



Panel

## 5.7. Transforming Village Culture: Village Halls and Cultural Centres in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century. Part I

**Panel organiser: Musat, Raluca, New Europe College, Romania**

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, village cultural centres appeared across numerous countries in Europe and beyond. Known under a wide range of names – for example the village or community hall (UK), rural civic centre (US), foyer culturel (France), Volksheim (Austria), Halkevleri (Turkey), and cāmin cultural (Romania) – these new institutions of village life were part of a global process of rural transformation aimed at integrating peasants into the modern world whilst preserving local cultures and traditions. Often founded by urban or rural elites, the state, voluntary associations or religious organisations, these institutions aimed to re-centre rural life around new practices and moral values that were often exogenous to the rural community itself. Despite their different uses and agendas, the presence of these institutions in so many counties indicates both an international interest in the development of the rural world through culture and wider transformations in leisure practices in the countryside. This panel brings together papers that look at houses of culture or cultural centres at the meeting points of local, regional, national and global history in different geographical and political contexts. Papers will deal with: Who founded village cultural centres and what agenda or ideological underpinning did they have (social, political, religious, or economic)? How they were used and by whom? What role did they play in various types of ‘civilising missions’ (for example state-driven, religious, rural development, etc)? What role they played in processes of social or demographic change? How were village cultural centres places in which folk cultures or other identities were preserved, revived or transformed? What definitions of rural culture arose from the establishment of village cultural centres? Participants are also invited to discuss not only the content, but also the form and aesthetics of village cultural centres, as new additions to the rural built environment, as part of rural planning schemes, but also as ways of re-organising existing buildings or spaces. Finally, we encourage discussions on the international and transnational dimension of this phenomenon, possibly engaging with as the role of these institutions in rural development, hygiene and modernisation from the point of view of international or global organisations.

**Chair: Burchardt, Jeremy, University of Reading, UK**

Tuesday, 20 August 2013 // 1300 – 1500 // Session 5 – Room A 019

### 5.7.1. The Cultural Propaganda of the Ploughmen’s Front and the Role of the Cultural Guides in Communist Romania (1945-1953)

Paper

**Radu, Sorin, Lucian Blaga University, Romania**

The main task of Ploughmen’s Front was to implement the Communist ideology in the rural environment, facilitating the process of comunization of the Romanian villages, where the Communists were extremely unpopular. The propaganda, using large apparatus of propagandists and agitators, attacked from all directions the souls and minds of Romanians, trying to transform them into obedient citizens, in people always ready to accept the rules imposed by the communist power, if not with joy, at least with passivity and indifference, and also into active, loyal people to the new regime. The communist propaganda and agitation, including that of the Ploughmen’s Front, gave great importance to the ideological education of their own cadres and activists with the purpose to transform them into an elite loyal to the party. In communist Romania at the end of 40s and the beginning of the 50s, there appeared a new type of propagandist: “the cultural guide”. This was a party servant educated at the school of cadres with the aim to organize and supervise activities of cultural propaganda in the countryside. The peasantry had to be convinced to participate to the cultural events, festivals and socials. It was of great importance for the cadres responsible with propaganda to promote such festive moments in countryside life, to control the strategies and methods by which those events were capitalized.

### 5.7.2. An Institutional Approach toward the Transformation of Countryside: the Collective Farms and Cultural Centers in the Communist Romania

Paper

**Micu, Cornel, Danubius University, Romania**

The presentation will focus on a rural region in South-Eastern part of Romania, namely the Bordei Verde commune, which I studied as I was working at my PhD project. The village cultural center or “cāmin cultural” appeared in Bordei Verde together with the collective farm during the 50s. Both were new institutions that competed with the more traditional ones such as the church, the tavern and the mayor’s office. They represented and attempted to transform the local culture and social relations according to the ideological line of the communist regime. Yet, in the case of the cultural center, it also represented a first attempt to politically mobilize the villagers and to gain their support during the sensitive decade in which the collectivization took place. The relation between the cultural center and the collective farm was imbalanced, with the last one representing the most important socialization space in the village. This was in accordance with the dominant Marxist ideology, which emphasized the role of economic structures and the need to change them in order to transform the society as a whole. Nevertheless, the cultural center in Bordei Verde survived after 1989 and remained a cultural hub for youngsters and adults. In this presentation I will focus on the institutional relation between the cultural center and the collective farm, in an attempt to determine which aspects of the daily life they shaped.

### 5.7.3. Comment

Paper

**Burchardt, Jeremy, University of Reading, UK**

#### Participants

**Burchardt, Jeremy**

Dr Jeremy Burchardt is a lecturer in history in the Department of History at the University of Reading and is currently chair of the Interwar Rural History Research Group. His research focuses on the social and cultural history of the countryside in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially leisure and rural social relations, and attitudes to the countryside. He is the author of *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793-1873* (2002) and *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change* (2002), and co-editor, with Paul Brassley and Lynne Thompson, of *The English Countryside between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline* (2006).

**Musat, Raluca**

Raluca Musat is a postdoctoral fellow at New Europe College in Bucharest. She completed a PhD in History at University College London in the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, where she taught European history and sociology. Her current research deals with the relationship between the development of the social sciences and rural modernisation processes in interwar Europe.

**Micu, Cornel**

Cornel Micu is assistant Professor at “Danubius” University, Romania. His fields of

interest are social and economic history, the transformation of social structures following europeanization, urbanization from a historical perspective and agricultural history. He has a PhD from the Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena, Germany and has been a fellow of the New Europe College in Bucharest and Imre Kertesz Kolleg in Jena and worked in several projects regarding the rural and political history of Romania. His current research topics are the policies of rural systematization and urbanization in communist Romania and Bulgaria.

**Radu, Sorin**

Sorin Radu is Associate Professor at the “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu. His research interests are in the history of electoral systems and history of communism in Romania. He is the author of several volumes, such as: *Electoralul din România în anii democrației parlamentare (1919-1937)* [Romanian Electorate during Parliamentary Democracy (1919-1937)], 2004; *Modernizarea sistemului electoral din România (1866-1937)* [Modernization of the Electoral System in Romania (1866-1937)], 2005; *Ploughmen’s Front. Documents, vol I (1944-1947), vol II (1948-1951)*, 2011 (in collaboration with V. Ciobanu and N. Georgescu).