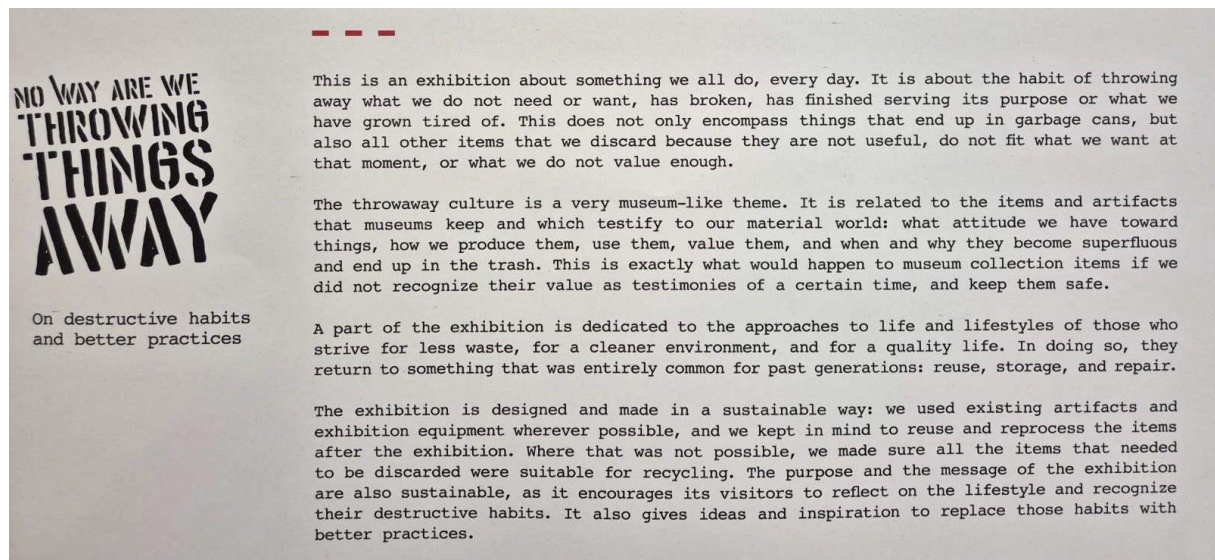


## No way are we throwing things away

In May 2023, the Museum of Recent History Celje from Slovenia presented the first fully sustainable exhibition, encouraging visitors to live more sustainably in both content and form. The exhibition was installed at the museum between May 2023 and March 2024, and since then part of the exhibition has been hosted at the Faculty of Environmental Protection in Velenje.

The exhibition, entitled **»No way are we throwing things away«: On destructive habits and better practices**, focuses on the problems of contemporary society related to the excessive throwing away of objects and pollution of the environment. It aims to encourage visitors to reflect on their consumption habits and raise awareness of the harmful consequences of such behaviour for the future. The exhibition highlights how our relationship with material objects has changed over time and how objects that were once essential in every household are now almost forgotten and can only be found in museums. The plastics that became a feature of the 20th century have replaced many other materials, but it is this change that is key to the environmental impact, as plastic products are often designed to be used only once. In the past, items justified the investment of resources and energy over their long lifetime, but today they are often discarded before they have fulfilled their purpose.

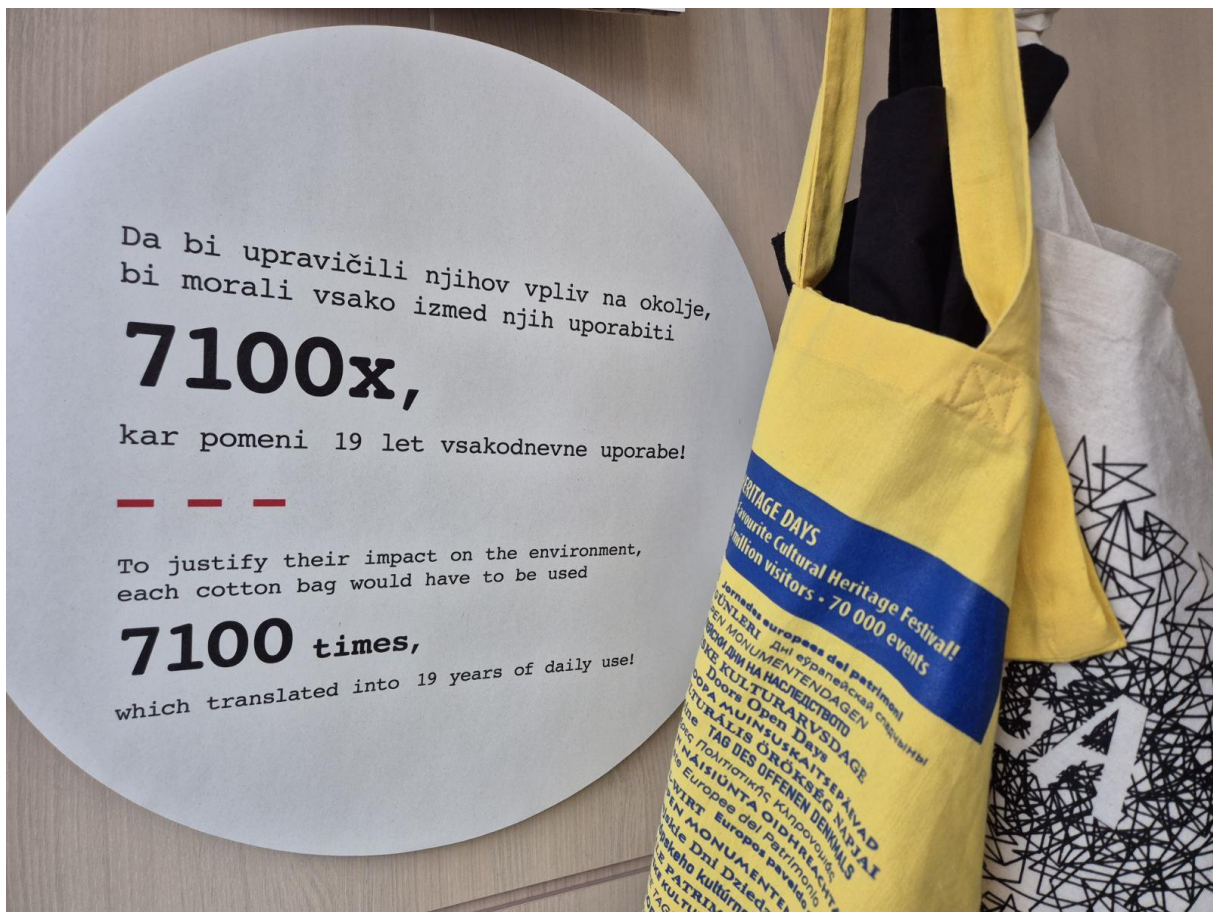


Throwing away has a long history going back millennia. In fact, humans have always thrown away what they no longer needed or found useful or helpful. The oldest known landfills discovered by archaeologists in Crete are around 5000 years old. But there is a big difference between throwing it away then and now. In the past, wastes were made of natural materials that decomposed over time and therefore had no long-term impact on the environment. Litter was mainly a hygienic and aesthetic problem, for example in the case of outbreaks of infectious diseases or dirty streets in medieval cities. However, litter has had a far-reaching and aggressive impact on the environment since the beginning of the 20th century, with the emergence of artificial materials such as plastics, invented in 1907 by the Belgian chemist Leo Baekeland. The development of this material led to new consumption patterns, especially after the Second World War, when consumerism became the key to economic growth. Companies such as General Motors in the US pioneered a planned obsolescence strategy to encourage people to buy new products before the old ones had served their purpose. When artificial materials became part of this mentality, the problem had catastrophic consequences for humans and, above all, the environment, and which modern society is struggling to cope with.



Consumer society has developed most in the West. In the 1950s, the term “Throwaway Society” was created in the USA, initially with a positive connotation. Disposable products were presented to people as a way to make their lives easier, as they were supposed to give them less work, more hygiene and more free time. Despite the fact that this way of life only came to Slovenia in the 1990s, it quickly took root and today has an exclusively negative connotation, and the consequences of this way of life are obvious and widespread. Small garbage dumps have become mountains, the biggest example being the former New York City landfill in Staten Island, which was once visible even from outer space, but has now been transformed into a park. Throwing it away has become a global habit, reflecting the modern consumption system, where people are most valuable as consumers. Instead of valuing products and the effort that goes into making them, we throw things away because we have too many of them or because they are made to spoil quickly, all of which has led us into an era where human lifestyles are impacting the planet in a profoundly negative way.





All of this makes me, as the writer of this text and co-author of the exhibition, extremely happy to be able to contribute, as a cultural worker, to a better understanding of the issues and to the solutions that we as individuals can implement in our lives. Knowledge is therefore a key element in change for the better. In fact, I am the best proof of this, because it was my research into the subject for the exhibition that led me to enrol in a postgraduate course at the Faculty of Environmental Protection, out of a desire for more knowledge. Since there are no coincidences, I am extremely happy that the exhibition I co-authored is now being hosted at the faculty where I am a student. Proof of how culture and science can intertwine and together address humans and humanity with the same questions and answers, each from its own perspective, but with the same goal-to make the world a better place.

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