

Science and arts intertwined: Defend knowledge, defend with knowledge

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Abstract

Events that combine scientific and artistic exhibitions in public spaces are rare, yet they offer a unique opportunity to present diverse perspectives on how we experience, interpret, and express our understanding of the world. “Defend Knowledge, Defend with Knowledge,” held on June 6 in Belgrade, Serbia, transformed Students’ Square into a vibrant venue featuring interactive scientific presentations, topical discussions, and artistic showcases by members of the University of Belgrade and the University of Arts in Belgrade, two institutions that play a vital role in Serbia’s academic, cultural, and social life. Visitors engaged with state-of-the-art topics in natural and technical sciences, participated in hands-on activities for children, and attended sessions on educational fairness, emotional intelligence, and lifelong learning. Artistic displays, including a charity bazaar, student film screenings, and musical performances, further enriched the event’s atmosphere. More than just informing and entertaining, the event conveyed a powerful message: universities are inextricably linked to society, working to improve life and the environment while offering solutions to contemporary challenges. By sharing scientific and artistic achievements in a common space, the event fostered curiosity, dialogue, and a sense of community, highlighting the essential role of knowledge and culture in society.

Keywords: University of Belgrade; University of Arts in Belgrade; interdisciplinary collaboration; public engagement; societal challenges; higher education.

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BOOK AND EVENT REVIEW

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are few events globally that combine scientific and artistic exhibitions, despite the appeal of presenting diverse perspectives on how we experience, interpret, and express our understanding of the world around us. While there are a few well-known international examples of science and art festivals or galleries, most of them focus on in-depth collaborations between scientists and artists or feature curated science-art exhibitions. The event “Defend Knowledge, Defend with Knowledge” held on June 6 in Belgrade, Serbia, offered a different but equally valuable approach: an open, street-level exhibition that brought together interactive scientific presentations, topical discussions, and artistic showcases from members of the University of Belgrade and the University of Arts in Belgrade.

Both universities play a vital role in the academic, cultural, and social life of Serbia. The University of Belgrade, established nearly 220 years ago, is the oldest and most significant academic institution in Serbia and the region. With 31 faculties and 11 research institutes spanning the social sciences, humanities, medical sciences, natural sciences, and engineering, it is recognized as a higher education institution of national importance. The University of Belgrade ranks among the top 1.9 % of universities worldwide according to the 2025 Global 2000 list by the Center for World University Rankings [1] and is consistently listed among the top 500 universities globally by the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) [2].

Equally significant is the University of Arts in Belgrade, comprising four faculties: Music, Fine Arts, Applied Arts, and Dramatic Arts. Although founded in 1957, its roots extend to the 19th century, with university-level arts education beginning in 1937 with the Academy of Fine Arts and the Music Academy, followed by the School of Applied Art in 1938. The University of Arts has profoundly shaped the cultural and artistic landscape of Serbia and the wider region, with many of the most eminent artists serving as educators and mentors.

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The event on June 6 represented only a glimpse of the broad impact these universities have on Serbian society and beyond. Among the highlights, the Faculty of Biology, Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy, Faculty of Physics, Faculty of Physical Chemistry, and the Institute of Chemistry, Technology and Metallurgy presented a diverse array of state-of-the-art topics in natural and technical sciences relevant to modern society (Figure 1). Passersby could learn about wastewater treatment, the transformation of various waste types into useful products and energy, novel biomaterials and advanced 3D-printed implants for dentistry and orthopedics, the advantages and disadvantages of lithium-ion versus sodium-ion batteries, genetic screening tests, climate change, and the use of planktonic organisms as indicators of environmental disturbances in aquatic systems. Alongside these “serious topics,” the exhibitions featured interactive experiments for children, who could create colorful jelly worms from alginate hydrogels, make batteries and bath bombs, observe algal cells under a microscope, and take a quiz on scientific names for various animals. Together, these topics and hands-on activities highlighted not only the relevance and impact of scientific research on society, but also the joy of discovery for all ages.



Figure 1. Highlights from the natural and technical sciences exhibition

In addition to the natural and technical sciences, the event also offered a space for reflection on the social and humanistic dimensions of knowledge. The Faculty of Philosophy contributed interactive sessions exploring questions of fairness in education, the role of learning in times of social change, the importance of emotional intelligence, and perspectives on adult education (Figure 2). These thought-provoking discussions invited participants to reflect on contemporary challenges in society and personal development from a humanistic angle.



Figure 2. Interactive exhibition on emotional intelligence: “(Don’t) Play with Feelings! A Little Bit about Emotional Intelligence :)” (“(Ne) igray se osećanjima! Nešto malo o emocionalnoj inteligenciji :)”)

However, the aim of the event was not only to inform, educate, entertain, and engage passersby, but also to convey a powerful message: universities are an inextricable part of society, dedicated to improving all aspects of life and the environment and providing solutions to contemporary challenges. In this spirit, the event featured an interdisciplinary interactive exhibition on two controversial mining projects in the Jadar and Homolje regions of Serbia. Both projects have raised nationwide concerns about toxic pollution, habitat destruction, and water contamination. Passersby had the opportunity to receive in-depth scientific information and engage directly with experts from the University of Belgrade. Additionally, a panel on university autonomy brought together six panelists from both participating universities to discuss the current status of universities in Serbia and the importance of maintaining autonomy for society as a whole (Figure 3). The discussion offered a historical perspective and emphasized that universities serve as early-warning systems for societal, economic, and ecological crises.



Figure 3. Panel on university autonomy (from left to right): Prof. Dejan Šabić (Faculty of Geography, UB), Prof. Katarina Popović (Faculty of Philosophy, UB), Prof. Dejan Pavlović (Faculty of Political Science, UB), Prof. Katarina Jovanović (Faculty of Music, UAB), Prof. Aleksandar Baucal (Faculty of Philosophy, UB), and Dr. Adriana Zaharijević (Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, UB). (UB – University of Belgrade; UAB – University of Arts in Belgrade)

Throughout the dynamic day, the scientific exhibitions and activities were interwoven with a range of artistic displays and programs. The Faculty of Applied Arts, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, and the Faculty of Music organized a charity bazaar featuring artistic crafts, artworks, and books by their own authors. The Faculty of Dramatic Arts also screened student films at its booth, while the Faculty of Music presented a rich program titled “All for Music, Music for All,” which featured student performances combining flute and electronics, as well as recitals by distinguished faculty members, including an acclaimed opera singer and exceptional pianists (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Artistic performance of Serbian solo songs by Prof. Katarina Jovanović (soprano) and Zorka Milivojević (piano), Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade

Overall, at the bustling Studentski trg (Students' Square) in front of the University of Belgrade Rectorate, the event attracted a steady stream of passersby and brought a vibrant spark to the city's usual Saturday rhythm. It demonstrated the power of sharing scientific and artistic achievements in a common space, inspiring curiosity, dialogue, and a sense of community around knowledge and creativity. In times when the value of knowledge and culture must be actively defended, such initiatives are more important than ever. We look forward to building on this success and seeing even more engagement at the next event in 2027!

REFERENCES

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Susret nauke i umetnosti: Branimo znanje(m)

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Izvod

Događaji koji prikazuju u javnom prostoru zajedno naučne i umetničke postavke su retki, ali nude jedinstvenu mogućnost predstavljanja različitih perspektiva o svetu koji nas okružuje. Postavka „Branimo znanje(m)“, održana 6. juna u Beogradu, pretvorila je Studentski trg u živopisno mesto sa interaktivnim naučnim prezentacijama, tematskim diskusijama i umetničkim programima u kojima su učestvovala članice Univerziteta u Beogradu i Univerziteta umetnosti u Beogradu, dve institucije koje imaju ključnu ulogu u akademskom, kulturnom i društvenom životu Srbije. Prolaznici su imali priliku da se upoznaju sa savremenim temama iz prirodnih i tehničkih nauka, učestvuju u interaktivnim radionicama za decu, kao i na sesijama o pravičnosti obrazovanja, emocionalnoj inteligenciji i učenju tokom celog života. Umetnički programi, uključujući humanitarni bazar, projekcije studentskih filmova i muzičke nastupe, dodatno su obogatili atmosferu događaja. Pored informativnih i zabavnih aktivnosti, poslata je i važna poruka: univerziteti su neraskidivo povezani sa društvom i posvećeni poboljšanju kvaliteta života i životne sredine, nudeći rešenja za sve savremene izazove. Kroz zajedničko predstavljanje naučnih i umetničkih dostignuća, događaj je podstakao radoznalost, dijalog i osećaj zajednice, naglašavajući ključnu ulogu znanja i kulture u društvu.

Ključne reči: Univerzitet u Beogradu; Univerzitet umetnosti u Beogradu; interdisciplinarna saradnja; uključivanje javnosti; izazovi današnjice; visoko obrazovanje

