

Andreea Buzzaș

The Traditional Village Represented in Romania's Open-Air Ethnographic Museums

Abstract

This paper work is a brief presentation of a comprehensive research project conducted as part of a doctoral program. Questions and problems related to the topic, as well as the process and methodology of the research are succinctly outlined, with the aim of introducing the reader to the most important open-air museums in Romania, while emphasizing the value of their identity. The quick development of museums has led to the emergence of a genuine Romanian school of museography, recognized both nationally and internationally. The source of this development resides in the museum discourse, that is, in the way how the museum manages to reevaluate its existing potential and to assert itself in the most diverse areas of public interest: scientific, educational, cultural, touristic, at the same time ensuring the representation of as many ethnographical areas as possible. Although the concept of ethnographical museum allows multiple approaches and definitions, this essay highlights the role of the identity of museums and their way of representing the traditional village, given the dynamics and the abandonment of traditions in modern times.

Keywords: museum, ethnography, culture, identity, tradition

The approach to this topic stems from our belief that a study which is based not only on ethnological researches but also on information provided by related disciplines (such as history, geography, and architecture), will ultimately contribute to the better, more accurate, understanding of the social and cultural hallmarks of the Romanian village, which at present is subjected to progres-



sive degradation¹, being faced with a crisis made even worse by modernization and globalization processes.

The research on the traditional village displayed in Romanian open-air ethnographic museums is all the more important since the phenomenon of village disaggregation has been triggered by the abandonment of traditions, along with the fact that tradition itself is often mistaken for everything that has turned obsolete, outmoded. In this respect, museums, especially the open-air ones, play a crucial role in the small-scale recreation of the village image, in saving and promoting the material and immaterial heritage of the village.

The fact that the traditional village stands for the “stylistic matrix” of the Romanian culture and civilization emphasizes the importance of any research that attempts to establish the extent to which the village gets its constituting, specific elements, displayed in Romania’s open-air ethnographic museums². These elements will be examined not only in museums, but also in the ETNO-MON – *Virtual Museum of open-air ethnographic monuments of Romania* repertory, a project completed by CIMEC (Institute for Cultural Memory) and coordinated by Irina Oberländer-Târnoveanu, in order to update to 2022 the information about the historical and thematic evolution of the country’s open-air museums.

Our research is a first synthesis on the status and role of open-air museums in capturing the essence and the individuality of the traditional Romanian village.

In dealing with the role of museums in delineating a people’s identity, one must take into account the capacity of those institutions to address comparatively the typical values of regional, zonal, and local ethnic groups against the backdrop of the sets of cultural values shared worldwide, as well as to assess and highlight the respective impact and importance of certain minorities.

In the context of the unification of the Romanian Principalities in 1859 and the completion of the state unity in 1918, the modernization of the country’s economic and socio-political life has affected the structure of the traditional folk civilization, by means of agrarian reforms, systematization of rural settlements (started in the eighteenth century, by the famous “aligning” process), emancipation of handicrafts and industries, modernization of means of locomotion and transport, as well as a radical transformation of rural architecture, indoor reorganization of rural houses and of the entire rural habitat.

All of these irreversible cultural and economic processes underwent various phases in the dynamics of keeping alive a tradition and, eventually, departing

¹ Bernea 2006.

² Opriș 1994.

from it. That made the role of ethnographic museums³ even more important in preserving traditional culture samples, in order to restore and reconstitute genuine historic albums of human civilization and, implicitly, an itinerary throughout centuries and millennia of history.

The research focused firstly on *The Romanian Village in Specialized Literature*, contouring the image of the village as depicted in creative writings, Romanian Academy membership acceptance speeches, the research conducted by the Bucharest School of Sociology, as well as in various other scholarly works. It addresses village aspects mirrored by Dimitrie Gusti⁴, Liviu Rebreanu⁵, Romulus Vuia, Simion Mehedinți, Lucian Blaga⁶, Henri H. Stahl⁷, Ernest Bernea, Traian Herseni, Constantin Noica, etc. The project also deals with the major research and studies made on the rural world, which have theoretically and methodologically inspired the organization of open-air ethnographic museums in Romania.

An important issue is the typology of rural settlements, in view of the geographic diversity of Romania and the historic conditions under which villages emerged and got organized. Another aspect being discussed is the necessity of a comprehensive, unitary system regarding the typology⁸ of villages, that should be flexible enough to apply to all villages and permanently update the information on the transformations affecting these human settlements.

The second objective addresses several general aspects of the *constitutive elements of the Romanian village*: the village's area and common lands, the dwelling, the household, the street, the church, the cemetery, the marketplace, the village's boundary signs, i.e., the wayside border crosses, crucifixes, fountains, peasant handicrafts and rural industries. This section of the dissertation establishes the role of these components in the rural world as well as reference points for the selection of the exhibits and the decisions concerning the most advisable ways to display them. It also attempts to identify several essential items lacking from Romanian open-air museums, with a view to adding them to present museum collections, pending on their availability in our villages.

The third objective of the research is dedicated to *the vernacular architecture reservations*. It focuses on a large number of legal aspects and implications and it underscores the role of reservations in the preservation of the Romanian

³ Stoica 1993.

⁴ Gusti 1965.

⁵ Rebreanu 1980.

⁶ Blaga 1980.

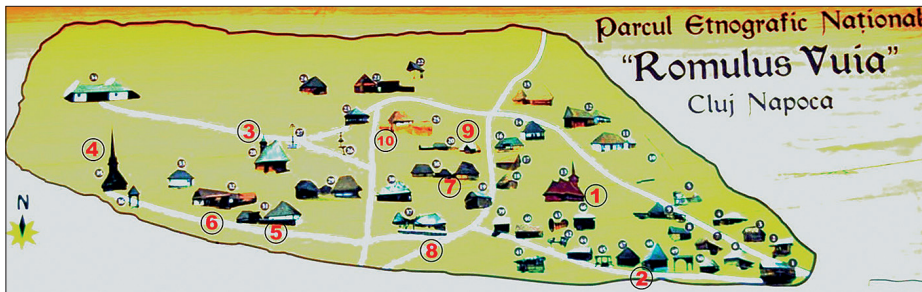
⁷ Stahl 1981.

⁸ Vuia 1975.

village, as a main way of protecting this type of human settlements prior to the transfer of the monuments to open-air museums. According to the historian Nicolae Iorga, the earliest concerns with vernacular architecture monuments date back to 1753–1756, when the principality of Moldova was ruled by Grigore Matei Ghica, the prince being well known for his frequent visits to princely courts and fortresses and thus considered “the first inspector of historic monuments”⁹.

Even if the principles established by various international charters have been drawn upon the restoring activity of open-air ethnographic museums in view, the first step in salvaging the vernacular heritage is an *in-situ* preservation of the monuments¹⁰, followed then, only when absolutely necessary, by their transfer to open-air ethnographic museums. From a legal point of view, the *in-situ* conservation activity and the open-museum activity are two different stages of safeguarding the heritage, though actual field situations may render these two activities mutually dependent.

Also, the research has to consider *Open-Air Ethnographic Museums in Romania* and the open-air museum networks of our country, updating information to 2022 and detailing the profile of each of the respective cultural institutions, while underscoring the specific of their planning.



Pic. Nr. 1: The map of the village museum in Cluj-Napoca, the first open-air museum in Romania.
Archive of the Transylvanian Museum of Ethnography

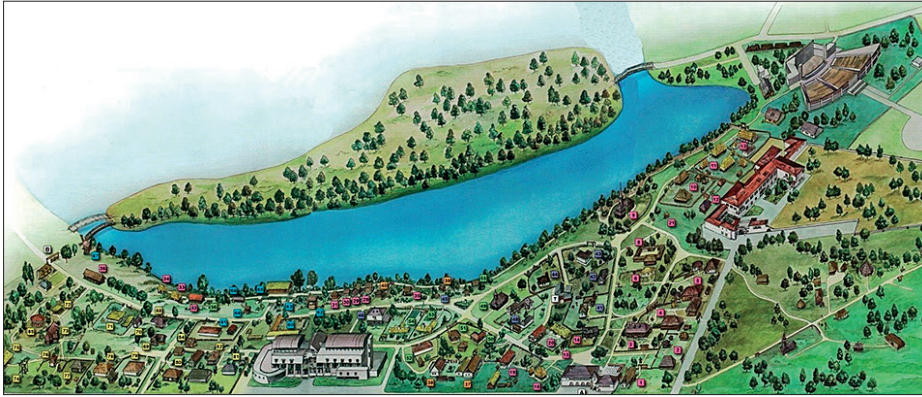
The initiative of organizing the first open-air museums is linked to two disciplines: sociology and ethnography.¹¹ As far as Romanian sociology is concerned, Dimitrie Gusti’s (1880–1995) major contribution must be mentioned, his novel approach as well as the monographic method that he pioneered and

⁹ Iorga 1926: 5.

¹⁰ Wollmann 2010.

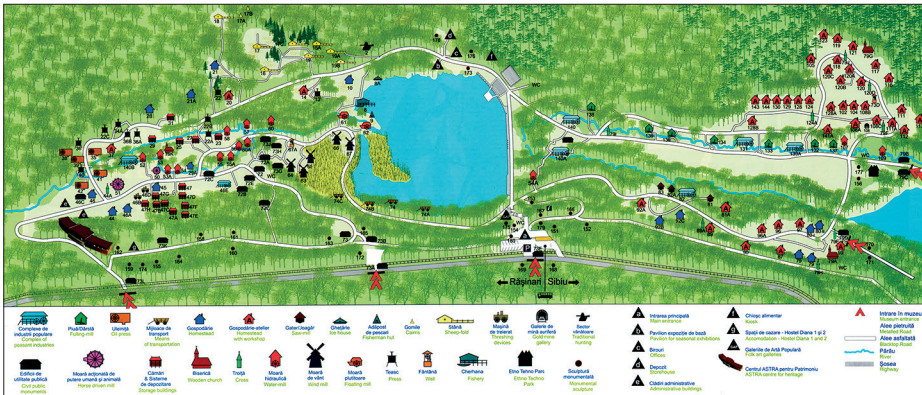
¹¹ Bucur 2004.

promoted. He set up in 1936 the Romanian Village Museum. In its turn, ethnography debuted as an autonomous science, with its own field of study, specific targets and research methods.

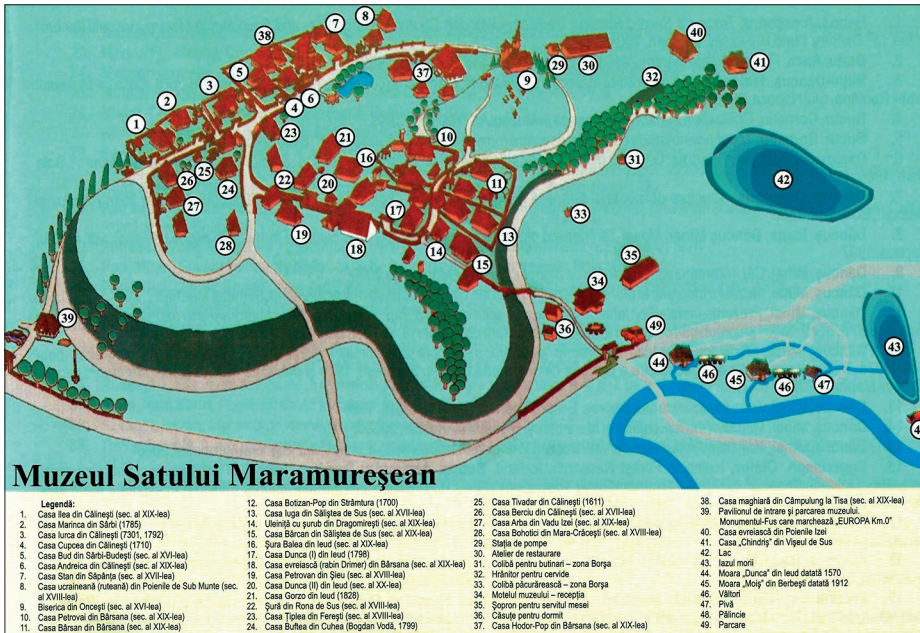


Pic. Nr. 2: *The map of the village museum in Bucharest, the most visited open-air museum in Romania.*
Muzeul Național al Satului „Dimitrie Gusti” – ghid informativ. București, 2012.

This part of the research also extensively addresses the founding, functioning, and evolution of Romania's twenty open-air museums. It analyzes to what extent various types of villages are suggested in the open-air museums described. From that point of view, attention is being paid to the museums' planning, internal structure, density and grouping of households, the ratio between alleys and houses, the placement, orientation and grouping of buildings facing the alleys, the types of households, the placing of monuments of public interest, the land altitude and landscape variations, etc.



Pic. Nr. 3: *The map of the Astra museum in Sibiu, the largest open-air museum in Romania.*
ASTRA Museum Archive



Pic. Nr. 4: *The map of the village museum in Sighetul Maramureşean.*
Dăncuş 2011: 139.

Focussing on *Romanian Ethnomuseology in a European Context*, the research also examines the position held by Romania’s open-air museums within the European open-air museum network¹², highlighting their accomplishments, desiderata, and especially their specific identity elements.

The research states the importance of Romania’s open-air museums in salvaging and preserving the country’s cultural identity, as well as in promoting ethnological tourism. The conclusion section comprises analyses on the Romanian traditional village and recent statistical data about it, along with details about its constitutive elements. This section also argues the necessity of setting up a comprehensive textual and visual database on the Romanian village from both sides of the Carpathian Mountains that would be useful to all of the researchers who take an interest in Romanian culture, civilization, and spirituality.

Projects like this aren’t complete without a *Glossary* that we have compiled with the aim of clarifying the meaning of a series of regional terms (most of them already part of passive memory), as well as of number of specialized

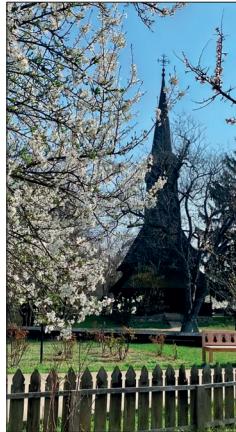
¹² Rentzhog 2007.

terms, so as to help the readers who are less familiar with the research topic of our dissertation.

In addition to the scientific information, the *Annexes* and *Illustrations* further provide images and maps representative of the traditional Romanian village, in support of the researchers taking an interest in the representation of the rural world in the country's open-air museums.



Pic. Nr. 5: *Wooden church
– open-air museum
from Maramureș.*
Photo: Andreea Buzaș



Pic. Nr. 6: *Wooden church
– open-air museum
from Bucharest.*
Photo: Andreea Buzaș

A detailed examination of monuments transferred to Romanian open-air museums enables us to conclude that the village and, in general, the rural world are well represented in Romania's network of open-air museums. The constitutive elements of the traditional village, such as the village area and its boundaries, the common lands, are represented or suggested in at least three museums. The alley and the grove are dealt with satisfactorily too.

The types of households specific to Romania's main ethnographic zones, along with the Romanian house (monocellular, featuring two or three rooms), depending on the geographical area, are best represented. A large number of exhibits consist of peasant installations and art industries, followed by public monuments: churches, mayor's offices, schools, country inns, sports pavilions, cemeteries, etc.

It is highly imperative that the range of public buildings be extended to several parish houses, a rural telephone switchboard, a rural post-office, a dispensary, "Spiru Haret" type of schools, and community centers. Romanian open-air museums also lack rural exhibits that are specific to the Communist times. Those trying times should also be suggested, be it only in few open-air museums. Though peasant architecture is well represented in Romanian open-air museums, these institutions do not display any household representative of the stone-architecture specific to several zones of the country.



Pic. Nr. 7: *Windmill from Constanța transferred to the open-air museum in Sibiu.*
Photo: Andreea Buzaş



Pic. Nr. 8: *Water mill – open-air museum Sibiu.*

Photo: Andreea Buzaş

In examining the vast domain of museum activities, one natural conclusion is that, beyond establishing and ever enlarging its collections, a museum's goal should be the display of items which bear upon science, culture, and education. To a large extent, the successful rendition of these three domains depends on the size, diversity, value, and promotion of a museum's collections. Any modern ethnographic museum that favors a comprehensive museum discourse – capitalizing on and promoting the material and immaterial heritage, the scientific advancements, and the cultural events – is prone to reap huge advantages from such an approach.

The moral and material success of a museum depends, however, not only on the value of its exhibitions and the particular interest that they arrest, but also on the quality of its advertising such events (on television, in the newspapers, over the radio, various publications). That success also depends on the quality of museum guiding services and complementary-explanatory ones (such as presentations of films, shows, traditional arts and crafts fairs, entertainments, meetings with people from the original location of exhibits), as well as on the teaching of lessons based on the respective exhibits, and on organizing arts and crafts summer camps.



Pic. Nr. 9: *Map of open-air museums in Romania.*
Godea 2002: 104; updated by Andreea Buzaş

List of open-air museums in Romania and the year of establishment

1. “Romulus Vuia” National Ethnographic Park Cluj-Napoca (1929)
2. “Dimitrie Gusti” National Village Museum Bucharest (1936)
3. Reghin Ethnographic Museum (1960)
4. The Bran Village Museum (1962)
5. Museum Of Traditional Folk Civilization ASTRA Sibiu (1963)
6. Golești Viticulture and Horticulture Museum (1966)
7. The Museum of the Oas Country, Negrești-Oaș (1966)
8. “Haszmann Pál” Ethnographic Museum, Cernatul de Jos (1969)
9. Bucovina’s Village Museum, Suceava (1971)
10. The Szekler Museum of Ciuc, Miercurea-Ciuc (1972)
11. Banat village museum, Timișoara (1972)
12. Székely National Museum, Sf. Gheorghe (1973)

13. The Village Museum of Vâlcea County, Bujoreni (1974)
14. The Museum of Popular Architecture of Gorj, Curtișoara (1975)
15. Vrancea Museum. The ethnographic section of “Crâng Petrești” (Petrești Grove) (1977)
16. The Boian Plain Museum and the Neolithic village, Drăgănești-Olt (1980)
17. Maramures Village Museum, Sighetu Marmăției (1981)
18. Baia Mare Ethnography and Folk Art Museum (1984)
19. National Museum of Agriculture, Slobozia (1990)
20. “Petru Caraman” Village Museum, Galați (2012)

Bibliography

BERNEA, Ernest

2006 *Civilizația română sătească*. București: Vremea

BLAGA, Lucian

1980 Elogiu satului românesc. In Octav Păun – Antoaneta Tănăsescu (eds.): *Discursuri de recepție la Academia Română*. 250–264. București: Albatros

BUCUR, Corneliu

2004 *Tratat de etnomuzeologie I–II*. Sibiu: ASTRA Museum

GODEA, Ioan

2002 Muzeotehnică. Oradea: Editura Muzeului Țării Crișurilor

GUSTI, Dimitrie

1965 *Muzeul satului românesc*. București: Editura Științifică

IORGA, Nicolae

1926 Cea dintâi vizită domnească la monumente istorice și opera lui Grigore Matei Vodă Ghica. *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice*. Fasc. 30.

OPRIȘ, Ioan

1994 *Istoria muzeelor din România*. București: Museion

REBREANU, Liviu

1980 Lauda țaranului român. In Octav Păun – Antoaneta Tănăsescu (eds.): *Discursuri de recepție la Academia Română*. 282–294. București: Albatros

RENTZHOG, Sten

2007 *Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea*. Stockholm and Östersund: Carlsson Jantli Förlag

STAHL, Henri H.

1981 *Amintiri și gânduri*. București: Minerva

STOICA, Georgeta

1993 *Muzee în aer liber din România*. București: Museion

VUIA, Romulus

1975 Satul românesc din Transilvania și Banat – studiu antropogeografic și etnografic. In Mihai Pop – Ioan Șerb (eds.): *Studii de etnografie și folclor*. 155–360. București: Minerva

WOLLMANN, Volker

2010 *Patrimoniul preindustrial și industrial din România I*. Sibiu: Honterus