

# ETHNOGRAPHY OF FIVE FOLK FAIRS IN ROMANIA

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*The paper deals with description of a field research over five folk fairs held in the summer of 2005 in Bucharest, Sibiu, Timișoara, and Suceava. According to the author, the folk artisanhip, as it takes place in contemporary Romania, should be understood as a process that includes two main phases namely the craftwork (or craftsmanship) and the folk trade (or artisanry). The working hypothesis of research are presented in relation to nine categories of analysis which consist of the socio-professional framework of artisanship, tradition, folk art, the socialist economy, the market economy, the folk fair, the ethnographic museum, clientele, and ethnicity.*

Among many folk artisans, ethno-folklorists, museum visitors, and tourists in Romania today, there is a persistent ethos with “authenticity” and the “national character” of the peasant crafts and artefacts. In fact, while claimed to be “bearers of the national folk culture”, artisans usually behave as traders of the ethnographic traditions they account for and represent. The folk artisanship is to be interpreted nowadays not only as a village-centred industry, but also as an open process of exchange with the urban world. Such a “trademark” is the result of the artisans’ involvement with the extended network of ethnographic museums in the cities of Romania, in order to meet and keep a clientele, national and foreign as well. As will be seen, artisanship (also called *craftsmanship* and *artisanry*) is associated with complex phenomena of social, economic, and cultural variation, hybridisation, and regeneration in Romania before and after 1989, as it is equally “traditional” and “modern”, and simultaneously art-and-commerce.

On an ethnographic ground, the current research is intended to examine the market enrolment of artisanship in Romania (within the folk fairs hosted by five national and regional ethnographic museums), as well as to explore the theoretical significance of the folk fairs in the comparative context of the open-air markets in Central and Eastern Europe. In doing so, we seek to understand the extent in which the craft-and-trade artisanship, while it is consistent with the contemporary market economy, could originate in peasant economic relationships probably much older than communism, and which subverted somehow the socialist economic framework. Taken as a particular rural category, craftsmen may represent a case study relevant for general cultural and economic trends of peasantry in the 2000s Romania.

This study is built up on the assumption that “tradition” and “trade” are not – such as inferred by the nationalistic and communist ideology - antithetical areas of expertise and practice. As of the late nineteenth century, artisans and their crafts have constantly become (along with folklore) referential for the national value system in Romania irrespective of the monarchic, communist, or post-communist political contexts. Accordingly, the making of the ethnographic museums in Romanian cities has been associated with the preservation, representation, and salvation of the peasant civilisation at a national scale. However, this cultural policy seems to diminish a core “element” in understanding the craftsmen’s work and identity, which is economy. As if artisans produced only from esthetical or philosophical reasons, they are commonly portrayed in terms of “folk-art” creators and thinkers. While art and beauty should not be at all denied for the folk artisans’ “worldview”, economy needs to be reconsidered as another dimension of the peasant ways of life.

In theory, the folk fair in the city would follow the science-based programmes of ethnographic museums in the protection of traditional cultures and artefacts. As a consequence, artisans would primarily be concerned with the conservation and transmission of the folk traditions on the behalf of which they work and live. After all, the state politics in the national patrimony would reflect some public awareness and consent regarding the importance and meaning of the folk-culture management.

Beyond rallying to some official agenda or ideology, artisans are more probably committed to the specialisation and adaptation of their craftwork to the changing world of post-socialism. On another side, museums are expected to seek for a broader relevance of their activities, especially in terms of the interest in the public audience. As a matter of fact, the museum folk-fair in contemporary Romania is an institution within which the folk art and market exchange coexist and interrelate with each other, which as an ethnographic reality *per se* artisans, museums, and public entirely acknowledge.

## **Ethnography of five folk fairs in Romania**

In 2002-2003, I conducted an investigation at the level of the craftsmen's workshops in five ethnographic areas of Romania (Maramureş, Mărginimea Sibiului, Oltenia, Vrancea, and Tulcea), in such domains of specialization as woodcarving, weaving, pottery, mask-making, and fishing. Since craftsmen make artefacts not solely for a domestic use in their village households, but equally for sale within the urban folk fairs, I considered it relevant to extend my previous research over such a market process.

Information for my current project has been collected during five folk fairs, held in 2005, in the following museums: the Museum of Peasants (Bucharest, 15-17 July), the Museum of Banat Villages (Timișoara, 5-7 August), the Astra Museum of Folk Civilisation (Sibiu, 12-15 August), the Museum of Suceava and Bukovine (Suceava, 19-21 August), and the Village Museum (Bucharest, 16-18 September)<sup>1</sup>. The museum fairs are not regular events, but they depend on fixed religious feasts or locally significant dates. As a result, the schedule of my fieldwork was made in accord with the above fairs.

First of all, I was interested in the regional diversity of the folk fairs and craftsmen concerned by my research<sup>2</sup>. In the case of the craftsmen, I collected data from a number of 27

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<sup>1</sup> As regards the institutional relevance of the museums concerned here, we first distinguish the chronological primacy and sociological encompassing of the Bucharest Village Museum (founded in 1936 by the members of sociological teams led by Dimitrie Gusti, with representation of the different peasant cultures of Romania). Another case (the Bucharest Museum of Peasants) is outstanding for the contemporary professional achievement of the EMYA distinction, as "the best European museum of the year" (1996). As for the Sibiu Astra Museum, we take into account the profile and capacity of its establishment, as devoted to "the folk civilisation and technology in Romania" within a perimeter of 100 hectares; at the same time, the Astra Museum is the house of several national associations in artisanship. With respect to the other two museums in discussion (the Timișoara Museum and the Suceava Museum), they represent the largest counties of Romania (Timiș: 8,697 km<sup>2</sup>; Suceava: 8,553 km<sup>2</sup>), and also cases of regional open-air museums that are currently hosting folk fairs; another reason here is that of the multiethnic folk programmes of the two museums.

<sup>2</sup> The artisans interviewed live in the following localities of Romania (the related counties are also indicated): Bacău, Băbeni - Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Bălăceana-Suceava, Brașov, Breaza-Prahova, Bucharest, Buftea-Ilfov, Câmpulung-Moldovenesc - Suceava, Corund-Harghita, Cluj, Cugir-Alba, Curtea de Argeș, Feldioara-Brașov, Gemenea-Suceava, Horezu-Vâlcea, Roșia Lazuri-Bihor, Lunca-Ozum - Covasna, Marginea-Suceava, Mănăstirea-Humorului - Suceava, Mitocul-Dragomirnei - Suceava, Moreni-Dâmbovița, Obârșia-Tomești - Hunedoara, Păniceni-Cluj, Pitești, Pleșa-Suceava, Rădăuți-Suceava, Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Rotaria-Iași, Runcu Salvei, Salba-Bistrița, Săpânța-Maramureș, Săveni-Botoșani, Sârbi-Maramureș, Slătioara-Suceava, Suceava, Timișești-Neamț, Timișoara, Târgu-Mureș, Târgu Lăpuș - Maramureș, Tomești-Iași, Tulcea, Țibănești-Iași, Valea Dealului-Argeș, Valea Seacă-Neamț, Vatra-Moldoviței - Suceava, Vinerea-Alba, Vlădești-Vâlcea, and Vorona-Botoșani. One artisan's residence is Chiperceni-Bessarabia. (See attached the list of artisans).

men and 26 women, of ages ranging from 25 to 72; in a few cases, when such informants were available, I discussed with artisans of Hungarian, Polish, and German ethnic identity. Another criterion followed was the craft variety among my field interlocutors, which includes woodcarving, weaving, icon-painting, pottery, mask-making, egg-painting, wind-instruments making, basketry, horn carving etc. (see attached the list of artisans).

My fieldwork was based on holism. As will be seen, this perspective is particularly referred to in the general concept of my research, as well as in the interview structure and items I followed in the field. Alongside the economy of artisanship, I sought to gather information concerning the craftsmen's social organisation, their vision on issues like "tradition" and "art", their relationships with political and cultural authorities, and so on. The focus on the economic dimension is motivated by the nature of the folk-fair institution, in the framework of which artefacts are brought for sale.

Last but not least, I had to consider the power relationships, which are inherent to any museum folk fair. As a rule, the craftsmen attend the fairs following an invitation they receive from the museum leadership, or from local and regional "centres for the folk creation". Since the folk fair is not a free-entry institution, visitors and craftsmen as well are usually expected to pay their participation. That is why my investigation also included interviews with museum directors and collection of materials about the museum management of the folk fairs.

In the field, I gathered several types of materials to use as references for the categories of analysis and interpretation for this research. A substantial part of my information is verbal, as based on a series of structured interviews conducted *in extenso* with 53 craftsmen and four museum directors. Such a database is necessary for understanding what the people think and say about artisanship, and how they are similar or different in their viewpoints and strategies when involved in the market process. As the answers received from my interviewees are variable in their details or arguments, I needed to compare them (in the quest for recurrent data) or simply to verify one or another indication, description, or... silence. I would call this type of information an "explicit" one, as it pertains essentially to what the craftsmen openly state or admit about themselves, their crafts, and their interests, needs, and aspirations.

Another level of documentation consisted of a number of 37 artefacts that I bought or received as gifts, and which represent a physical evidence of the craftsmen's work. Artefacts are significant for the craftsmen's "styles" of manufacture and decoration, as well as for the "representational" themes they approach. Whenever possible, I collected (also as "materiality" of my field documentation) the visits cards of the craftsmen and the museum directors, as well as folders, posters, and brochures edited by the craftsmen themselves, or by the museums organising the fairs.

Along with the questionnaire and materials about the artisanship, I was interested in the visual information of my research as comprising video and photo records from all the five fairs approached. The video records contain about 200 minutes of film, and the number of photographs is about 150. The visual materials are important for rendering the general atmosphere of a folk fair and particularly for the laboratory re-examination of such a "cultural scene".

During all the folk fairs where I was present, I kept a fieldwork diary in which I wrote down small observations or details seized rather as any visitor or tourist, than in a systematic way. I often needed to scrutinize the craftsmen and their artefacts, before choosing my informants according to the criteria discussed above. Needless to say, not all the craftsmen agreed immediately to my interview request, so I had to wait for their confidence or available time. In other situations, I shared with artisans their conditions of accommodation and meal, which helped me in making my work intelligible and acceptable among them. Also as a means to gain familiarity with my interlocutors, I met many of them within other fairs; in

such frequent occasions, we recognized each other and exchanged personal impressions about this or that fair. Such informal talks were highly useful in understanding artisanship beyond the structural and sometimes rigid framework of an interview. The remarks of visitors or “clients” of the craftsmen seemed suggestive to me for another (although equally “implicated”) perspective on artisanship.

The “entry permission” was always necessary in the case of talking with the museum staff, but once I presented my research theme and goals, I benefited of access not only to the fair, but also to local directors’ vision of what a folk-fair is, or should be. In Timișoara, I attended a debate that local museum hosted between some museographers or folk-culture specialists, and the craftsmen present at the folk fair. Similarly, I did not refuse the invitation that several craftsmen once addressed to me to join them at the general meeting of the “Association of Folk Artisans in Romania”, which took part on occasion of the folk fair from the Sibiu Astra Museum. Although absent from the initial schedule of my research, such events enriched my field notes and generally diversified the points of view I collected on artisanship. These miscellaneous data, and many of the same nature, have been making the content of my diary in the field, and they represent an important source for my research.

The interviews, artefacts, visual records, and personal notes are to be generally considered as the “field information” of the current project. In order to produce meaning they must be analysed and interpreted together, since their content may be convergent but also contradictory. Differences between the “explicit” and “implicit” sides of culture could thus appear between the craftsmen’s discourse (according to interviews) and their artefacts, such as expressed by the claim of one’s own “authenticity” vs. someone else’s “kitsch”. Similarly, the videotapes or photos are “objective” to the degree in which their “memory” reproduces such aspects as the bargain, the daily rumour, or the crowd within the fair.

At the same time, both the videos and photos are limited to the representational appearances of a folk fair, namely to what the craftsmen, the museums, the visitors, and the ethnographer have seen as “relevant” when talking about, and when writing on, an exhibit. Probably, the ethnographer’s presence is the most difficult to cancel from either the interview concept, or the collection of database materials, or the making of films and photos. Therefore, multiplication of sources is meant also as a tool to balance or to reduce from the bias risks in one or another interpretation for this study, as well as to review some of the conclusions of it.

## **Categories of analysis and working hypotheses in the study of artisanship**

As mentioned, this research is meant as a development of a previous approach of artisanship in Romania, which took place at the craftsmen’s home workshops in their village locations. In studying craftsmanship, or the “workshop-centred” artisanship, I proposed a definition for such socio-economic pattern, with respect to those “[Peasant] traditional and market-oriented practitioners of crafts” (cf. Constantin 2003: 76). In accordance with the field information, the publications resulted from the first investigation were interpreted through the following categories of analysis: “Family and Kinship Framework”, “Technology”, “Clientele”, “Artisans under Communism”, “Artisans and the Market-Economy”, “Artisans and the Ethnographic Museums”, “Traditional Styles and Symbols”, “National Self-Identification”, and “Profitability of Tradition” (Constantin 2003, Stahl, Constantin 2004).

The above categories were used to classify and systematize the raw data, in order to envisage as much as possible from the empirical realities associated with the craftsmen and their work. Since the focus of my research was the workshop production of artefacts, most of the categories reflect the local organisation of craft industry, as if it were part of an autarchic

village economy, like agriculture or the animal breeding. However, from the very first phase of my research, the field evidences were clear as to the fact that craftsmanship is more than a form of rural subsistence or auxiliary occupation within the peasant husbandry. Crafts and artefacts appeared to me as the mark of an economic specialisation or a “gift” whereby some of the members of a rural community were simply opening up the resources of their village to an outside demand.

As a result, I was to include amongst such “local” topics as “kinship”, “technology”, or “styles”, a series of “items” obviously external from what a village community and economy are commonly expected to connote. Ideas like “clientele”, “market economy”, and “profitability of tradition” will become crucial for my enquiry, in an effort to understand the native context of the peasant crafts, but also the regional, national, and even international evolution of them.

A major distributive network for the folk artisanship is made by the ethnographic open-air museums. Two such museums were founded in the cities of Cluj and Bucharest since the inter-war period, but it was only after the World War II, under the communist regime, that a plethora of ethnography or “folk-culture” museums expanded in Romania<sup>3</sup>. As will be seen, the importance of ethnographic museums is so high for the artisans’ work that they should be taken as the second main phase (after the village craftwork) of the “social fact” of artisanship.

I have mentioned above the relationships between artisans and museums as a “category of analysis” that I already used in the phase of investigation over the rural workshops. As a matter of fact, the function ascribed to museums in the craftsmen’s accounts – that of a constant, intense, and lucrative “partnership” – made relevant the study of artisanship as a *process*, and not only as a localised pattern of peasant production. Museum consequently became a landmark for the concept of my current study, both in the structure of interviews and in the further interpretive work on the field information. Also as a result of the new research focus, I was to reformulate the definition of craftsmanship in terms related to the artisans’ trading strategies, as well as to the museum institutionalisation for such a “market-orientation”.

To clarify now what I mean by the “categories of analysis” of my research, I must discuss the content of questionnaires I followed when conducting interviews with artisans and

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<sup>3</sup> In 1923, the first Romanian ethnographic museum was founded in the city of Cluj by geographer Romulus Vuia. A similar museum appeared in Sighetul Marmăției town, in 1926, thanks to the initiative of ethnographer Gheorghe Vornicu, as well as with the support of geographer Simion Mehedinți. In 1936, sociologist Henri H. Stahl and dramaturge Victor I. Popa designed the Village Museum in Bucharest as a “social museum” in accord with the research conception promoted within the Sociological school of Dimitrie Gusti. After 1946, a network of ethnographic open-air museums will be set up in Romania, including among others the Curtișoara Museum (the Oltenia region, 1946), the Ethnographic Museum of Moldavia (Iași, Moldavia, 1958), the Museum of Folk Civilisation - Astra (Sibiu, 1967), the Ethnographic Museum of Bărăgan Plain (Slobozia, the Muntenia region, 1971), the Museum of Viticulture and Fruit-Trees Culture (Golești-Argeș, the Muntenia region, 1971), and the Museum of Banat Villages (Timișoara, 1980). According to ethnographer R. Florescu (1971: 39), “One of them [the ethnographic museums] is representative for the whole territory of the country (the Village Museum in Bucharest); two other are specialised single-subjects units (the Museum of Folk Civilisation in Sibiu, and the Museum of Viticulture and Fruit-Trees Culture in Golești) also covering the whole territory of the country; twelve units represent the regions or provinces: the open-air museums [in the towns] of Iași, Cluj, Timișoara, Curtișoara-Gorj, Bujoreni-Vâlcea, Reghin, Negrești-Oaș, Tulcea, Șimian-Turnu Severin, Focșani, Maramureș, and Bran”. Florescu closely associated (1971: 36) the making of ethnographic museums with the process of socialist transformation of the village communities in post-war Romania: “Important means were provided by central and local state authorities to permit a development rate leading to 10 open-air museums, in less than 15 years. [...] The socialist revolution undertook the structural change of the villages [...]. Departure of a more and more important mass of rural population to the towns – where is the basic source for the industrial workers’ development -, the modification of the status of land property, and the reorganisation of rural economy – [...] pose the problem of the disappearance of village as an unit of traditional social life [...]”

the museum directors. The interview with craftsmen generally reflects the structure of a “life-history” questionnaire, in that items are referred to my interlocutors’ past and socio-cultural background, such as “when and from whom did you learn your craft?”, or “since when do the people perform this craft in your native area?” Also in a biographic key, I asked for data on the artisans’ family working-framework of today, as well as on their family’s perspectives in that handicraft.

However, the core problematic that my questionnaire attained among craftsmen was the market process of artisanship, which included items like “do you work as a family private association or within any craft cooperative?”, “how do you cope with competition in your field?”, and “do you conduct your sale as retail or/and as wholesale?”. In relation to such thematic, I addressed to artisans a series of questions concerning the relationships they engage, maintain, or develop with the ethnographic museums, namely “do you leave your artefacts under the museum custody, in order to be sold there?”, “have you been awarded any prize or diploma from the museum authorities?”, “are you requested to pay any tax for being allowed to attend a museum-hosted folk fair?”, and so on.

The questionnaire standpoint is holistic by addressing topics of social, economic, and cultural relevance on the craftsmen’s life and identity. However, the order of questions did not strictly express such a theoretical scheme, but it rather alternated, mingled, or reformulated items related to the three general domains of study. For instance, the economic issues were usually approached along with cultural aspects, as when questions about the craftsmen’s “private workshops”, “professional status”, and “wholesale demands” were preceded or followed by questions on the “decorative styles and motives”, “traditional belonging”, and “museum exhibits”. This was assumed not to insist excessively on the interlocutors’ privacy, but also to assure an internal control of the questionnaire.

With regard to the interviews taken with the museum directors, I put my questions through and around the thematic of cultural “management” that museums conceive of, and apply towards, artisanship. Some of such items derived directly from the interviews with artisans, or were convergent with them, as follows: “what is the form, if any, of your ‘partnership’ with the craftsmen: donation or custody of artefacts, framework for the fairs, sponsorship?”, “how do your museum see the craftsmen: ‘folk creators’ or/and ‘traders’?”, “has your museum been making up its own ‘network’ or ‘clientele’ of craftsmen?” Other questions concerned the “vision” or “policy” specific to this or that museum as regards craftsmanship, that is “is your museum ascribing any role to artisans in the ‘conservation’ or ‘salvation’ of the peasant traditions?”, “does your museum accept the change or ‘transformation’ of ‘tradition(s)’ or ‘folklore’ in the contemporary village communities?”, “could the rural traditions be really ‘revitalised’ through the folk fairs that your museum is currently setting up?”. The museum directors’ accounts are particularly useful for their “top-down” perspective on the folk artisanship, as well as for having provided information complementary or contrastive to that offered by craftsmen.

The answers collected through the two questionnaires make up the primary database for the further analytical and interpretive work of my research. On this ground, I am able to consider and define the categories of analysis to apply now on the “museum-centred” artisanship. Before this, I once again outline the “twofold” nature of artisanship, in accordance with the information gathered in both the rural and urban field contexts of my investigation. Thus I speak of the craftsmen’s “workshops” and “folk fairs” with no intention to distinguish between a “private” or “subsistence” branch of artisanship, and another one, characterized by “market specialisation” or “capitalistic investments”.

Accordingly, I maintain some of the “headlines” of my previous research, like “the social organisation of artisanship”, “clientele”, and “the ethnic dimension”, as well as the

comparative discussion on the artisanry within the socialist and market economic frameworks. The only topic I set here apart is “technology”; however, even in this case, renunciation is partial, since some items of my first questionnaire deal explicitly with the making of artefacts and with the “folk art” motives, styles, and symbols. Based on this, I would infer that the focus on the craft process, which was proper for a research devoted to the artisans’ home industries, has to be replaced this time with two correlative chapters about “tradition” and “folk art” according to the craftsmen.

The main shift of focus of the current research is that concerned with the institutions of the folk fair and ethnographic museum. As already explained, the interviews highlight the theme of the fairs periodically held by museums on a mutual base of “partnership” with artisans. This is the meaning of the “market enrolment” among craftsmen, to be extensively exploited by this study as a development of, and not as a detachment from, the artisans’ village-located workshops.

All the above categories will also outline or theoretical frame the other varieties of documentation, including artefacts, visual records, and personal field notes. Analysis of the database also requires formulating several working hypotheses to follow when processing and interpreting the field information.

As will be seen, such hypotheses are built up on what I already know about craftsmanship, on the base of my previous and present enquiries. The problem with hypotheses, therefore, is to advance presuppositions that may eventually remain outside the real meaning of one or another “fact” or “aspect” under examination. By drawing on the “workshop-centred” artisanship, for example, I face the risks of extending implications of the village-originated craftwork over the city-located folk-fairs, such as when speaking about the “traditional motives of decoration” with a craftsman more probably interested in meeting the diversified “tastes” of his clientele. Likewise, while thinking about the patterns of exchange associated with the museum fairs, I may figure out the trading behaviour and interests of my interlocutors, rather than the handwork and “art” commitment of them. Once more, the dual substance of artisanship as an integrated pattern of peasant economy is to be accounted for, and conceptualised.

To assure my working hypotheses with a link to the field, which is to provide a starting point for the research accuracy, I shall correlate them to the above domains of analysis. This is also a means to control the analytical and interpretive frame of my research, since validation or invalidation of a given hypothesis may accordingly confirm or reject the data arrangement under this or that rubric.

As regards the *social organisation*, I would infer that artisanship should not be simply seen as an “annex” or auxiliary occupation within the peasant husbandry, notwithstanding the craftsmen’s claims that they have been, or are, involved in other agricultural or industrial activities, or that their handwork is technically individual or “unique”. Indeed, many of the craftsmen’s accounts include statements or descriptions about such frameworks as “family associations”, “craft cooperatives”, “firms”, and – at a national level – associations of the folk artisans. Thus it is to expect artisanship to actually be or become a specific branch of the rural economy, enacted as such “on its own” or through local division of labour with the rest of a craftsman’s household<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> In a study concerning the “system of the folk-crafts during a four-decade period [in socialist and post-socialist Romania]”, ethnographer Olga Horşia takes the craftsmen’s organisation in cooperatives as a “fundamental element” of artisanship. With respect to a series of pottery centres such as in Corund-Harghita, Horezu-Vâlcea, Marginea-Suceva, Oboga-Olt, Vama-Satu Mare etc., the author describes the “cooperative structures” as characterized by “mobility”, “flexibility”, “large variety of production”, and “adaptation to demand”. According to Horşia, a percent of 16% of population in Topoloveni-Argeş worked within the local folk-art cooperative (cf. Horşia 1994).

*Traditions* seem to play rather a legitimising role, perhaps as a still identity-shaping resource (in terms of origin, content, and identification of/with a given tradition), but not as an immutable and formally reproduced value-system. Probability of intervention over the technological patterns, as well as over the decorative repertoires, is high – depending on the innovation exigencies of the market (which does not exclude the changes occurred in the aesthetic standards of the contemporary villages of Romania). As a “distinct” domain of rural life (in accord with craftsmanship), the folk traditions should be considered together with other peasant forms of expressive behaviour, like the folklore and rituals. In such a contextualisation, “authenticity” will be a guarantee for the quality of one’s handicraft and artefacts<sup>5</sup>.

When it is not simply taken for “tradition”, *folk art* would probably matter too little for the vernacular definition of artisanship. We can ask to what extent such a category belongs to the bearers of peasant crafts and how they conceptualise it today. In fact, notions such “beauty”, “style” and “creation” are primarily expected to associate with the artisans’ handwork, traditional heritage, festive days, and “common-sense” as well. When implemented by artisanry, however, the folk arts could also operate as a “negotiated matrix” of rural and urban ideas, worldviews, “artistic” tastes and praxis, moral sentences, cultural fashions, and so on. The adoption of the contrastive notion of “kitsch” in the craftsmen’s native vocabulary is another argument to consider the intellectual construction or interpretation of folk art<sup>6</sup>.

There exists the possibility that *socialist economy* reflect more than an only “lost-world” among the artisans of today. Majority of them learned about their crafts under communism, which entails fluctuation and relativism in their narratives on the topic. On the other hand, the state patronage over the folk traditions and crafts did not entirely disappear after 1989, but it survived in the museums’ and city municipalities’ management of the folk fairs<sup>7</sup>. It is a fact that, while the ethnographic museums were mostly founded in the socialist

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<sup>5</sup> Anthropologist Vintilă Mihailescu sees the “issue de la tradition” as constitutive to a “démarche inévitable dans une approche critique de l’ethnologie roumaine”. The “objet” of such an approach – the *sarma*, stuffed vine leaves, or meat-roll in cabbage – that is a “‘gastronème’... plus ou moins ‘réel’” – is, according to Mihailescu, relevant for an ample theoretical investigation of the theme of cultural belonging or appropriation (also) among the Romanians. In the author’s terms, as a “patrimoine partagé” and a “symbole patrimonial”, the *sarma* “fait partie de la réalité” of consumer; as a “cultural *sarma*”, it is not the same as other kinds of “*sarma*” – which nonetheless is possible with regard to the “civilised *sarma*”! Since “le patrimoine est un enjeu du pouvoir”, and the past may set up “pièges traditionalists”, the author’s conclusion is that “repenser la dimension historique des objets du présent c’est peut-être la principale tâche de l’anthropologie roumaine actuelle” (cf. Mihailescu 2003).

<sup>6</sup> According to a comprehensive definition provided by ethnographer Paul Petrescu, “[The folk art is] One of the basic components of the Romanian art, to be understood as a form of our people’s social consciousness, able to specifically mirror the world’s reality [...]”. As such, the folk art would include (following the same author) the peasant furniture, carved little artefacts, musical instruments, agricultural tools, tissues and clothing items, pottery, painting, carved bones and horns, basketry, metallurgy, and ornamentation (Petrescu and Stoica 1997: 40, 43-50).

<sup>7</sup> The state patronage of what “folk” meant in socialist Romania took as another form of “expression” the domain of folkloristic representations, such as the “festival scene” (which was intended to replace the village folklore framework), “professionalisation of ‘folklore artists’”, “the folklore show”, “national folklore festivals, and ‘competition’” (cf. Marian-Bălașa 2000-2002). According to the author, “The academic research centres, as well as the ‘centres for the direction – *îndrumare* – of folk creation [...]’ were initially planned to cooperate with institutions for ideological propaganda and communist education in order to reformulate the folk tastes and manifestations, including the folkloristic ones, in accordance with the communist ideology”. The communist authorities’ involvement through the “cultural management” of the folk culture culminated in the 1970s and 1980s with the huge “Cântarea României” [Homage to Romania] festival, characterised (according to Suzanne Kratzer) by “the mass character”, “social, ethnic, and age variety”, “continuity and rhythm”, and “competitive character” (cf. Marian-Bălașa 2000-2002: 278-9). For the implications of the state cultural-management of the artisanship in socialist Romania, see Stahl, (Constantin 2004: 96-100, 188-91).

period of Romania, the folk fairs will proliferate after the communist fall. Thus, the private initiatives associated with artisanship must necessarily be considered within their dependencies upon governmental cultural politics and a state-regulated market.

As suggested above, *market economy* is likely to represent a rather “would-be” framework for the folk artisanship in post-socialist Romania<sup>8</sup>. Craftsmen make important efforts to attain or enhance the competitiveness of their work by engaging themselves in the market distribution of their artefacts through the folk-fair network set up by the ethnographic museums. The commonly used definition of artefacts as “commodity”, as well as the promotion of them by visit-cards or posters, is an obvious sign of the increasing specialisation in a field indeed “marketable”. It remains, however, to answer how mutually-profitable in fact is the “partnership” of the artisans with museums, and how the museums face in their turn another competition, that for the craftsmen-as-clients, from the part of such “rivals” as the private folk-style shops and warehouses or the city municipalities.

In a similar way, the *folk-fair* in the city is expected to concern not so much the “patrimonial” or “representational” purposes of ethnographic museums, as the “supply-and-offer” flow of goods of the open-air markets. In theory, artefacts address “consumption needs” related more to aesthetic, than to utilitarian, tastes. However, they are “products” (as the artisans say) subject to exchange relationships such as whatever goods and services are. The folk-fair relationships are engaged “face-to-face” (and thus they are open to negotiation). Moreover, such relationships include retail and wholesale, branch co-operation as well as competition. All these are market institutions, even if most of artisans claim that craftsmanship would not be productive enough to make one’s living and that commerce would only cover the expenses for the raw materials they use<sup>9</sup>.

Due to the craftsmanship market enrolment, the *ethnographic* or “*folk-culture*” museums could undergo – or undertake? – a transformation of their “functional” profile from an institution devoted to the collection, conservation, and exhibition of “folk objects”, to a cultural enterprise interested more in “clientele” than in “visitors”. It is through such a metamorphosis that museums develop proper “marketing” techniques of commercialising the artefacts, editing brochures about artisanship, tax collecting for entry and participation to the fairs, hosting of “folk” cuisine services, folkloristic representations, etc. Important issues to examine are the managerial strategy of museums (such as payment or discount for the

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<sup>8</sup> “Informality” is perhaps a more accurate term for such economic phase in many public and private sectors in Romania today. Liviu Chelcea and Oana Mateescu edited (2004) a collective volume dedicated to Romanian “informal economy” after 1989. They and the co-authors approach a series of themes like the pawning firms, thefts from a ex-socialist livestock breeding complex, private strategies in the wood-commerce, politics and social practices in urban markets, human trafficking to Hungary, and apple-brandy commerce. The editors associate the informal economy in contemporary Romania with the “second economy” during socialism (cf. Chelcea, Mateescu 2004: 17).

<sup>9</sup> The folk fair is a peasant institution that the ethnographic museums seem to have borrowed from the peasant cultural milieu within which it had developed for centuries. Such fairs – called *nedei*, singular *nedeie* – took place since the medieval times on the western, southern, and eastern sides of the Romanian Carpathians. Anthropologist Gheorghîță Geană provides (2006: 93-4) the annual calendar of sixteen folk fairs in the villages of Bârsești, Năruja, Tirchiș, and Vidra (Vrancea County), as held between 23 April and 6 December, at fixed dates, usually representing Christian feasts”. According to the author (who also relies on ethno-folkloristic and sociological descriptions of Carpathian fairs in the 1930s), a series of functions may be associated with the mountain folk fairs in Romania, including the “institutionalised entertainment” as a “means of socialisation for young people”, the “economic exchanges as influential peasant markets”, and the “ethnic function” of “reinforcing the primordial ties” between the Romanians who live in Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania (Geană 2006: 94-7).

craftsmen's accommodation and transportation expenses), and the competition between museums for hosting the folk fairs<sup>10</sup>.

There probably exists a regular market demand for the folk artefacts, as come from the part of a *clientele* that includes tourists, folk shops, ethnic restaurants, private collectors, etc. This fact, together with random or occasional buyers, makes up the consumption network for artisanry<sup>11</sup>. Presence of a constant clientele is theoretically a condition for the folk-fairs popularity among artisans, as well as for the maintenance of partnership between craftsmen and museums. Since majority of artisans mention the existence of their personal connections with clients, the inference of a "ready-made" demand for the folk artefacts may be as much as plausible. The craftsmen's regional diversity is a further premise in meeting and keeping one's own clientele within the folk fairs.

Similarly to the craft diversity, *ethnicity* is supposed to fulfil a differential function necessary to reify the "primordial" or "perennial" virtues associated with craftsmanship. In reality, many of such "virtues" could partially act as rhetorical tools to enhance the market competitive attributes of handwork and artefacts. However, the ethnic dimension – approached here as regards Romanian, Hungarian, Polish, and German artisans – is possibly relevant in conjunction with categories of analysis like the social organisation and clientele. This is the case of local specialisation in a given craft, or of some rural → urban "chains of distribution" enacted through kinsmen or co-villagers<sup>12</sup>. Another probability is the display of artisanry by means of the museums' ethnic patrimony, which is apparent "at large" among the Romanian artisans and "at narrow" among the craftsmen of ethnic-minority status, when they exhibit artefacts inside or in front of traditional houses specific to their groups or areas.

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<sup>10</sup> Such an agenda of many ethnographic museums in contemporary Romania is a radical change if compared with the situation since before 1989. During socialism, Romanian "folk-culture" museography used to follow such working criteria as "Mirroring the unity of material and spiritual [folk] creation in the country as a whole", "Outlining the continuity of Romanian folk culture", "Respecting authenticity", "Displaying the main types of [peasant] constructions", "State of conservation [of the folk artefacts]", "Esthetical value of the folk artefacts", "Representing functionality [of the folk artefacts or installations]", "Representing accurately the cultural areas and issues" (cf. Ungureanu 1971: 14-22). Other criteria accounted for were "Historicity" and "Utilising the natural environment" (cf. Irimie 1971: 116).

<sup>11</sup> As regards the clientele of artisanry in post-socialist Romania, ethno-folklorist Maria Bâtcă makes an analysis of the folk-artefacts production through the incidence of two contrastive couples of notions, namely "authentic" vs. "kitsch", and "tradition" vs. "innovation". Bâtcă is concerned with "the confusion of the consumer public" when such public is "uneducated from an artistic point of view", with "different tastes, prejudices, and trends"; "unpredictability" of the market behaviour of such clients is also taken into account. "Education for the young generation" is aimed at "the knowledge and appreciation of the authentic traditional values", as well as "the scientific and educative television programmes" is seen as a solution "to extract the authentic artefacts from anonymity" (cf. Bâtcă 2000-2002: 299-300).

<sup>12</sup> Ethnicity builds up an important framework for the practice of various local crafts in Romania today, as particularly concerns the ethnic-minority status. Thus, Iulia Hasdeu provides ethnography of the Roma copper-craft (which is in fact replaced after 1989 by the commerce of aluminium from industrial abandoned rests), in a village from Southern Romania (cf. Hasdeu 2004). Another example is that of the Roma basketry in a village from Eastern Transylvania, in a context of mutual employing relationships between Hungarians and Roma (Gypsies) (cf. Töhötöm 2004).

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