators of the play have noted, it is

> *a story about a world deprived of memory of the past, a world in which unlimited possibilities and the unrestrained development of civilization lead to the regression of the individual. It is also a story about the contemporary role of memory of the Holocaust, which uniqueness is given*

[1] See International Conference "Memory Institutions and the State." *Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania*, 22 October 2024. Retrieved from https://www.lnb.lt/en/news/12290-international-conference-memory-institutions-and-the-state [accessed 11/08/2026]; International Conference "Memory Institutions and the State": Conference Programme, November 7–8th, 2024. *Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania*, 2024. Retrieved from https://konferencijos.lnb.lt/lnb105/ [accessed 11/08/2026]. Recordings of the presentations delivered at the international conference "Memory Institutions and the State: Connecting History, Understanding the Present, and Building a Future" are available: International Conference "Memory Institutions and the State." November 7th, Conference Hall / Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania. *YouTube*, 7 November 2024. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qKQjH-0FcE [accessed 11/08/2026]; International Conference "Memory Institutions and the State." November 8th, Conference Hall / Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania. *YouTube*, 8 November 2024. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWKk2M0S94A [accessed 11/08/2026].

> *a particular force by staging it at Theater* Potem-o-tem—*the only theater currently located in Muranów, in the very heart of the ghetto and the prewar Jewish district*.[2]

This is probably one of the strongest examples of how historical memory can be invoked to affect the viewer and compel them to feel outraged and to weep at the same time. These are more than sufficient reasons why the topics discussed during the conference in Vilnius should not remain only in the hearts of the conference audience but also reach a broader target readership. At one point, I suggested to the editor of the journal that we should try to develop thematic issues, based on the national and international conferences organized at the National Library of Lithuania. This issue of "Aktualu rytoj / Relevant Tomorrow" is no exception—it demonstrates that memory institutions are important sites where scholarly inquiry, cultural heritage, and political responsibility converge.[3]

Both university researchers, who are immersed in academic activities, and scholars, who are engaged in GLAM, often have far more ideas than they are able to encompass on their own in their research. The idea of organizing an international conference, at which colleagues from across the world could share their experiences and thoughts about the relationship between GLAM and the state from the most diverse perspectives, had been developing in my subconscious for several years. The fulfilment of this dream undoubtedly required the committed team, tireless scientific and organizing committees, the right place, and carefully thought-out themes that would entice the participants to fly across the world with a common goal to discuss and highlight the role of GLAM in different parts of the world and in different historical periods. I am deeply grateful to everyone who embarked with me on this invaluable journey.

Over the past decades of independence, in Lithuania, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, GLAM has contributed to and actively participated in the creation of the identity narrative of a free independent state. GLAM has already moved beyond repositories of artefacts, documents, or books and has become a contemporary space of research, education, community building, digital literacy, and democratic resilience, or simply, a space for one's everyday work. To return to the 105th anniversary of the National Library of Lithuania, it would be difficult to measure unequivocally the scale of the transformation that has taken place within the libraries for over more than a century. However, it is evident that, alongside their role as providers of knowledge and information, libraries have acquired another important function due to the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war,[4] disinformation, and cyber threats. These days, they help society to navigate the abundance of information and distinguish reliable knowledge from manipulation. The exceptionally broad activities of GLAM undoubtedly also contribute to the identification, clarification, and consolidation of historical facts.

From this point of view, the relationship between history, facts, and political myths becomes especially important. Speaking about Russia's war against Ukraine, Timothy Snyder noted that

> *First of all, history is very important as a way to see through myths. Very often wars are fought on the basis of false ideas of the past. … History can help us expose when people are telling lies. History can also help us see what a war might really be about*.[5]

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[2] Trzecia wojna. *Teatr Potem-o-tem*. Retrieved from https://potemotem.com/trzecia-wojna/ [accessed 11/08/2026].

[3] This is the third special issue of this journal (the first was dedicated to Vilnius in the 19th—21st centuries, and the second to the points of contact between visual arts (painting) and philosophy). See *Aktualu rytoj / Relevant Tomorrow*, 2023, Vol. 3, No. 23–24: Special Issue "Europe. Capital. Transformations: Vilnius in the 19th–21st Centuries" = specialus numeris "Europa. Sostinė. Tapsmas: XIX–XXI amžiaus Vilnius" / Compilers and scholarly editors—I. Strumickienė, D. Žiemelis. Vilnius: Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, 2024. Retrieved from https://journals.lnb.lt/relevant-tomorrow/issue/view/no23-24 [accessed 11/08/2026]; *Aktualu rytoj / Relevant Tomorrow*, 2024, Vol. 4, No. 26: Special Issue "Monadological Landscapes: Reflections of Leibniz's Theory in Philosophy and Painting" = specialus numeris "Monadologiniai kraštovaizdžiai: Leibnizo teorijos atspindžiai filosofijoje ir tapyboje" / Compiler—K. Čerapaitė. Vilnius: Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, 2025. Retrieved from https://journals.lnb.lt/relevant-tomorrow/issue/view/no26 [accessed 11/08/2026].

[4] Especially after the Russian "hybrid war," which in February 2022 turned into an open military aggression against Ukraine.

[5] "Russia's war in Ukraine will be seen as colonial war"—Interview with Timothy Snyder / Interview was conducted by C. Bendas. *LRT.lt*, 21 November 2023. Retrieved from https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2128983/russia-s-war-in-ukraine-will-be-seen-as-colonial-war-interview-with-timothy-snyder [accessed 11/08/2026].

This Snyder's idea captures very precisely the very essence of GLAM—galleries, libraries, archives, and museums not only preserve documents or objects, but they also contribute to the formation of public opinion, as the public sphere has increasingly become vulnerable to propaganda, myths, and political amnesia.

The development of this thematic field has been influenced by the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Russia's attacks against cultural heritage and memory institutions have demonstrated that history and memory have long ceased to be merely the matter of academic discussion or unearthing of immemorial historical times. The ongoing war in Ukraine has revealed the crucial significance of GLAM: in addition to documenting the past, these institutions have also shown an exceptional capacity of a rapid recording of everyday reality of war. The practice of Ukraine's national museums has demonstrated that artefacts collected in a war zone are not mere exhibits, they also form the basis for authenticity, historical testimony, and the disclosure of truth.[6] This was the topic on which I most wished to hear practitioners' experiences. At the conference, this issue was discussed in considerable depth and even somewhat painfully by Kseniya Kharchenko,[7] a Ukrainian writer, who was based in Austria at the time of the conference, and Vidmantas Balkūnas,[8] a well-known Lithuanian press photographer and investigative journalism professional, who has worked in conflict zones in various countries.

The documentation of grim everyday reality of war can become not only a matter of memory, but also of resistance, security, or even the freedom of the state. Here, I would like to recall more than one case, in which Lithuanian and other countries' museums have organized, and continue to organize exhibitions based on the collections of Ukrainian museums and archives, thereby attesting to Ukraine's historical existence as a sovereign country.[9] Thus, GLAM plays an unquestionably active role in the state, society, and civic self-awareness.

During the conference, the participants repeatedly asked the organizers of the event why the library in particular and not any other Lithuanian memory institutions had initiated this particular scholarly discussion. The answer is simple: Why not the library? The National Library of Lithuania has many and diverse profiles. In addition to being the most important book repository and knowledge space in the country, it is also a parliamentary library, contributing to the preparation of information for the members of the Lithuanian Parliament. The National Library of Lithuania is home to the Children's and Youth Literature Center, which brings together professionals in this field and also engages the young readers with various activities. As a research institution, the National Library of Lithuania has been

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6 See more, Kharkhun, V. Warring Memory: Exhibiting the Russo-Ukrainian War in Ukraine's National Museums. *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 2025, p. 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2025.10089; Vonnák, D. "This Happened to Us for the Second Time": War-preparedness, Risk, Responsibility and the Evacuation of Donbas Museums in 2022. *Museum and Society*, 2023, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 4–16 https://doi.org/10.29311/mas.v21i2.4305; Ourdan, R. In Ukraine, the High Stakes of Documenting the War. *Le Monde*, 11 June 2025. Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/06/11/in-ukraine-the-high-stakes-of-documenting-the-war_6742226_4.html [accessed 11/08/2026].

7 Kharchenko, K. Speaker Profile. In: *International Conference "Memory Institutions and the State: Connecting History, Understanding the Present, and Building a Future."* Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, 7–8th November 2024. Retrieved from https://konferencijos.lnb.lt/lnb105/kseniya-kharchenko/ [accessed 11/08/2026]. Watch the video of the presentation, *International Conference "Memory Institutions and the State." November 7th, Conference Hall / Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania*.

8 Balkūnas, V. Speaker Profile. In: *International Conference "Memory Institutions and the State: Connecting History, Understanding the Present, and Building a Future."* Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, 7–8 November 2024. Retrieved from https://konferencijos.lnb.lt/lnb105/vidmantas-balkunas/ [accessed 11/08/2026]. Watch the video of the presentation, *International Conference "Memory Institutions and the State." November 7th, Conference Hall / Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania*.

9 Another telling example is an open appeal sent only a few days after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion by the National Library of Lithuania to the global library community and institutions, representing more than 60,000 libraries across Europe and America, "On Solidarity Initiatives with the People of Ukraine." The whole text of the Appeal can be found here: https://www.lnb.lt/media/public/documents/Public_Appeal_to_the_World_Community_of_Libraries.pdf [accessed 11/08/2026]. See also, National Libraries of the Baltic Countries Express Solidarity and Support the Fighting Ukraine. *Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania*, 28 February 2022. Retrieved from https://www.lnb.lt/en/news/8265-open-appeal-to-the-world-s-library-community-on-initiatives-for-solidarity-with-the-people-of-ukraine [accessed 11/08/2026].

strongly committed to Judaica studies; its Statehood Center, which organizes international conferences and exhibitions, is also located on its premises; moreover, highly important research on the Lithuanian diaspora, old books, and other fields has been carried out.

It is evident that a contemporary library is an important space for historical research, the actualization of memory and international scholarly cooperation that has sufficient competence to initiate various scholarly events and be no less attractive than academic institutions. This special issue serves as further evidence of this.

Structure and Content of the Special Issue

This special issue of "Aktualu rytoj / Relevant Tomorrow" is significant because it reconsiders the relationship between memory institutions and the state not as a narrow topic of public cultural administration, but as a broad and profound reflection on democracy, historical responsibility, public opinion, and citizens' identity. The issue contains articles by ten researchers working in the international arena and a book review. The geographical scope of the research extends from Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland to Ukraine, South Africa, and the Lithuanian diaspora in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay.

Michael Bernhard (University of Florida) clearly identifies that the state's relationship with memory institutions depends on the nature of governance, and that in situations dangerous to democracy, these institutions may become targets of memory wars and political pressure. He makes it possible to link the professionalism of memory institutions with the knowledge base of democratic society: "the politicization of libraries, archives, and universities promotes ignorance rather than knowledge.[10] Izabela Paszko (German Historical Institute Warsaw) extends the concept of memory institutions into the field of urban space and architecture.[11] Zigmas Vitkus (Klaipėda University), in turn, explores how state-established memory institutions of Lithuania can maintain their scholarly authority when they are at the same time expected to represent the state's memory policy.[12] Rikard Friberg von Sydow (Södertörn University) talks about the museum not only as an institution, but also as a space of dispute over public trust, cultural policy, and expert autonomy.[13] Jan Haugner (University of Bern) provides one of the stronger formulations of the role of the archive, describing it as "the soul of the state."[14] Yet it serves not as a romantic description, but as a clear reminder that the archive may be the basis of political legitimation, and that archival memory is not neutral, because the documents may fail to be created, be destroyed, or manipulated if they do not correspond to the desired image of the state.

Colleagues from the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Elżbieta Nowosielska, Michał Raczkowski, and Adrianna Sznapik, define the significance of a digital humanities project "The Cultural and Intellectual Geography of the Former Polish Lands after the Partitions, 1865–1918: A Digital Vademecum"[15]; whereas Georgi Verbeeck (Maastricht University),

[10] Bernhard, M. *State Memory Institutions and Modes of Civil Society*, p. 8–22, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.2.

[11] Paszko, I. *Täterort Topography as Object: The Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism and Modern Infrastructures of Memory*, p. 23–40, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.3.

[12] Vitkus, Z. *Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimų centras: tarp ekspertinės ir atstovaujamosios institucijos*, p. 41–61, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.4.

[13] Friberg von Sydow, R. *The Debate Regarding the Swedish Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities: Politics, Postmodernism and the Purpose of a Museum*, p. 62–75, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.5.

[14] Haugner, J. *Turning Memories into Power: Swiss Archives as a Tool of Republican Policymaking in the Second Half of the Early Modern Period*, p. 76–92, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.6.

[15] Nowosielska, E.; Raczkowski, M.; Sznapik, A. *Digital Humanities: An Opportunity or a Challenge When Dealing with Cultural Heritage and Memory? Reflections on the Project "Cultural and Intellectual Geography of the Former Polish Lands after the Partitions, 1865–1918: A Digital Vademecum,"* p. 93–114, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.7.

when analyzing the case of Eugene de Kock in post-apartheid South Africa, shows "how a state can shape collective memory."[16] Tetiana Boriak (Vilnius University) enables us to see Ukrainian memory policy not only as a field of conflict, but also as a rapidly consolidating foundation of statehood under wartime conditions.[17]

The collection of articles concludes with Gabija Vyšniauskaitė-Danusė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore), who analyzes the problems of Lithuanian diaspora heritage in South America,[18] and Oksana Brui's (Yaroslav Mudryi National Library of Ukraine), Tetiana Chorna's (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy Library), and Oleh Serbin's (Yaroslav Mudryi National Library of Ukraine) joint article, which presents a model for the development and collaboration of the National Digital Library of Ukraine, revealing how memory institutions, the Ukrainian government, and non-governmental organizations have been coordinating their efforts to preserve the country's cultural heritage despite the challenges posed by ongoing Russia's war against Ukraine.[19]

The special issue is crowned by Rasa Čepaitienė's review of Neringa Klumbytė's book on political humor and Soviet dystopia in Lithuania, in which the author reminds us that memory is formed not only in institutional archives or museums, but that it can be found in language, irony, everyday life, and cultural experience.[20]

Memory institutions operate on many closely interconnected planes. They preserve and document the past, shape public opinion, mediate the dialogue between the state and society, often become objects of political battles, and at the same time encourage a critical review of what is regarded as global, national, regional, or local historical memory.

Post Scriptum

On behalf of the editors of this special issue, we sincerely thank the authors for their collaboration and for their feedback as conference participants. Particular recognition goes to Dr. Sigita Černevičiūtė, one of the chairs of the conference's organizing committee, for her contribution to organizing the event. We also thank the reviewers (the journal uses a double-blind review process) for their critical comments and constructive suggestions in improving the articles submitted for this special issue. Finally, we thank the team at the Science and Encyclopedia Publishing Center of the National Library of Lithuania for their assistance in publishing this issue: Dr. Dalia Cidzikaitė, the English-language editor (and one of the editors of this issue), Daina Dailidonienė and Mindaugas Karaciejus, the Lithuanian-language editors, and Tomas Rastenis, the layout designer.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

[16] Verbeeck, G. *Dealing with 'Prime Evil' in South Africa: The Eugene de Kock Case between Justice, Reconciliation, and Memory*, p. 115–131, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.8.

[17] Boriak, T. *The Politics of Memory and the Dynamics of State-Building in Ukraine Since 2014: The Historical Markers of Identity*, p. 132–155, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.9.

[18] Vyšniauskaitė-Danusė, G. *From Migration to Memory: The Preservation of the Lithuanian Diaspora Heritage in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay*, p. 156–173, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.10.

[19] Brui, O.; Chorna, T.; Serbin, O. *On the Way to the National Digital Library of Ukraine: The Collaboration of Memory Institutions, the State, and NGOs in Preserving Cultural Heritage in Wartime*, p. 174–190, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.11.

[20] Čepaitienė, R. *Juokas, kuris ne visada juokiasi kartu su valdžia (Rec.: Neringa Klumbytė,* Autoritarinis juokas: politinis humoras ir sovietinė distopija Lietuvoje / *iš anglų k. vertė Daiva Litvinskaitė, Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinės Martyno Mažvydo bibliotekos Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos centras, 2024. – 344 p. ISBN 978-5-420-01872-9)*, p. 191–191, https://doi.org/10.51740/RT.5.27.28.13.

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