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 in many different forms – from the classic rural meeting houses of France and the United States to the so-called ‘cultural quarters’ or ‘cultural villages’ of the former Soviet Union – these institutions were central to the development of village cultural life. They provided a forum for the expression of village sentiments, interests, and aspirations, and served as a focus for the maintenance and transmission of cultural traditions and values.

In the United Kingdom, for example, village halls were often the venue for dances, social gatherings, and political meetings. They were also used for the provision of social services, such as youth clubs and sports facilities. In many cases, they were financed by the local community and managed by a committee of elected volunteers. Over time, village halls evolved into more sophisticated cultural centres, providing a range of services and activities that catered to the needs and interests of the local population.

In the United States, rural civic centres were similarly important to the development of rural culture. They served as a focal point for community events and activities, and were often the site of important political and social gatherings. In some cases, they were used for the provision of social services, such as libraries and recreation facilities. Over time, these centres evolved into more sophisticated cultural institutions, providing a range of services and activities that catered to the needs and interests of the local population.

In the Soviet Union, the concept of the ‘cultural quarter’ was introduced in the early 1920s as part of the Soviet Union’s efforts to modernise and industrialise rural areas. These institutions were often financed by the state and managed by a committee of elected volunteers. Over time, they evolved into more sophisticated cultural centres, providing a range of services and activities that catered to the needs and interests of the local population.

In the contemporary world, village cultural centres continue to play an important role in the development of village cultural life. They serve as a focal point for community events and activities, and are often the site of important political and social gatherings. In many cases, they are financed by the local community and managed by a committee of elected volunteers. Over time, these centres have evolved into more sophisticated cultural institutions, providing a range of services and activities that cater to the needs and interests of the local population.

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 role of village halls in local leisure culture throughout the 1930s, in Lakeland, a region in the Lake District. By focusing on the experiences of villagers, the paper aims to provide an understanding of how village halls were used to develop a sense of place and identity in the region. The paper also provides a critical perspective on the use of these institutions in the development of local leisure cultures.

7.6.2. Landownship 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 purpose of a purpose built village hall in mid nineteenth century rural England did not equate to morbund 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 ascendency 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 – Canin 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 imbued with when disseminated in the villages. I identify the important role that folklore played in embedding 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 Vanocoia, 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.

Chair: Burchardt, Jeremy, University of Reading, UK

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

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: Traditions, Change and Sense of Place in Lakeland 1930s to the early 1970s. 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 at the University of Reading and is currently chair of the Interior Rural History Research Group. His research focuses on the social and cultural history of the countryside in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially rural and rural social relations, and attitudes to the countryside. He is the author of the Aldermaston Movement in England, 1933-1937 (2002) and Paradigm Lost? Rural Life and Social Change (2002), and co-writing with Paul Brereton and Lynne Thompson, of The English Countryside between the Wars: Representation and Decline (2008).

Holland, Sarah

Sarah Holland is a PhD student at Sheffield Hallam University; her thesis examines rural communities in the mid-twentieth century against the theoretical context of D H’s, revaluing 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 and individual level. Both my past research on mass media and my current focus on material culture explores these notions of memory and identity in rural communities both in the present and in the future. Her most recent research on the history of advertising examines the relationship between the mass media and rural modernisation processes in interwar Europe.