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

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 cãmin 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 underpinned (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 underpinned (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 underpinned (social, political, religious, or economic)? How they were used and by whom?

5.7.3. Comment

Burhardt, Jeremy, University of Reading, UK

The main task of Ploughmen’s Front was to implement the Communist ideology in the rural environment, facilitating the process of communication 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

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 “cãmin 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 collectivisation 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. The paper will be 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 shaped.