

ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUMS IN THE RURAL AREAS OF CRIȘANA REGION, ROMANIA – KEEPERS OF LOCAL HERITAGE, TRADITION AND LIFESTYLE

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Abstract: Crișana Region is a historic region in the north-western part of Romania, rich in cultural heritage and traditions and a small, yet valuable part of this heritage can be found exhibited in the ethnographic museums from the rural areas. The aim of our study is to draw attention upon these museums, which are small museums, usually organized at the initiative of local people in their own houses or in old houses of deceased relatives (the case of Muzeul satului din Finiș – Finiș Village Museum). The collections are of various sizes, containing older and newer objects belonging to them or to other members of the community, however, the common issue which characterizes these museums is that they are all very eclectic, most often unorganized collections. We also made a cartographic representation of their distribution in the territory, so they could be easily located by those interested in this type of ethnographic cultural heritage.

Key words: ethnography, museum, heritage, rural area, tradition

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INTRODUCTION

Museums, generally, have been for a long period of time the keepers of valuable exhibits of different nature and from different domains like art, history, anthropology, ethnography, etc. Most museums are large and are situated in cities and towns where

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they can be visited by the local people as well as by tourists and travelers through the respective locality, due to the fact that towns and cities are the localities abundant in cultural attractions, amongst which museums. Museums are the object of our study, (Harris & O'Hanlon, 2013; Herman & Vârnăv, 2014; Ilieș et al., 2018; Indrie et al., 2018; Lincu et al., 2018; Mihincău et al., 2019; Navarrete Hernández, 2014; Turner, 2014) but those which can be found in rural areas, more specifically in the rural areas of Crișana Region, Romania. They host collections of ethnographic items which reflect very well the past and present local realities of the communities. Crișana Region is located in the north-western part of Romania (Figure 1) and it comprises Bihor County entirely and parts of Arad, Sălaj and Satu Mare Counties. The region benefits of all types of landforms (Figure 1), from low plains such as Crișurilor Plain, in the western part of the region, hills and depressions, Crasnei Hills, Vad-Borod Depression, Beiuș Depression, to mountains like Plopiș Mountains, Bihor Mountains, etc (Blaga, 2014, Ilieș et al., 2014; Ilieș et al., 2018). The component population of the region is of various ethnicities: Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Slovaks and Roma (Bodocan, 2001).



Figure 1. Geographical location of Crișana Region in Romania and within the European Continent

Other ethnicities are also represented, but in a very low number. The landforms are important in our study because they have a great deal of influence upon the people's occupations, since the land provides materials for them, and, implicitly, on the objects they create in order to work. People of different ethnicities contribute with their own culture and traditions to the local ethnographic heritage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A mixed methodological approach was used, data collection and analysis, as our aim is to present the ethnographic museums from the rural area of Crișana Region and

the type of exhibits they host. The ethnographic heritage of the entire region, or of smaller areas of it, has been studied by many specialists in the domain (David, 2015; Filimon, 2012; Ghinoiu, 2011; Godea, 1977; Godea, 1981, Herman & Gherman, 2016; Herman & Benchiș, 2017; Ilieș et al., 2017; Ilieș et al., 2018; Josan, 2009, 2010), however, we consider that the ethnographic museums from rural areas were not given proper attention. Therefore, we compiled a list of these museums and two of them were taken into study by comparison: *Finish Village Museum* (Figure 2) and „*Horea and Aurel Flutur*” *Museum of Ethnography* (Figure 3), both from Bihor County.

The two above mentioned museums were studied in situ by observation and the photographic technique was used to illustrate the exhibits. From cartographic point of view, two maps were made using GIS (Geographic Information System Mapping). One of them depicts the geographic location of Crișana Region and the second one represents the distribution of the ethnographic museums in the region.



Figure 2. The household which hosts the *Finish Village Museum*



Figure 3. The entrance to the „*Horea and Aurel Flutur*” *Museum of Ethnography*

The ethnographic museums are spread throughout the rural area of Crișana, they are present in most counties which compose the region, reflecting through the collected objects the local ethnographic heritage. They are organized in households and houses or under the form of exhibitions in schools or culture houses which are themselves representative for the local type of buildings and rural architecture.

Table 1. The ethnographic museums from the rural areas of Crișana Region, Romania (Data source: <http://ghidulmuzeelor.cimec.ro>)

| Museum | Locality | County |
|--|-----------------|---------------|
| Beliu Museum Collection | Beliu | Arad |
| The Museum of Buteni Commune | Buteni | Arad |
| „Horea and Aurel Flutur” Ethnographic Museum | Chișcău | Bihor |
| Finish Village Museum | Finish | Bihor |
| Sălacea Museum House | Sălacea | Bihor |
| Ligia Bodea Museum House | Iaz | Sălaj |

Obviously, there are ethnographic collections and exhibitions in the big and more famous museums from the urban areas as well, and they are even more organized, more compact than those from the rural areas, but the cultural value of the latter lies in the fact that everything there is suggestive, from the small objects and tools which were

used in various household works and occupations, traditional clothing and fabrics, specific to the villages or to the area, to furniture pieces, as they all reflect the lifestyle of the local community, their love for artistry and their craftsmanship.

Even the names of these museums suggest either the type of collection they comprise or the name of the founder (Table 1). Table 1 illustrates the ethnographic museums and the localities and counties where they can be found.



Figure 4. The ethnographic museums from rural areas and the „lands” of Crisana Region

The reasons why there are three ethnographic museums in Bihor County alone are that the entire county is in the region, it has all the landforms mentioned earlier and all the ethnicities, fact which leads to a wide variety of occupations, traditions and lifestyles. It can be noticed that most of these museums are in the vicinity of mountainous areas (Figure 4), since higher relief provides other occupation possibilities besides agriculture, due to the existence of raw materials: forestry, building with wood, wood processing, carving; mining; milling, sheep breeding, etc., and the more occupations the population have, the richer their heritage is. Besides the counties, Crișana is also made up of „lands”, „mental spaces” (Cocean, 1997; Cocean, 2011; Cocean & Filip, 2008; Ilieș, 1998; Ilieș, 2014; Ilieș & Wendt, 2015; Ilieș, 2017; Ilieș, 2018;) which have a strong influence on the region’s cultural heritage: Silvaniei Land, Beiuș Land and Zărandului Land (Figure 4). Thus, *Belu Museum Collection* and *The Museum of Buteni Commune* are in Zărandului Land, „*Horea and Aurel Flutur*” *Ethnographic Museum* and *Finiș Village Museum* are in Beiuș Land, *Ligia Bodea Museum House* is in Silvaniei Land and, although *Sălacea Museum House* is in neither of the mentioned lands, it is in another well-defined area, Ierului Valley.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

When considering ethnographic museums or collections in rural areas, it can be noticed that there is no consistency regarding the exhibits. Obviously, they all have similar items such as household objects, clothing pieces, tools, icons, etc., gathered from the respective area, but the way they are exhibited depends solely on the owners’ or founders’ space possibilities and vision, their purpose being to reflect as accurately as possible how people used to live and work in their villages.

Finiș Village Museum, located in Finiș Locality, Bihor County, is a small museum organized by the owner of the household who inherited it from his grandparents. It contains the main building made up of a porch, two rooms and a kitchen between them. There is also a pantry with separate entrance, a barn and a water well in the yard. The rooms are set up as a bedrooms and family rooms, decorated in a manner which is typical for Beiuș Land and for the entire region: two beds on opposite walls, one bench in front of each bed, a table in the middle of the room, a wardrobe and a dresser (Figure 5, left).



Figure 5. Bed, table and benches (left); loom (right)

The beds are decorated with pillows and fabrics with traditional patterns. There are also mannequins showcasing traditional clothing, typical to the Hungarian

ethnicity. One room, besides the bed, table, cupboard, also features a traditional loom, dating back to 1928, used by women to weave their own fabrics (Figure 5, right)

The kitchen features a built-in traditional oven and shelves for dishes (Figure 6). The objects exhibited in house recreate the living conditions of a typical, fairly rich family (we know this by the number of pillows on the beds, they represent wealth).

The household objects are very eclectic from various periods of time. Although most of them are not very old, some are contemporary, they reflect the household organization and the rural particularities of the family life. More household objects are exhibited in the pantry and tools in the barn (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Barn (up-left); pantry (up-right); kitchen (down)

„Horea and Aurel Flutur” Ethnographic Museum from Chișcău, Bihor County is also a family cared ethnographic museum, set up in the household of brothers Horea and Aurel Flutur and their families. Just like the museum from Finiș, this one also has a room set up with traditional furniture pieces, mannequins dressed up in traditional clothing, fabrics woven in the house and decorated with local patterns, etc., representing

the usual living conditions of the local people (Figure 7). There is also an old classroom accessible to the visitors (Figure 7). The rest of the objects are exhibited in a large, covered barn, on categories. In this case the exhibits did not belong solely to the family, they were collected from other people in the village and even from neighboring villages. First of all, they represent the lifestyle of people through the household objects, then there are tools and mechanical machines which reflect their occupations: from shoe-making, weaving, pottery, wood-processing and carving, carpentry, to forestry and mining (Figure 8).



Figure 7. Traditional room (left); old classroom (right)
„Horea and Aurel Flutur” Ethnographic Museum

The exhibits are very many and they belong to various periods of time and to several areas, not only to Chișcău Village, so we can say that a part of Beiuș Land is reflected here, mostly the mountainous area of Bihorului Mountains. Some of the items have tags explaining their origins, such as the period of time when they were made, which part of the area they were brought from or who they belonged to.

Some others, especially wooden objects have the owner's name and the year they were made carved in them. However, most objects have no indications of origin or former owners, or dating, as they were usually passed on from one generation to another, without any additional information. The main principle of organizing them was by category: chests on one side, baskets, on another side, mechanical machinery in one place, furniture pieces against one wall, pottery on another wall, etc. (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Barn with exhibited eclectic objects (left and right)

CONCLUSIONS

Both analyzed museums exhibit mainly the heritage of the founding families, especially the *Finiș Village Museum* which recreates the traditional household of the family who actually inhabited the house for almost two centuries (Figure 9).



Figure 10. Flutur family pictures at the „Horea and Aurel Flutur” Ethnographic Museum from Chișcău

The same situation is encountered in „Horea and Aurel Flutur” Ethnographic Museum from Chișcău (Figure 10), a family collection combined with the miscellaneous collection of objects from the local population and from the surrounding areas.

It can be noticed that family, traditions, old habits and the connection to the past are very important for the people in rural areas. They are important enough to make the people go through the trouble of founding these ethnographic museums with the only purpose of carrying on these spiritual and material values. The income of owners provided by visits to the museums lies in visitors giving a volunteer donation (if they consider it worth it), in the case of *Finiș Village Museum* and the optional shopping of traditionally made objects in the case of „Horea and Aurel Flutur” Ethnographic Museum from Chișcău. The opening hours of the first are not established, there is just the phone number of the family’s grandson who comes and opens the museum for visitors and proudly walks them through, providing information about the family heritage and answering any potential answers.

The latter, the more developed one, has opening hours and visitors walk around the museum on their own, but there is somebody to answer questions if necessary. It resembles more a regular museum, except the fact that not all items are dated and that there are very many objects cluttered in a fairly small space. According to the owners of both museums, not many people visit them, unless they are passing through the villages and they happened to hear about them. An advantage of „Horea and Aurel

Flutur” Ethnographic Museum from Chișcău is that it is situated near *Bear’s Cave*, so visitors to the cave might be interested in the ethnographic museum as well.

Museums are not the typical tourist attraction in rural areas, they are representative mostly for urban areas, yet we consider that the ethnographic museums from rural areas have cultural and tourist value exactly because they reflect rural life from the remote past up to the present and they contribute a great deal to the promotion of the local ethnographic heritage, not only to the younger generation, but also to visitors from other parts of the country or even from abroad.

They stand for local uniqueness in a world where the globalization tendencies cannot be avoided (Richards, 2007). Further research and talking to the local population could help finding more about the origins of the object composing the ethnographic heritage. Better marketing strategies should also be found in order to raise awareness regarding the spiritual and material importance of these museums from cultural, economic and social point of view (Benedek & Dezsi, 2006).

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