

THE OPEN-AIR MUSEUMS: FROM MEDIATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY TO ENTERTAINMENT. NATIONAL VILLAGE MUSEUM IN ROMANIA AND KOREAN FOLK VILLAGE IN SOUTH KOREA

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the new social, cultural and economic role that open-air museums play, in a post-nationalist period, taking into consideration the Korean Folk Village in Seoul, South Korea and the National Village Museum 'Dimitrie Gusti' in Bucharest, Romania. The first approach is to define the role that the two open-air museums played historically, as well as the changes they undergo in recent years. In the context of globalization, culture is redefined in its relationship to economic growth and tourism contribution and the need for museums whose marketing turns the attention towards the visitor. Museums undergo a democratisation process, in the sense that collections became accessible and made interesting for the general public. Although in recent years in Romania it is considered that there is a lack of funding and legislation regarding cultural patrimony, the Village Museum in Bucharest is adapting to the latest evolutions in the patrimonial and cultural sector, remaining one of the most important cultural institutions in Romania. The Korean Folk Village was put in connection with the revival of the Korean economy, a policy aiming to preserve Korean culture by supporting the country's cultural heritage in the process of building a modern nation-state (Lee, 2011). While the South Korean Folk Village is oriented towards tourism attraction, re-enactment of the past and entertainment, the National Village Museum 'Dimitrie Gusti' in Bucharest is rather oriented towards its pedagogical role, its dialogue with the public translating in event organisation.

Keywords: open-air museum, anthropology, post-national, mediation, culture, re-enactment.

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the new social, cultural and economic role of the open-air museums, in a post-nationalist period (Zipsane, 2005), considering two open-air museums, the Korean Folk Village in Seoul, South Korea and the National Village

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Museum 'Dimitrie Gusti' in Bucharest, Romania. In the case of the South Korean Folk Village, it is remarkable the rethinking of the relationship between culture and economy, in the context of globalization, culture being 'regarded not only as cultural artifacts which potentially contribute to tourism and economic growth, but as socio-cultural resources integral to the economic transformation which cultivate new capacities and skills for innovation and creativity in order to structurally enhance the national economy to a higher stage' (Lee, 2011: 1-35). As museums are considered among the most important travel destinations, I took into consideration the perspective of Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett about 'the death of museums, ascendancy of tourism, production of heritage' (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 1) and entertainment. In the context of a need for museum marketing, the attention is turned towards the visitor, enhancing 'the manner and the consumption environment of the displayed museum product' (Zbucnea, 2008: 71).

The research approaches museums and their way of materializing culture' (Bouquet, 2012: 5) in an anthropological perspective, through participative observation and visual media (photography). As Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett points out, 'exhibitions are fundamentally theatrical for they are how museums perform the knowledge they create' (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 3). In this perspective, 'objects are the actors and knowledge animates them. [...] Their script is a series of labels. Scenes are built around processes of manufacture and use. The larger narrative may be a story of evolution or historical development. The performative mode is exposition and demonstration. The aesthetics is one of intelligibility' (*id.*). Jean Davallon explains that an exhibition can be envisaged as a media, as it is an artefact, 'thus, it responds to an intention [...] to produce an effect' (Davallon, 1999: 9). Michèle Gellereau (Gellereau, 2005) proposes an alternative in the study of the museum visit as situation of communication and cultural mediation, sustained by the scenario, the performance (acting) and the rite context and ensures, in social life, the articulation between the individual dimension of the subject and its collective dimension' (Lamizet, 1997: 364; Lardellier, 2009: 107).

ESTABLISHMENT, HISTORY AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

The first discussion focuses on the genesis of the two open-air museums, in their socio-cultural, political and economic context, as well as their role at the national level, 'to document and exhibit the historical richness of the nation in all its variety, unity and age' (Zipsane, 2005). An open-air museum is a distinct type of a living museum, exhibiting its collections out-of-doors (Rentzhog, 2007); the first open-air museums, Skansen and Nordiska Museet (1873), were conceived by the Swedish philologist, curator and ethnographer Artur Hazelius. He followed the ideas of 'cultural nationalism', which claimed that 'the members of a national

community were linked together by various cultural, ethnic and linguistic commonalities, notwithstanding actual state borders' (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2015). Skansen used 'folk costumes, architecture and festivals, which was a code normally referred either to the extra-European tribal or intra-European peasant 'other' of elite civilization.' (*id.*) The open-air museum created by Artur Hazelius 'became crucial in constructing a visual language of European museology that, in contrast to classic museum languages of universalism as art and history, directly displayed the difference, the individual and the particular' (*id.*).

Henrik Zipsane explains that 'as the grip of nationalism over our perceptions of the past has weakened in the past 10–20 years, a key element at the basis of the 'natural' role of the museum in a political and ideological sense has vanished' (Zipsane, 2005).

Thus, 'the discussion about open-air museums, as about all museums, generally turns around their new roles in a post-nationalist period' (*id.*) and the close connection between cultural patrimony and economy. In the new context, museums define their roles either in the education of the population and in developing the society or by economic indices (Zbucnea, 2012: 9).

Furthermore, the democratization of museums is discussed, in terms of making collections interesting and accessible for the general public: 'Democratizing the museum was discussed in terms of empowering people – making them want to explore and find out about the collections in ways that built on their own knowledge' (Bouquet 2012, 5). The cultural patrimony became a touristic objective in the last years, mainly due to the increase of cultural tourism (*id.*), becoming an important resource for tourism, nowadays addressing a diverse audience.

'DIMITRIE GUSTI' NATIONAL VILLAGE MUSEUM: DISPLAYING NATIONAL IDENTITY

National museums firstly represent and legitimize nations, as in the context of 19th century European nation-building, they became an 'international standard of nation-claiming' (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2015: 1). In this context, the genesis of national museums 'was linked to the idea of 'European' and 'Western' civilized states' (Badica, 2011: 721), they helped 'framing national identity' (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2015: 1) through art, history and ethnography. The 19th and early 20th century European elite culture was marked by the 'rediscovery of peasant culture and folkways', having exceptional relevance especially for the 'periphery of Europe' (*id.*). The Balkans (Southeastern Europe) have been seen by the West as a repository of rural folk traditions and customs (Todorova, 1997, 2009) and these 'typologies were interiorized by state elites, which could develop spectacular representations of national difference using visual codes of ethnography museums' (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2015).

The 'Dimitrie Gusti' National Village Museum opened in May 1936, on 4500 sqm on the border of the Baneasa Lake, a project sustained by the Royal Cultural Foundation 'Prince Carol'. The main purpose of the museum was that of reviving the peasants' way of life, the concept of the museum belonging to Dimitrie Gusti, leader of the Sociology School in Bucharest, who conducted monographic researches from 1925 to 1935 in over 600 villages in all Romania's zones. In 1936, 29 houses, a wooden church from Maramures, five wind mills, a water mill, an oil press, a distillery, a fishery and other annexes were displaced and re-constructed on the spot. Dimitrie Gusti rejected though the ethnographic open-air museums in the Nordic countries as inspiration, he considered the museum a sociological one, 'able to reflect better than anything else the richness and variety of peasant life, the ideas so many times profound, of peasant architectonic style, the great science of environment adapting...' (Gusti, 1968: 220 in Radu, 2007: 159-168). In 1948, Professor Gheorghe Focşa, considered the second founder of the museum, participant in the monographic researches and collaborator of Dimitrie Gusti, continued his works, transforming the sociological museum in a museum of ethnography.

While during the socialist period, the Romanian museums were associated with communist propaganda (Badica, 2011: 712–731) and mass culture (Pickard, 2008: 220), they faced a conceptual crisis after 1989. The political changes of 1989 'caused real shock and dramatic consequences: there was a serious reduction in public interest for unvarying and unattractive museum products, built upon political criteria determined by communist ideology' (*id.*). Yet, nowadays, the National Village Museum in Romania is considered among the most important travel destinations, 350,000 persons visiting the museum each year.

During a visit at the 'Dimitrie Gusti' National Village Museum, a visitor discovers the traditional vernacular architecture, displayed throughout the collection of 350 buildings (houses, stables, cellars, wells, triptychs, gates, water and wind mills, blacksmith workshops, etc.), grouped accordingly to the region they come from. The houses shelter more than 110,000 objects of patrimony, with national identity value, half of which belong to collections of ceramics, icons, popular costumes, furniture, and toys.

A Gallery of popular art, a library and, lately an inn, a fair exhibition area and a stage were added to the museum complex. The museum visit can be approached in a communication perspective, as a form of cultural mediation. The visit of a museum is seen as a performance; as it has the capacity to create a symbolic, pedagogical, experiential relationship with the public, being at the same time a significant construction (cf. Lamizet, 1997; Davallon, 1999; Gellereau, 2005).



'Dimitrie Gusti' National Village Museum, Bucharest.

The Village Museum in Bucharest is adapting to the evolution of cultural patrimony marketing, or to that of museum marketing (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2015), although it is considered that in Romania the administration of cultural patrimony is still affected by the lack of funding and legislation. The museum is hosting programs and projects of museum education, fairs and tradition crafting, as well as temporary exhibitions. The cultural patrimony is highlighted by different cultural activities (traditional fairs, demonstrations of artisans, shows and exhibitions) organized by the museum, almost all connected on holidays like Dragobete, Palm Sunday, Saints Peter and Paul, The Cross Holiday or Christmas. These exhibitions and events can be addressed in the light of recent development in the museum world: 'the incorporation of museums into the culture industry demands' (Bouquet, 2001), demanding for new forms of public attraction.

KOREAN FOLK VILLAGE: FROM FOLKLORE TO ENTERTAINMENT

In the different context of South-East Asia, with the revival of the Korean economy in the 1960's, the Office of Cultural Properties started to value the establishment and operation of a folk museum. The Korean Folk Village was founded on May 8, 1973, and the privatization of the Folk Village was officially approved by the government on September 18, 1973 (Korean Folk Village site). This policy aimed to preserve Korean culture by identifying valuable items of the country's cultural heritage and by supporting and controlling them in the project of building a modern nation-state' (Lee, 2011: 1–35). Although this system has been institutionalized only recently in Korea, it has been regarded worldwide as one of the most important projects of modern nation-states (Jung, 2004: 475–508; Nam, 2009: 213–252).

The Folk Village museum is located in the satellite city Yongin of the Seoul Metropolitan Area, belonging to the province of Gyeonggi in South Korea. The purpose of the Korean Folk Village is to display elements of traditional Korean life and culture: 'The museum being constructed shall exhibit Korean cultural heritage and artefacts depicting the ancestor's creative spirit and artistic beauty to the public, in addition to both domestic and foreign professional scholars, in order to reconfirm the excellence of Korean culture'. (Korean Folk Village site.)

As the National Village Museum in Bucharest, the Folk Museum in Seoul displays replicas of traditional houses of the different social classes (peasant, landowner, *yangban*) from various regions. 168 traditional houses were relocated to the folk village and restored according to the original lifestyle of the Korean people in the late Chosun period. About 30 folk villages were relocated and recreated in approximately 200,000 pyeong (660,000 sqm). The village has reproduced over 260 traditional houses reminiscent of the late Chosun Dynasty and has recreated the life of Korean people through the exhibition of various household goods.

Approximately 30,000 items of daily life have been collected from various regions and placed in each room based on their characteristics and period, enabling visitors to conveniently see, listen and feel the apparel, food, domestic life, manufacturing technology, religious ceremonies, and folk amusement according to period.

Different areas are defined within the museum: the folk village, which researches and studies the identity of the Korean people, and also exhibits, teaches and exchanges cultural heritage and folk documents; the museum area; the family park where families can enjoy various entertainment facilities and the traditional marketplace. The museum also has a traditional street market, restaurants, and showcases of traditional woodworking and metalworking techniques.



Folk Art Museum, Seoul (private collection of photos by courtesy of Professor Valentina Marinescu, University of Bucharest).

The exhibitions in the Folk Hall enabled visitors to understand the traditional lifestyle and culture by centering on traditional holiday customs, ceremonial occasions, religious ceremonies, entertainment, and manufacturing technology through the year-round life of a four-generation family from the late Chosun period.

The Folk Village is considered one of the popular tourist attractions in South Korea, both for Koreans and foreigners. While being an open-air museum, the Korean Folk Village is included in the category of living museums, as it recreates historical settings and periods as well as conditions of a culture, of a natural environment, providing visitors with an experiential interpretation of history (Handler & Saxton, 1988: 242).



Folk Art Museum, Seoul.

In the Folk Museum of Seoul, performances of traditional dances, equestrian skills, marriage ceremonies, and recreational activities are programmed each day, re-enactment of past representations, a promise of ‘touching the past’ (Auslander, 2013: 161–183). Having as an objective the immersion into that culture or time in history, the exhibits are so designed that visitors can experience the specific culture, environment or historical period using all the physical senses (sight, smell, sound, taste, touch) (Handler & Saxton, 1988: 242).



Folk Art Museum, Seoul.

CONCLUSION

Our article is an attempt of considering the new role that open-air museums play in two different countries, such as South Korea and Romania. Although belonging to two geographical, social, political and cultural spaces as different as South Asia and South Eastern Europe, the role and function of the open-air museum has shifted from national representation towards entertainment, especially in the case of South Korea, through re-enactment and event creation, thus better addressing the contemporary cultural representations and larger audiences.

While the economic and social context of South Korea provides a frame for a display oriented rather towards public, experiential and entertainment, the Romanian political and economic context of the Village Museum is rather based on the conservation of the cultural patrimony, with educational and research orientation.

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