Nagrada ŽIVA fsk.si | ŽIVA Award

CONFERENCE AND AWARD CEREMONY PROGRAMME

ŽIVA Award 2026

12th Edition

Myth and Memory in the Slavic Cultural Space

30 September – 3 October 2026
Bled, Slovenia

FORUM of Slavic Cultures fsk.si

ZKB ZAVOD ZA KULTURO BLED

Republic of Serbia Ministry of Culture

REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA MINISTRSTVO ZA KULTURO

DAY 1
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2026

16.30 / 20.00	**Registration & Information Desk** Venue: **Bled Festival Hall – Congress Centre, Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled, Slovenia**

17.00 / 18.30	**Meeting of the ŽIVA Jury** Venue: **Bled Festival Hall – Congress Centre, Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled, Slovenia**

19.00	**Organized Transfer of ŽIVA Participants to Bled Castle (ŽIVA 2024 Best Slavic Heritage Site)** Pick-up location: **Main Entrance of Bled Festival Hall – Congress Centre, Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled, Slovenia**
20.00 / 21.00	**Heritage in Motion (HIM) 2026 Award Ceremony** Venue: **Bled Castle**, Grajska cesta 61, 4260 Bled **Master of Ceremonies:** **Darja Pretnar** **Musical Performance:** **Špela Šemrl**, accordion **Welcome** **Lea Ferjan**, Director of the Bled Culture Institute **The Meaning of the HIM Awards** **Massimo Negri**, Scientific Director of the European Museum Academy **Andreja Rihter**, Director of the Forum of Slavic Cultures and President of the European Museum Academy **Introduction to the Awards** **Stojan Pelko**, Coordinator of the HIM Jury **Award Ceremony** **New Digital Experiences** **Virtual, Augmented & Extended Reality** **Audiovisuals** **Museums in Short** **Overall HIM Winner Announcement** **Group Photograph of the Award Winners**

21.00 / 22.30	**HIM and ŽIVA Dinner –** ***The opening of ŽIVA 2026*** Venue: **Bled Castle**, Grajska cesta 61, 4260 Bled
22.30	**Organized Transfer of ŽIVA Participants from Bled Castle**

DAY 2
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2026

8.30 / 18.00	**Registration & Information Desk** Venue**: Bled Festival Hall – Congress Centre, Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled, Slovenia**

9.30 / 9.45	**Opening of the ŽIVA 2026 Conference:** ***Myth and Memory in the Slavic Cultural Space*** Venue: **Bled Festival Hall – Congress Centre, Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled, Slovenia** **Lea Ferjan**, Director of the Bled Culture Institute **Andreja Rihter**, Director of the Forum of Slavic Cultures (FSK)
9.45 / 10.25	**Keynote:** ***Slavic Myths: From Vampires to Werewolves and Beyond*** **Noah Charney,** internationally bestselling author, TV presenter and professor of art history Exploring the mythology, folklore and legendary creatures of the Slavic world, from vampires and werewolves to witches, water spirits, dragons and forest beings. Drawing on his book *Slavic Myths*, Noah Charney will examine what these stories reveal about the societies that created them – and how they continue to resonate in literature, art, film, tourism and contemporary identity. **Introduction: Andreja Rihter**, Director of the Forum of Slavic Cultures (FSK)
10.25 / 10.40	**Does the Award Change Everything?** **Tatjana Vlahović,** Director of the Croatian Natural History Museum and recipient of the 2025 ŽIVA Award for the Best Slavic Museum What has changed since receiving the 2025 ŽIVA Award? Tatjana Vlahović will share her reflections on the impact of the award, new opportunities and the museum's journey since becoming the 2025 ŽIVA Award winner.

	Introduction: **Lidija Nikočević**, Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Croatia
10.40 / 11.00	Coffee Break
Presentations by the ŽIVA Award 2026 Nominees and Thematic Panels ***Categories: Best Slavic Museum & Best Slavic Heritage Site***	
11.00 / 11.10	**Introduction: Pavel Douša**, Chair of the ŽIVA Award 2026 Jury, Czech Republic
11.10 / 12.00	**Traces of Memory** *How do museums preserve, interpret and give new meaning to the traces of individual and collective memory?* **Moderator: Pavel Douša,** Chair of the ŽIVA Award 2026 Jury, Czech Republic • **Memorial House of Milica Babić Andrić**, Bosnia and Herzegovina • **Historical Museum – Tutrakan**, Bulgaria • **EPICenter (European Platform for the Interpretation of the XX Century), GO! 2025,** Slovenia • **Museum of Hostages**, Radovljica Municipality Museums, Slovenia • **PI "Homeland Museum" Visoko**, Bosnia and Herzegovina
12.00 / 12.50	**Heritage Dialogue** *Cultural heritage comes to life through dialogue – between generations, communities, institutions and different ways of understanding the past.* **Moderator: Branislav Panis**, Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Slovakia • **Museums of the Croatian Zagorje**, Croatia • **Museum of the Mazovian Nobility in Ciechanów**, Poland • **Rural Transport Museum**, Slovenia • **Maritime Museum of Montenegro**, Montenegro • **NI Institute and Museum Bitola**, North Macedonia
12.50 / 13.40	**Living Stories** *How do stories of the past continue to live, evolve and find new forms in contemporary museums and communities?* **Moderator: Neda Knežević**, Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Serbia • **Planet Sarajevo**, Bosnia and Herzegovina • **Video Game History Museum**, Croatia • **MUZA Museum and Gallery**, Slovenia

	• **Slovenian School Museum**, Slovenia • **Museum for Change**, Ukraine
13.40 / 14.40	Lunch Break
14.40 / 15.20	**Traces That Remain** *Through art, exhibitions and cultural memory, traces of the past are preserved, reinterpreted and given new meaning for the present.* **Moderator: Maja Chankulovska Mihajlovska,** Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, North Macedonia • **Museum of Modern Art**, Bosnia and Herzegovina • **Art Colony Danilovgrad**, Montenegro • **Gallery of Contemporary Fine Arts Niš**, Serbia • **The Gallery of Matica Srpska**, Serbia
15.20 / 15.50	**Memory That Lives On** *Memory lives through the ways communities remember, experience and give meaning to their shared past, making it an active part of cultural identity and contemporary life.* **Moderator: Sarita Vujković**, Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Bosnia and Herzegovina • **PI Museum and Gallery Tivat**, Montenegro • **NI Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje**, North Macedonia • **The Municipal Public Institution "Museums of Kotor"**, Montenegro
15.50 / 16.50	**Our Stories, Our Heritage** *Heritage is shaped by the stories we choose to remember, the voices we give space to, and the meanings we create together.* **Moderator: Dirk Houtgraaf**, Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Netherlands • **Split City Museum**, Croatia • **Pakrac City Museum**, Croatia • **The Museum of Trenčín**, Slovakia • **Regional Museum Goriški muzej**, Slovenia • **Pomurje Museum Murska Sobota**, Slovenia
	Coffee Break **Coffee will be available at the venue from 16:00 onwards.*
16.50 / 17.20	**Between Myth and Memory**

	Myths, stories and ancient traditions continue to shape collective memory and resonate through places, customs and cultural practices. **Moderator: Lidija Nikočević**, Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Croatia • **Vysočina Open Air Museum**, Czech Republic • **Museum of Folk Architecture Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek**, Poland • **Museum – Teodora and Izydor Gulgowski Kashubian Ethnographic Park in Wdzydze**, Poland
17.20 / 18.00	**Living Landscapes, Living Heritage** *How are natural and cultural landscapes shaped by human experience, and how can museums preserve, interpret and bring to life the traditions and memories connected to them?* **Moderator: Robert Zydel,** Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Poland • **Rogatec Open Air Museum**, Slovenia • **Ecomuseum of the Seasonal Lakes of Pivka**, Slovenia • **National Parks of Montenegro**, Montenegro • **Slovene Ethnographic Museum**, Slovenia
18.00 / 18.30	**Heritage in Place** *Museums bring heritage to life by connecting objects, stories, traditional skills and practices with the places and communities in which they belong.* **Moderator: Dobrila Vlahović**, Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Montenegro • **Museum of Masovian Countryside in Sierpc**, Poland • **Montenegrin Wool Institute Nikšić**, Montenegro • **Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok**, Poland
19.00	**Cocktail Dinner**

DAY 3
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2026

8.30 / 18.00	**Registration & Information Desk** Venue: **Bled Festival Hall – Congress Centre, Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled, Slovenia**

9.00 / 9.40	**Keynote: *Czech Museums and the 21st Century*** **Michal Stehlík**, Historian and Director of the Czech Museum of Literature, Professor of Museum Studies at Charles University Drawing on the rich history of Czech museums, Michal Stehlík will reflect on how their role has evolved from institutions shaped by national ideas to institutions navigating the complexities of contemporary society. He will explore the challenges facing museums in the 21st century, from digitalisation and changing visitor expectations to questions of social relevance, cultural heritage and the future role of museums. **Introduction: Pavel Douša**, Chair of the ŽIVA Award 2026 Jury, Czech Republic
Presentations by the ŽIVA Award 2026 Nominees *Category:* ***Excellence in Preserving Slavic Heritage Worldwide***	
9.40 / 10.20	**Slavic Heritage Beyond Borders – Part 1** *Slavic cultural heritage travels across borders through communities, organisations and initiatives that keep traditions, stories and cultural identities alive in new environments.* **Moderator: Nina Zdravič**, Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Slovenia • **Slovenian Cultural Action**, Argentina • **Slovene Ethnographic Institute Urban Jarnik**, Austria • **Ukrainian Museum of Canada**, Canada
10.20 / 10.35	Coffee Break
10.35 / 11.15	**Slavic Heritage Beyond Borders – Part 2** **Moderator: Elia Vlachou,** Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Greece • **Lojze Bratuž Cultural Centre**, Italy

	• **Serbian Church Museum of Szentendre** (Hungary) • **SMO Narratives and Landscapes Museum** (Italy)
11.15 / 11.30	**What Comes After the Award?** **Goran Patchev,** Director of the NI Institute for Protection of Monuments of Culture and Museum Ohrid, Ohrid, North Macedonia What makes a heritage site successful today? Goran Patchev reflects on the journey since receiving the 2025 ŽIVA Award for Best Heritage Site. **Introduction: Neda Knežević**, Member of the ŽIVA Award Jury, Serbia
11.30 / 11.45	**Presentation of the ŽIVA Award 2027** *Coming to Malinska-Dubašnica, Island of Krk, Croatia, in 2027* **Dino Buljat**, Executive Manager at the Maritime Heritage Interpretation Centre DUBoak
11.45 / 12.30	**CERTIFICATE PRESENTATION & PHOTO SESSION** *The ŽIVA Award Jury will formally present certificates to all nominated museums, followed by a group photo session.*

12.30 / 16.00	**Museum Marketplace** *The Marketplace is an integral part of the ŽIVA Award programme, creating a space for professional exchange, networking and the sharing of experiences among museums and cultural institutions from across the region. By bringing institutions together in an informal setting, it encourages new connections, strengthens cooperation and opens opportunities for future partnerships.*
14.00 / 15.00	Lunch

19.00 / 20.30	**ŽIVA 2026 AWARD CEREMONY** Venue: **Big Hall, Bled Festival Hall – Congress Centre, Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled, Slovenia** **Master of Ceremonies: Darja Pretnar** **Musical Performance: Šuštarji ensemble** **Welcome:**

	- **Lea Ferjan**, Director of the Bled Culture Institute - **Anton Mežan**, Mayor of the Municipality of Bled - **Karl Murr**, Chairman of the European Museum Academy Board **Ceremonial Address** - **Tanja Pak**, Professor and Head of Glass, ALUO, Ljubljana; Founder, Tanja Pak Glass Design Studio **Address** - **Viljem Leban**, Acting Director-General, Cultural Heritage Directorate, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia **The Meaning of the ŽIVA Award** - **Andreja Rihter**, Director of the Forum of Slavic Cultures **Introduction to the ŽIVA Awards** - **Pavel Douša**, Chair of the ŽIVA Award 2026 Jury, Czech Republic **Award Ceremony** - **ŽIVA Special Recognition for Interpretation of Intangible Cultural Heritage** - **ŽIVA Special Recognition for Community Engagement** - **ŽIVA Special Recognition for Outstanding Exhibits** - **Honourable Mention** - **Culture Hero of the Slavic Heritage** - **Ambassadors for Excellence in Preserving Slavic Heritage Worldwide** - **Best Slavic Heritage Site** - **Best Slavic Museum** **Group Photograph of the Award Winners**
20.45	**Organized Transfer of ŽIVA Participants to Bled Castle** (ŽIVA 2024 Best Slavic Heritage Site) Pick-up location: **Main Entrance of Bled Festival Hall – Congress Centre**, Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled, Slovenia
21.00 / 23.00	**Gala Dinner** Venue: **Bled Castle, Grajska cesta 61, 4260 Bled**
23.00	**Organized Transfer of ŽIVA Participants from Bled Castle**

CONFERENCE & AWARD CEREMONY VENUE:	**Bled Festival Hall – Congress Centre** Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled, Slovenia *All ŽIVA conference sessions and activities, including the Award Ceremony, will take place at this venue.*
GALA DINNER VENUE:	**Bled Castle** Grajska cesta 61, 4260 Bled, Slovenia

DAY 4

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2026

EXCURSION DAY

9.00	Meeting point and departure for the excursion **Bled Festival Hall – Congress Centre, Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled, Slovenia**
9.00 / 13.00	**Guided tour of Bled** Lakeside promenade, Pr' Mrako – Homestead and Slavko Oblak Gallery, Bled Castle (ŽIVA 2024 Best Slavic Heritage Site)
13.00 / 14.00	Lunch Venue: **Bled Castle**, Grajska cesta 61, 4260 Bled

Bled – A Historic Setting for the ŽIVA Award 2026 Ceremony

Bled, a picturesque destination, enchants visitors with its fairytale charm – Lake Bled, with its iconic island and church framed by Alpine peaks, and the imposing Bled Castle, perched high on a cliff above the lake.

Its history stretches back more than a thousand years: it was first mentioned in a deed of donation in 1004, when German Emperor Henry II conferred the Bled estate upon the Bishops of Brixen. Over the centuries, Bled became a sought-after spa and holiday retreat, particularly during the Austro-Hungarian era, when it gained renown as a prestigious getaway for the European aristocracy. Today, Bled offers a rare combination of archaeological and cultural heritage, natural beauty, and a peaceful atmosphere, continuing to captivate visitors from around the world. It stands as both an icon of Slovenian tourism and a place of warm, welcoming hospitality.

Once again, Bled will provide the perfect setting to celebrate outstanding achievements in museum practice, heritage interpretation, and Slavic cultural cooperation. The 2026 ŽIVA Award is organised by the Forum of Slavic Cultures in close cooperation with the Bled Culture Institute and the Municipality of Bled. The three-day event will culminate in the ceremonial awards presentation, attended by nominees, cultural representatives, and jury members from the Forum's partner organisation, the European Museum Academy (EMA). The Bled Culture Institute, established in 2004 by the Municipality of Bled, is responsible for managing the Bled area and developing its cultural infrastructure and programmes. The Institute was also the recipient of the 2024 ŽIVA Award for the Best Slavic Heritage Site, in recognition of its exemplary preservation and presentation of Bled Castle.

The main congress venue in Bled will be the Festival Hall, the largest conference centre in the area and the central venue of the ŽIVA Award programme. The modern Festival Hall Bled is recognised as a leading venue for business, scientific and protocol events, including the annual Bled Strategic Forum, which brings together political and economic leaders from across Europe and the Balkans. Its lakeside location, within walking distance of hotels and accommodation, makes it highly accessible. The Festival Hall Bled is also the recipient of the Good Travel Seal Platinum certificate, confirming its strong commitment to responsible and sustainable management.

The ŽIVA Award has a special historical and cultural connection with Bled. Although the goddess Živa is scarcely mentioned in historical sources, she is remembered in folk traditions, particularly in connection with "living waters" and sacred landscapes. According to local legend, a pagan shrine dedicated to Živa once stood on Bled Island, later replaced by a Christian church. Živa is, in a way, returning home, back to her symbolic and cultural roots.

We warmly look forward to welcoming you and to celebrating the richness of cultural diversity, creativity, and meaningful collaboration.

Marketplace

The Marketplace is a dedicated networking space within the conference, designed to enable informal exchange and presentation of participating institutions. All nominated institutions, as well as other registered participants, will have the opportunity to showcase their work, activities, and selected materials (such as brochures, catalogues, and objects) in a relaxed and open setting. It will take place on **Friday, 2 October 2026**.

Each participating institution will be provided with an individual stand, offering space for informal presentations, networking, and exchange with other participants, as well as opportunities for future collaboration.

Further details regarding the setup, technical equipment, and stand arrangements will be communicated by the local organiser in due course.

Photo: Bled Culture Institute

Excursion

We will begin with a walk along the lakeside promenade, enjoying views of Bled Island and Bled Castle. The route continues through the Spa Park, dedicated to Arnold Rikli, the founder of modern tourism in Bled, and past the monument to Slovenia's greatest poet, France Prešeren. We will stop at Slovenski trg next to the Parish Church of St. Martin, visit the old village centre, and then return to the starting point.

Transfer to the Pr' Mrako Homestead and the Slavko Oblak Gallery.

The Pr' Mrako Homestead is a well-preserved example of 17th-century vernacular architecture and an important part of the cultural heritage of the village of Rečica. The characteristic design of the homestead and its surroundings tells the story of the life, work, and values of a prosperous farming family across generations.

Photo: Bled Culture Institute

Transfer to Bled Castle.

Bled Castle, which majestically rises on a 130-meter-high cliff above Lake Bled, is the oldest castle mentioned in written records in Slovenia. It was first referenced in 1011. Over the centuries, the castle has undergone numerous renovations and expansions.

Photo: Bled Culture Institute

Organisers of ŽIVA 2026

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International Foundation – Forum of Slavic Cultures

The International Foundation – Forum of Slavic Cultures (FSK) was established just one month after the first Slavic countries – Slovenia, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic – joined the European Union. It was June 2004, and for the first time ever, Slavic languages became official languages of the European Parliament. This marked a period of renewed building of bridges between Slavic nations and the rest of Europe, with the Forum of Slavic Cultures taking on a pioneering role as a link between Slavic countries through their shared cultural heritage. It was also a time that held up a mirror to us all, challenging us to take responsibility for confronting the ambivalent identity of the Slavic world within our common European family.

Initially neglected and underestimated, the richness of Slavic spiritual and cultural heritage was largely forgotten and widely misunderstood. Here lies the unique mission of the Forum of Slavic Cultures – an organisation that has, for twenty years, connected nations on democratic and equal grounds, while diligently working to renew, expand, and strengthen cultural ties among our countries. At the FSK, we firmly believe that cultural liaison and cooperation are the key to facilitating Slavic creativity, strengthening our identity and reviving cultural dialogue in both the European and the broader global arena.

Our widely recognized ŽIVA Award highlights and rewards best practices in museums, fostering the continuous exchange of experiences and ideas. Meanwhile, the International Summer School of Museology has established us as an educational hub for Slavic countries.

Our work is always guided by principles of mutual respect for diversity, equality of all cultural and artistic expressions, and active intercultural dialogue. We believe these are essential pillars for respectful and tolerant coexistence in an increasingly complex world.

Bled Culture Institute

ZKB ZAVOD ZA KULTURO BLED
BLED CULTURE INSTITUTE

AN INSTITUTE WITH A CLEAR CULTURAL MISSION

The Bled Culture Institute is a public institution established by the Municipality of Bled with the purpose of preserving, developing, and coordinating the cultural life of the local area. It was founded on November 11, 2004 by an official municipal decree and has since carried out a wide range of important tasks related to the protection of cultural heritage and the creation of contemporary cultural content. Its central responsibility is the management of Bled Castle as a cultural monument of national importance, as well as the care of other cultural buildings and infrastructure in the municipality.

BLED CASTLE – A SENTINEL ABOVE LAKE BLED

Perched on a cliff above the lake, Bled Castle, the oldest castle in Slovenia, has been watching over the area below for more than one thousand years. Its first written mention dates back to the year 1011, when it was an important strategic and administrative centre of the region. Today, the castle is a symbol of Bled's identity and its historical heritage, and continues to captivate visitors with its stunning views, amazing museum collections and art exhibitions.

A SPACE FOR CREATIVITY AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Over the years, the institute has designed and carried out numerous projects reaching beyond the local environment. It has brought to Bled renowned artists, as well as many performances, concerts, exhibitions, and festivals that place the town firmly on Slovenia's cultural map. Each event is more than just an occasion. It is an opportunity for people, ideas, and stories to meet. Through its work, Bled Culture Institute clearly demonstrates that culture is a living part of the local environment. It connects the community, welcomes visitors, and builds bridges between heritage and the present.

FESTIVALNA DVORANA BLED
BLED CONGRESS CENTRE

DISCOVER THE BLED CONGRESS CENTRE

The Bled Congress Centre is the largest conference centre in Bled, offering space for up to 484 participants in its main amphitheatre-shaped hall. There are also three smaller halls and a spacious foyer, which is suitable for participant registration, exhibitions, coffee breaks, and receptions. The smaller halls and foyer feature natural daylight and offer beautiful views of Lake Bled.

The European Museum Academy

European Museum Academy

The European Museum Academy (EMA) is a non-profit foundation dedicated to advancing international dialogue and critical reflection on museums. It promotes research in museography and museology, encourages debate on emerging trends, and supports the evolving social role of museums in a rapidly changing world. A key aim of EMA is to disseminate museological knowledge and foster innovation within the museum profession.

EMA is a volunteer-based network of museum experts from diverse national and cultural backgrounds, united by a shared commitment to the advancement of museological knowledge and practice. Its work is grounded in a proven track record of developing and managing innovative museum projects.

The Academy views museums as powerful instruments for addressing the socio-economic and cultural challenges of our time. It advocates for the modern museum as a space for creativity, public engagement, scientific dialogue, and social cohesion – a meeting place where cultural dialogue and shared understanding can flourish.

Supporters of ŽIVA 2026

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Slovenian Tourist Board

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