

Social Traumas, Community Building, Ecological Thinking, Solidarity

The Social Functions of the Hungarian Open Air Museum

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Abstract: New museology, emerging in the 1970s, reached critical museology in the early 2000s. A few peculiar examples of participatory museology can be found when looking back to decades of tradition at the Skanzen Hungarian Open Air Museum. It was a long transformation from an essentially architectural museum into a social museum. In my paper I reflect on some examples of this history.

Open air museums represent one of the most popular and sought-after museum types in the world, with significant ethnographic and historical collections, visitor-friendly exhibitions, and a wide range of programs related to these exhibitions. It is a common phenomenon in the museum world that social problems and sensitive issues first appear in education programs, then in research and collection strategy, and finally in exhibition politics. And so it was at the Skanzen. The tendency began in the early 21st century, when, connected to the Trianon syndrome, it materialized in the research related to the preparation of the Transylvanian building complex, then to the social traumas of 20th-century peasant society. The minority existence, being a Hungarian outside the country's borders, is a cornerstone of the interpretation of the Transylvanian building complex. The analysis of 20th-century changes and research and collections related to the yet-to-be-built 20th-century rural building complex touched upon the history of the disappearance of peasant society as well.

Keywords: new museology, Hungarian Open Air Museum, social museum, community, social traumas

ANTECEDENTS

New museology, emerging from the 1970s reached critical museology at the beginning of the 2000s. A wide range of literature has been published in the topic. The volume *Participatory Museum* by Nina Simon, published in 2010 is about participatory museology. A few peculiar examples of participatory museology have been looking back to decades of tradition in the Hungarian Open Air Museum too. It was a long way to transform from a basically architectural museum into the position of a social museum. In my paper I reflect on some examples of this history. Open air museums represent

one of the most popular and sought-after museum types of the world with significant ethnographical and historical collections, with determining, visitor-friendly exhibitions attracting the public and a wide range of programs related to these exhibitions.

The history of open air museums began with the foundation of Nordiska Museet in Stockholm, and by the establishment of Skansen (1891) this museum type was actually born. Arthur Hazelius (1833–1901) dreamed about this museum type,¹ which presents a region's rural or urban architecture, interior furnishings and way of life with the help of original, relocated houses. These were not simply architectural and/or interior museums, but real social museums representing way of life, in which exceeding the trend of the age not only the triple tasks of collection, protection and representation appeared but the possibilities of education and entertainment too.

For the inhabitants of Stockholm, the Skansen was a folk-park, a multifaceted entertainment locale, a green place and a meeting point at the same time. There are several descriptions to be found about how people spent their summer free time in Skansen, what their excursions in the evenings looked like. Hazelius quickly documented this in thought and later used it as an argument concerning the social role and importance of Skansen as a new public center – especially for the young. In his letter to Bernard Olsen he emphasized that Skansen had not only a cultural historical importance but a national and social significance too (RENTZHOG 2007:11–12).

The German publicist, Heinrich Pudor (1865–1943) preceding his age by far recognized one basic foundation of Hazelius' innovation and wanted to harmonize museums and schools so that he can exploit the education potential of museums. According to his paper museums have to reflect upon contemporary and relevant problems, they have to be animated, similarly to cinemas, since, in his opinion 'life in motion' is much more attractive than still images. He wrote that people cannot come closer to this ideal anywhere else than in Hazelius's work, in Skansen (RENTZHOG 2007:33–34).

The basis of the success of Skansen – and all the other open air museums – is the ingenious method of uniting knowledge and entertainment.

The central Hungarian Open Air Museum belongs to the third generations of open air museums, since it was established in 1967 as a department of the Museum of Ethnography. Later, in 1972 it became an independent institution and opened its first exhibition in 1974. According to the original objective of the Skansen in Szentendre it planned to represent the folk architecture, interior furnishings and way of life of Hungary with the help of original relocated buildings, edifices reconstructed as copies and authentic interiors from the late 18th till the pre-20th centuries. The Museum basically followed the model of German open air museums, architectural elements were the most important, to which the presentation of interior furnishings and way of life was added with the help of thoroughly detailed interiors.

¹ Hazelius possibly used his experiences from the World Exhibition in Paris in 1889, since the prefigurations of open air museums already appeared in this exhibition, moreover, in the exhibition of 1867 too. The French Frédéric Le Play (1806–1882) designed the ethnographic park of the Expo in Paris and the famous opera architect Charles Garnier planned the exhibition with the title *Histoire de l'habitation humaine* [The history of human habitation]. The basic principle of the exhibition was to present the development of human culture through the concept of the home, being 'the most important and most edifying locale'. This could have been an example for Hazelius (RENTZHOG 2007:25–29).

In the 1990s the Museum launched a renewal process in several directions, reflecting on not just professional but social challenges and changes too. Its mission statement was transformed according to this intention. Concerning research, the analysis of different aspects of way of life has become more and more important; besides the ethnographical research of classic peasantry the society of market towns, the layer of craftsmen and the marginalized social groups have also got into the focus of study. Due to changed circumstances not only the present-day territory of Hungary has belonged to the research area; Hungarians living outside the country's border, the Hungarian language territory and Hungarians living in diasporas have also been taken into the research concept of the Museum. However, the appearance of the ethnographical documentation of the recent past has been one of the most significant changes of focus in the institution's life. In the last decade researching the recent past and the present has got into the limelight, their examination provided the basis for many research projects. The necessity of thematic expansion has appeared in open air museology, meaning the demand for representing social groups outside peasantry (craftsmen, servants – agricultural laborers – amphibious workmen, rural intelligentsia) too.

These topics have appeared in the exhibitions organized lately: *In the Course of History, Population Exchange in Southern Transdanubia; Farewell to the Peasantry; Just a Small Work – Villagers in Malenkij robot at the End of World War II.*

NEW EXHIBITIONS AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS REFLECTING SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND TRAUMAS

The situational education programs in the exhibitions of Skanzen, belonging to the 'Personal history' series help to understand and experience historical events and relations.

We try to reconstruct the life of a family or an individual with the help of original documents, locales and situations building upon the students' creativity and empathy. After getting to know the way of life and habits of different social layers and minority groups coexisting at the beginning of the 20th century we focus on assimilation or traditionalism, the conflict of acceptance or prejudice, drawing students' attention to the importance of accepting each other, of being tolerant.

The museum education program can be complemented in the school with the help of the teacher, where students can reconstruct the fate of figures created in the Skanzen, in the period of Holocaust. They create the missing documents, letters, diary entries or memories of the imagined person. They imagine this individual's fate and course of life. Then by weighing the possible choices of their figure they interpret the lives and consequences of actions of victims, rescuers, passive observers and active contributors at the time of the Holocaust. We do not only aim to mediate historical facts and knowledge, but through the reconstruction of personal destiny we try to develop empathy and responsible thinking in students. We realize this intention in our education program 'Ráhel, János, Jákob and the actress' exploiting the exhibitions of the Upland Market Town regional unit.

It is a general phenomenon in the museum world that social problems and sensitive issues of society first appear in education programs, then in research and collection strategy, then finally in the exhibition politics too. This was the same in the case of the

Skanzen too. This tendency began at the beginning of the years of the 21st century, when connected to the Trianon syndrome it materialized in the research work related to the preparation of the Transylvanian building complex, then to the social traumas of the 20th century peasant society. The minority existence, being a Hungarian outside the country's border will be one important cornerstone of the Transylvanian building complex. This has already appeared in the research and will be part of the interpretation too.

The analysis of 20th century changes and research and collection connected to the future 20th century building complex touched upon the era and history of the peasant society's elimination too.

In 2005 the museum representation of these historical events took place in the dwelling house from Hidas in the Southern Transdanubian regional unit. In this building the exhibition time is 1959. In 1945 the family living in the Swabian house built in the 19th century was evacuated, the furnishings and the animals of the family came into the possession of a Szekler family from Bukovina, who had been previously driven away from their home in Bácska overnight. The background of this story appears in our special exhibition, complementing the interior, presenting the history of relocations and population exchange between the years 1945–1947, with the title: *In the Course of History, Population Exchange in Southern Transdanubia in the 1940s* (curator: Erika Vass). In our exhibition we present the politically forced evacuations of 1945–1948. Because of their collective responsibility, Germans formerly living in Hungary were settled in Germany, while others from minority Hungarian communities such as Szeklers from Bukovina and Upland Hungarians were also relocated due to their collective responsibility from Romanian and Czechoslovakia and settled in Tolna and Baranya Counties in the place of the evacuated Germans. These constraints turned many families' lives upside down, damaging them and breaking them, influencing not just the minorities but the majority population of villages too. The tragic events resulted in irresolvable conflicts for a long time between inhabitants of different ethnic groups, forced to live with each other in the same village. Although seemingly these conflicts have ceased to exist, the individuals participating in the events still carry the wounds they had received. The exhibition does not only help the processing of this trauma, but wishes to loosen ethnic and gentile conflicts between present-day young people with the education program related to the exhibition.

The disintegration of the peasant society is a long process, whose last and most tragic chapter occurred after World War II. The communist dictatorship of the 1950s hammered in the last nail into the symbolic coffin of peasantry after the introduction of compulsory produce delivery quotas, the "sweeping of attics", the listing of "kulaks" and forcing people into agricultural cooperatives. The exhibition with the title *Farewell to the Peasantry*, organized by Zsolt Sári focused on this topic. The main subject matter of the exhibition is based on the several-decades-long research of ethnographer Friderika Bíró and historian Lajos Für. The result of their scientific research can be acquainted with from a book of three volumes. (BÍRÓ-FÜR 2013–2014) *The Historical essay* drafts the history of the Hungarian peasantry, the *Interview volume* consists of original peasant narratives and confessions, while the third one with the title *Collection of Sources* gives an insight into the tragic era after 1945, lasting for fifteen years through contemporary archival documents. The seemingly bare historical data, the several thousands of minutes of recorded narratives, the many pages of archival materials document personal lives and individual stories. Paths of life, broken lives influenced by the events of the 20th century still having an effect. In our exhibition we

present the farewell of one-time farmers and peasants to all those things which determined their lives: the land, the family, the small-works, the tools, the holidays, the village and their memories. This is not a farewell of their free will: it was born out of constraint, it was enforced. The exhibition was organized in the dwelling house from Drávacsehi, situated in the Southern Transdanubian regional unit. We applied a special method as we used a relocated, authentically furnished dwelling as the locale for the exhibition. It was the first time we cleared the furnishings away from a house due to a temporary exhibition. In the empty house nails left in the wall and object silhouettes created by grey dust on one of the surfaces recall the one-time furnished house and interior, a life once going on inside. In the exhibition organized around the ten topics of the research project all issues are connected to one or two objects, a photograph, an interview part and a curatorial text. The aim of the exhibition was best expressed by historian Gábor Várkonyi in his critique:

“It is not by chance that the exhibition ends with the farewell to the land, in the barn. It is a moving and cathartic end at the same time. A lonely plough stands in the centre of the space. Almost sterile, as bare as the whole exhibition, conveying this un-lifelike sterility. Cleaned, conserved tools and different articles for personal use – nobody will ever use them according to their function. In the depth of the barn there is a rope with a knot at each end. The visitor suddenly does not know what s/he sees, the thought is slowly forming; a thought we would never say aloud by choice: the two parents hung themselves for the two ends of the same rope, when all of their belongings were taken.

The exhibition *Farewell to the Peasantry* launches the processing of a severe historic catastrophe. Unfortunately, the lack of continuity and the social traumas caused by violent interventions are organic parts of Hungarian history. The processing of these shocks causing severe suffering is necessary for the emergence of a nation possessing a realistic self-understanding and healthy national consciousness” (VÁRKONYI 2014:67).

The latest exhibition, opened in 2016 in the yard of the dwelling house from Muraszemenye in the Southern Transdanubian regional unit serves this special aim. In our exhibition labelled *Just a Small Work – Villagers in Malenkij robot at the End of World War II* (curator: Borbála Balázs-Legeza) we represent the recruitment of the Red Army moving in at the end of the war, then we recall the circumstances of the evacuation into the Soviet Union and the forced labour camps – through personal memories and recollections, enriching the presentation with a tragic installation. The methodological speciality of the open air exhibition is that it does not contain any real museum objects, it affects the audience emotionally with the help of recollections and naïve poems.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE MUSEUM

As mentioned above open air museums undertook the representation of not only built and material heritage at the time of their emergence; the intangible cultural heritage was also in the focus of research in these museums. (BATÁRI-KÁLDY 2015:79–83.) We returned to this ideal, when the Skanzen undertook the documentation of intangible cultural heritage not just in connection with the research of way of life, but by becoming the Hungarian institution bringing into effect the UNESCO convention regulating the

protection of intangible cultural heritage by providing the institutional framework for the operation of the Department of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

This institution having several pillars has accomplished many changes concerning the representation of heritage in the past decade; it is an act whose basis had been provided already in the 1970s. The concept of the living museum has been one of the most influential elements of open air museums for decades. It is closely connected to education activity, based on the concepts of lifelong learning and a wide public access. Open air museums are excellent areas of education, whether it is formal or informal or means the activities of the living museum. In open air museums the importance of knowledge acquired through experience has to be emphasized among other educational options. It emphasizes three main results of learning: the acquisition of knowledge, the learning of skills, and the changing of attitudes (ZIPSANE 2010:100).

The Hungarian Open Air Museum has continuously worked on the construction of its peculiar social network in the previous years, with which it connects different types of communities to the institution, and helps local communities in preserving and strengthening their heritage and identity.

Contact with the communities providing the relocated buildings is one of the most important examples. There are several types of this, as the Museum does not only remain in contact with the given settlements and the inhabitants living there till it conducts research work or the regional unit/exhibition opens. These communities frequently participate in the realization of the museum programs. In certain museum programs women from Milota led the demonstration of bread baking, an activity which was an important element of the 1970s-concept of the living museum. It was in 2013 when a dozen people from Milota participated in a museum festival recently; providing different programs in their own yard from 'Milota'. (Since then we have carried out research in the village several times.) The members of the community from Harka appear similarly with their own program, populating the yard from Harka, year by year.

The story of the votive chapel from Jánosomorja is exciting too. The building would have been demolished at the beginning of the 1980s, as it stood in the track of a busy road. After surveying the building, the Museum asked for the relocation of the chapel. Thus it was rebuilt in Szentendre. Since then the population of Jánosomorja has held Saint Anne's Day in the Museum almost every year.

During the opening ceremony of the Bakony-Balaton Upland regional unit we presented the local specifics of the procession on Corpus Christi Day; this tradition has returned into the practice of the original community too.

Architectural studios participating in the rebuilding after the flood in the Bereg region or the red mud catastrophe in Kolontár examined and used the folk architectural research, survey documentations and photos of the museum archives for the creation of the model plans.

The Museum returned the support of the communities by letting the inhabitants of these settlements visit the Museum free of charge.

The Skanzen celebrates the 50th anniversary of its foundation in 2017. A travelling display is one specialty of the jubilee programs. The "mini exhibition" travels the country in a converted and refreshed Robur autobus visiting those places from where buildings had been relocated into the Museum. The Museum collection is illustrated by one or two objects and photos connected to the visited settlement. There will be an

interactive game in the bus with the topic of birthday. Apart from the exhibition we offer free museum education programs for the local students and with the help of a virtual material we give back the community those buildings and objects which were taken into the Skanzen in the previous decades, namely those photos, building surveys, object photos and ethnographic interviews which were collected in the given settlement by the researchers of the Museum in the last 50 years.

The intangible cultural heritage is a cultural practice basically existing orally, in knowledge and customs, and is connected to a living community. This intangible cultural heritage left from generation to generation, constantly recreated by the communities provides the feeling of common identity and continuity for them. The convention about the preservation of intangible cultural heritage was accepted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2003 for the protection of this function.

The aim of the convention is to preserve these community practices, to strengthen the identity of communities with independent cultural traits and thus the mutual recognition of cultural diversity; moreover it also strives to raise awareness concerning the significance of expression forms threatened by extinction and the protection of such heritage elements.

In 2006 by the creation of the XXXVIII. statute Hungary made the ratification of the document possible, as a result of which our nation joined the convention as the 39th country. The execution of the convention was led by the Educational and Cultural Ministry of the time (today it is the Ministry of Human Resources), on their commission the Hungarian Open Air Museum in Szentendre has been coordinating the professional tasks connected to the national execution of the convention since 2009. As a result, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Directory (www.szellemikulturalisorokseg.hu) emerged as a unit of the Museum's organization. This directory operating inside the Museum attends to a close connection with those communities which preserve the heritage elements selected to the national list or those who plan to get onto the list. One highlight of this co-operation is the Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival, organized annually at every Pentecost, where besides a foreign community, listed on the UNESCO's world heritage list all national heritage elements and communities included in the national list participate.

VOLUNTEERS AND THE MUSEUM

The Hungarian Open Air Museum was the first in the museum field to launch its volunteer program, which has almost 200 participants today, volunteers working in the program help the institution with several thousands of working hours. At the launch of the program we aimed to have tasks which fit the museum mission as much as possible, namely we strived to provide the access for cultural values for the possibly widest social groups. Thus the museum program can be considered to be a help to the same extent as value and recreational possibility for both the museum and the volunteer.

For us the volunteer program is a mutual, useful co-operation for both parties, which means a strong social basis for the Museum, and a meaningful commitment to an important and good case for the volunteers.

The innovation value of the program is provided by the fact that we maintain a well – structured and – organized program in the museum environment, fitting the institution’s mission. This program becomes a more and more organic part of the museum’s texture and the volunteers’ circles. At the beginning of the program we recruited participants of the program in an organized way; while today the program is mostly spread by word and expands this way.

We can count on the work of volunteers in several areas from visitor service (information, tour guides, operation and support of locales) to collection tasks (data processing, restoration works). For this well-organized system it was inevitable to create the post of a volunteer coordinator, which is shared by two colleagues at present, a volunteer and a member of the museum staff.

Immediately reacting to the appearance of the school community service project in Hungary we initially integrated the students into our volunteer program in the institution, then from the 2014/2015 school year we have organized an independent project work for them. In 2014 we participated in a Grundtvig program, where together with an English, Belgian, Danish, Norwegian and a Swedish museum we drafted a handbook for volunteer programs that can be launched in open air museums. In the confines of the program organized by the Volunteer Centre Foundation and the Fundação Eugénio de Almedia we received six Portuguese volunteers, while one of our own volunteers spent three weeks in Portugal with a Hungarian team. We organize annually three meetings for our volunteers, a family day or exhibition visits.

ECOLOGICAL THINKING – COMMUNITY GARDEN IN THE SKANZEN

One of the main characteristics of community gardens is that they are established inside towns while undertaking the roles of community building and self-sufficiency. However, we think that the system operated by the Skanzen fits the notion of community gardens and their social message. The community garden in the Museum can be found in the yard of the dwelling from Zádor (Southern Transdanubian regional unit), the plots are cultivated by eight families.

The group of garden lovers was organized for the initiation of the Museum in 2013 with the aim of providing place a size of a smaller kitchen-garden on the territory of the institution for families from Szentendre, who in their urban home – characteristically in Szentendre – do not possess a garden. However, the community is irregular in its own way, because they rent a smaller plot of land on the territory of the Museum, and as the community of the Museum they not only receive land but all the information the museum staff knows about the maintenance of traditional kitchen gardens and the ecological care of plants, with the least amount of chemicals. On the other hand the establishment and operation of the group originates from the Skanzen. Through the years garden lovers have forged into a cohesive group, who help each other to maintain the gardens and organise their work through a Facebook group. Families cannot afford to go to the Museum daily due to their crowded weekdays, thus they divide the works e. g. of watering and they discuss other gardening tasks and questions through the group too.

Among the tenants of the gardens there are five families from Szentendre and three families from the museum staff, cultivating lands of different sizes. There is a contract

between the Skanzen and the garden tenants with the most significant part about the fact that tenants undertake to take care and to maintain the gardens. Garden tasks can be carried out in the opening hours of the Museum and in the preceding and following two hours around closing time. They store their garden tools and equipment used in the garden in the museum yard in a designated place. The most important connection of the group is the garden, however we organize several community occasions for the gardeners.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Integrated camps are organized in the Skanzen for disabled young people and students of secondary schools conducting school community service.

In the Skanzen we have paid attention to provide programs for children with a disability for decades. We are in close connection with several institutions attending to these children, on the basis of co-operation agreements, thus their groups are regular visitors of our programs. However, due to the emergence of a closer emotional attachment for children growing up in institutions it is necessary to provide a longer time together, on the other hand more and more students apply in the museum to spend compulsory school community service in a meaningful and useful way. We tried to connect these two demands with the idea of a common program, as we think that the common activity of the two groups mutually influence the participants.

We did not consider participants as helpers or people needing help, but as participants complementing each other completely. During the activities it became clear for everyone that some skills and abilities of young disabled people (tactile sense, musicality, emotional intelligence, stamina, openness, curiosity etc.) are better than the average, thus secondary school students got to know their partners exchanging day by day during the daily activities as people to be appreciated. Thanks to this, a strong group cohesion formed, helping the members to get to know each other. Secondary school students met another personality, disability, difficulty, problem and success with each new partner. Besides other difficulties the disabled children having hospitalization problems got in touch with all students, and the common activities pleased every member of the group.

Feedback from the accompanying carers, the students and our own experiences strengthened us concerning the complex efficiency of integrated activities. We saw that the primary goals of the program – gaining experiences, educational option for the disabled children, meaningful pastime for students conducting school service during the discovery of folk culture and the Museum – were reached; it is clear from the feedback that we strengthened students' sense of responsibility, also making them more open towards the children with disabilities. An extra bonus on the positive side is that students have a more open, different view towards parents and teachers of disabled children too.

INSTEAD OF A SUMMARY

Naturally, the question arises in each and every case: How can we integrate the community and make the previously passive observer a participant? What is needed to achieve this? In my opinion a joint communication matrix is needed (linguistic, written, physical) with

the help of which participants continue to have a dialogue, share their opinions and can form into a community (in the given exhibition, work or research) (KESTER 2012:138).

Interdisciplinarity has been our decades-long experience, as in the shaping of the Skanzen architects also took part besides ethnographers; in the previous years we worked together with historians, sociologists, artists, IT professionals, designers in several projects. We tried to introduce participatory museology by involving a wider audience.

Today it has become evident that a museum cannot be an authoritarian institution revealing its message from this position. We have to find the possibilities in which we provide options for interaction and observing. According to Nick Prior:

“In another word the Museum is not based on the (curatorial) authority of its collection, but finds a way suiting different reference frames of the audience – thus encouraging sudden interpretations of its collection. ... As a result, the Museum is a radically syncretic institution, in which differing tendencies work together – aesthetic contemplation and entertainment, connoisseurship and consumption, individual delectation and community service.” (PRIOR 2012:102)

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