

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

**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**

Wednesday, 21 August 2013 // 0900 – 1030 // Session 7 – Room A 022

### 7.6.1. Village Halls, local leisure cultures and sense of place in 1930s Lakeland

**Andrew, Rebecca, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK**

This paper explores the central role village halls played in local leisure culture throughout the 1930s, in Lakeland, a region in the Lake District. Existing work identifies village halls as an important focus for rural communities in the inter-war years and suggests that such venues encouraged the spread of popular culture in the countryside. In contrast, this paper argues that village halls could also serve a rather different function, reinforcing both older leisure patterns and existing social structures. The absence of commercial leisure venues in Lakeland meant that village halls were important cultural spaces where local communities could express their difference, maintaining ‘authentic’, traditional leisure habits. Activities held in these venues, such as social dancing and dialect plays, were self-consciously used to illustrate Lakeland’s connections to the past. Although village halls were a frequent focus for small, localised gatherings, visitors, such as tourists, were often present at larger events, which allowed communities in Lakeland to project a particular sense of place to outsiders. This paper links this localised sense of place with the broader moral geography of the countryside, which was evident in the 1930s. These experiences are contextualised by wider national debates about leisure and the countryside, drawing on oral history testimony and evidence from the local press, to illustrate the role village halls played in the construction of local leisure identities in Lakeland.

### 7.6.2. Landownership and Village Cultural Centres in Mid Nineteenth Century England

**Holland, Sarah, Sheffield Hallam University, UK**

This paper argues that the physical and ideological “cultural centres” of some rural communities were in fact interchangeable, with villagers occupying church, chapel, school, and other private and public spaces to fulfill multiple objectives (social, economic, cultural, religious, educational). Therefore, the absence of a purpose built village hall in mid nineteenth century rural England did not equate to moribund village culture. Evidence from the detailed analysis of case study villages in South Yorkshire, England demonstrates the complexities of village culture and re-evaluates the role of landownership in rural life. The way in which landowners used existing cultural centres, such as the church, school and public house, as vehicles for social control and community cohesion by expanding the cultural remit of these institutions is examined. Possible motives for the reliance on existing institutions are also

discussed. In addition to the motivation provided by landowners, the ascendancy of the tenant as contributor to village culture through active participation is evaluated. Comparisons are made between villages with and without dominant landowners, in order to further re-evaluate the role of landownership in rural life. Interconnections between places and spaces during this period are also considered, examining the concepts of individual and collective experiences of village culture, and of cultural centres as forums for the exchange of ideas and knowledge, as well as opportunities for leisure

### 7.6.3. New moralities, new peasants, new rituals: the place of folklore in the heart and home of socialist culture

**Urdea, Alexandra, Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK**

This paper is concerned with the role that the House of Culture - Cāmin Cultural - was meant to play in the dissemination of communist ideology in the Romanian countryside. I will be looking at the specific forms of ritual and culture that communist ideology was imbibed with when disseminated in the villages. I identify the important role that folklore played in embodying the moralities and aspirations of the communist regime, in a form that peasants could find it easy to identify with. Throughout the paper I will also look at the effects of these attempts in the village of Vranceaia, by looking at the meanings associated there with the House of Culture. While looking closely at the propaganda associated with the house of culture, I am using Yurchak’s notion of the ‘performative dimensions of seemingly “wooden discourse”’ to see how the communist propaganda demands might have been interpreted and understood by the people they were aimed for.



#### Participants

**Andrew, Rebecca**

Rebecca Andrew is based in the Manchester Centre for Regional History at Manchester Metropolitan University, where she completed her PhD, *The Leisure Identities of Rural Youth: Tradition, Change and Sense of Place in Lakeland, 1930s to the early 1950s*. Her thesis used oral history testimony to examine the leisure activities of young countrymen and women and highlighted how their experiences were shaped by a strong sense of tradition and awareness of the Lakeland landscape. Her research interests include the history of youth, rural communities, popular culture, and local and regional identities.

**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).

**Holland, Sarah**

Sarah Holland is a PhD student at Sheffield Hallam University. Her thesis examines rural communities in the mid nineteenth century against the theoretical context of D Mills, reevaluating the role of landownership and the ‘open-close’ paradigm. She

has delivered papers at various conferences and universities including the British Agricultural History Society and the Social History Society. She teaches at Sheffield Hallam University, including a module that examines the relationship between historical research, academic history and public history. Her public engagement work includes teaching adults and special needs groups.

**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.

**Urdea, Alexandra**

Alexandra Urdea’s research interests revolve around the construction of identity at both a national or individual level. Both my past research on mass media and my current focus on material culture explore then notion of memory and identity in what constitutes lieux de mémoire and other kinds of landmarks through which we define ourselves. In 2009 I was awarded an MA degree in Central and South East European Studies, University College London. My dissertation was an analysis of advertising and mass media material revealing “The self-stigmatizing dimension of the Romanian national identity”.