

**Archaeology as Advocacy: Celebrating Cultural Heritage and Promoting Sustainability in
Transylvania Mining Communities**

How to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of rural Transylvania?

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Introduction

For centuries, museums have been institutions in which people showcase, preserve, and curate their, and global, cultural heritage. The word museum comes from the Greek word “museion” which means temple of the goddesses called “muses”. These were the goddesses of the arts and science. The very first museum was the Museum of Alexandria which was established in the 4th century BC. This museum was the first museum that presented collection, exhibition, preservation, and classification by visiting settlements in the Mediterranean and collecting artifacts. This museum was created for uses such as a library, amphitheater, observatory, study and work halls, botanical garden, and zoological collection. The first museums were created in order to preserve and exhibit, study and research what man had created at that point. They then began to accumulate artifacts in terms of literature, scientific and philosophical discoveries, natural species, and arts.¹

The Palazzo Medici in the 15th century laid the foundation for modern museums with artifacts being presented in chronological order. In the later half of the 18th century and first half of the 19th century, the first modern ideas for museums were introduced. The French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution drastically changed the progress of these institutions.² They started to become more publicly accessed. They were seen as a way to teach and inform the public. Now during this time museums were not uniform in the way they were set up or in their goals. All over the world museums were organized differently and showcased different things. It was not until the 20th century that a specific structure was introduced: Museology.³ Museology is the “science studies the history of museums, their specific functional and space organization systems,

¹ Hernandez, Sachie. "The Museum Evolution and its Adaptation." *Culture and Development* 8 (2012): 39

² Ibn. 39

³ Ibn. 40

their collections and manner in which they are exhibited (museography), and the relation between these institutions and society.”⁴ This was the start of the modern museums we see today.

It is during World War II that there is a glimmer of the ideas and desires that have pushed for the creation of community museums. Sachie Hernandez writes “The devastation caused by WWII developed a strong sensibility towards the need to rescue and defend heritage by educating the people. The museum object and museum contents in general had to be revalued, seeking maximum clarity and visibility—in contrast to the complexity and redundancy of the eclectic museum—and people had to be attracted, irrespective of social status and cultural level.”⁵ After the world witnessed such horrors and an attempt to wipe out a history of people, there was a push to preserve heritage. This turning point prompted another change in museum evolution.

As time progresses, the goals of museums have changed. From the 4th century BC where museums were made to simply preserve artifacts to the 19th century where the public is invited and the goal is to teach and learn collectively. Modern museums are now centers for learning, research, and preservation of history. The museums we know today such as the Smithsonian, the MoMA, and many others are now being seen as flawed due to their colonial roots in favor of these new community museums. The community museums are providing an alternative structure meant to address the problems of past museums.

These community museums help to keep cultures alive and preserve heritage piece by piece. The community has the voice in what is emphasized and shown and preserved. They show the world what is important to them and their history rather than an outsider making those decisions. Cultures are given a boost by the founding of these museums because they allow

⁴ Ibn. 40

⁵ Ibn 41-42

younger generations and others to learn the history of themselves and it sparks new interest. Traditions and stories are no longer lost to the past. The museums are used as a tool by the community as a way to give life back to communities who were being lost to society and give them their power back to control their heritage, their history, and culture.

In this paper, I survey cutting-edge practices in the design of museums. Specifically, I ask how can we employ best practices in modern museums to design the placement, layout, and exhibits of the Ramet Museum Project in order to meet the goals of community partners? The Ramet Museum Project is one that is focused on the Ramet site in the middle of a Transylvania mining landscape in the Apuseni Mountains in modern day Romania. As of today there are ongoing excavations of an Early Bronze Age cemetery. The goal of these excavations is to better understand different burial practices amongst the peoples who lived in the highlands of rural Transylvania. The main argument of the research is that many communities in the Early Bronze Age actually used the ideology of transforming space to completely repurpose the landscape, previously inhabited by the Cotofeni Culture, into a cemetery. On top of this research there are plans to create a museum at this site in order to showcase Transylvanian heritage and culture as well as present the information found at the site.

I begin this paper by examining examples of other community museums, paying particular attention to how these museums are organized, run, and started. From these case studies, I develop 5 action points that make a successful and engaging community museum. I next explore how we can adapt these best practices, particularly around the engagement of the community and the presentation of their culture and implement them in the Ramet Museum Project. The study of community museums around the world and how they can impact and benefit the one we plan to build at Ramet is important because it helps us and our future

researchers avoid mistakes that have been made as well as build a community museum that is the most profitable and beneficial to the community surrounding Ramet.

There is a new type of museum that is becoming more and more popular throughout the world. Ecomuseums are popping up everywhere all across the globe. Ecomuseums are “a community-lead heritage or museum project that supports sustainable development.”⁶ Local communities are now focusing on ecomuseums and how the development of one in their city or town can help to restore their identity, create a sense of place, repair the economy, and simply bring the community together. Nunzia Borelli and Peter Davis write that the establishment of an ecomuseum is a dynamic process that allows communities to identify, conserve, interpret, and manage their natural and cultural heritage resources. These museums are based on community agreement and are defined most often by a geographical territory. This may sometimes cross political boundaries. In ecomuseology, the terms “identify,” “conserve,” “interpret,” and “manage” mean that showcasing and protecting the natural and cultural heritage resources should help raise self-awareness, it should find new interpretations, and should reflect the aspects of the place that the local people have given value too. Most ecomuseums (98%) are located in rural areas and “emphasize the link with local history, local landscapes, natural resources, biotopes, and agricultural practices.”⁷ Ecomuseums help to keep cultures alive and they preserve heritage piece by piece.

Now many will ask why an ecomuseum is better for local communities than say a normal, traditional museum. Well the answer is simple. Traditional museums such as the Metropolitan or the Smithsonian have a different set of values when they construct their

⁶ Davis P. Ecomuseums and the representation of place. *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 2009, 116 485

⁷ Borelli, Nunzia, and Peter Davis. "How Culture Shapes Nature: Reflections on Ecomuseum Practices." *Nature and Culture* 7, no. 1 (2012): 34

exhibits and museums. Museums construct a version of the truth for audiences to consume by selecting the specimens, artifacts, evidence, and then by using a variety of media to show that truth. These curators may carefully choose specimens and fragments of material culture from their collections to create a narrative about a locality, its landscape, histories and peoples, but in the end it is their version of the truth. The local community had no input and they do not benefit from that exhibit. It is not their truth but rather someone else's view of their story. It is quite often that museums often miss what the locals deem the most important or what they value most. This hinders the experience that visitors could have and in the end washes away the heritage and culture of the local community. The sites and museums have been constructed by experts not locals or even visitors. Peter Davis writes "These 'top-down' processes can mean that the heritage features of the immediate environment that local people value most may not be protected, and even where they are that the associated histories or stories told are too 'academic', irrelevant or take no heed of local understanding and local sympathies."⁸ By ignoring the community's input they could leave the most important part of their heritage unprotected. Ecomuseums seek to change this and prevent this from happening.

Another theme that is crucial for ecomuseums is the sense of place. A sense of place is unique to ecomuseums because most museums are built in and around the communities. Visitors experience firsthand the community's culture, heritage, and identity. This is another point Davis makes in his argument for the positive effects ecomuseums have on their surrounding communities. He says that in traditional museums the place itself, the subject of the exhibit, lies outside the museum and in order for that place and culture to be fully understood visitors must

⁸ Davis P. Ecomuseums and the representation of place. *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 2009, 116 484

first experience the place before they can even hope to understand. The location of ecomuseums is incredibly important and one of the first steps in creating one.

There are countless examples of ecomuseums around the world, some small and some large. They benefit their communities in a variety of ways from rebuilding community spirit to an economic benefit that is sorely needed. By examining some examples of different ecomuseums, we can hope to see the similarities and differences between them and how different communities value different things. These next few paragraphs will discuss different museums and how they operate.

Japan

Japan has many ecomuseums that have evolved from the open-air museums that were created in the 50s in order to recover cultural heritage and maintain a symbiosis of the local scenery. The first open-air museum in Japan was the Open-air Museum of old Japanese Farm Houses, created in 1956. This museum is made up of 12 houses and buildings of traditional use such as granaries and mills, excellent both for its good preservation and its active use for the visitors. It was declared a world heritage site in 1995.



Figure: The Open-Air Museum of old Japanese farmhouses

The ecomuseums we find today in Japan grew from museums such as that one. The Tamagawa and Kawasaki ecomuseums are urban models of them that have an administrative center from where there are different experiences and satellite spaces created. These ecomuseums organize cleaning and collecting waste from its shore, organizing workshops on environmental concern, popular parties and events both traditional and contemporaneous, etc. These museums work to bring together the social call, the industrial and economical factors and the civil power of the city. These ecomuseums have developed several campaigns that count on citizen participation and have succeeded each time. With the support of the enterprises, the government support and the effort of the social associations, the ecomuseums have developed several campaigns counting on the citizens' participation. Another ecomuseum from Japan is the Hirano-cho ecomuseum in Osaka. In 1993 it was established as an ecomuseum or as an alive museum for the development of the community. They recovered the neighbourhood with the citizen's intervention and they

renovated the urban space and recovered their identity. The buildings were restored and the facilities were equipped and then they promoted the social, cultural and economical activities of the area. There are many more examples of ecomuseums from Japan but the main thing is that all these museums are focused on repairing the community and helping preserve their identity.

Greece

Another example is the Gavalochori Museum in Crete, Greece. This ecomuseum was founded in 1968 and officially opened in 1993. The museum itself is located in a building that is an excellent example of the local architecture. The building was built in two different periods giving visitors an interesting glance into how the Venetian period and Turkish era melted into one. The museum consists of 7 rooms with themes: Kamarospito (arched house), Silk, Pottery, Kopaneli (lace), Stone carving, Church, Wood carving, History. The Kamarospito shows an accurate representation of a Cretan house with a loom, kitchen with traditional dishes, the wine press which turned to a bed and a storage space, the living room, the room with the barrels and the typical armchair with one arm (the other should be free for the weapon).



Figure: Weaving exhibit shown at the Gavalochori Museum

The silk room is full of Cretan costumes that are made entirely out of local silk while the Kopaneli room shows a wedding dress made with lace that is an important part of the Cretan culture. The other rooms go on to show different aspects of the culture and history. This ecomuseum keeps the culture of Crete alive and accessible for visitors as well as the local community. It is a place to learn and experience the local heritage.



Figure: Gavalochori Museum

Alberta, Canada



Figure: Kalyna Country; one of the largest museums in the world

The Kalyna Country Ecomuseum in Alberta, Canada is an extremely large ecomuseum. It covers several thousand square kilometers of Alberta and includes a National Park and other wilderness areas. This is a “living” outdoor ecomuseum that has more than just buildings and exhibits. Visitors are encouraged to travel around the area to learn about the past, the living cultures of the communities, the landscape and the natural recreation areas. They offer many different activities that range with the season and showcase many local restaurants, shops, tours, and the local history. This museum focuses on allowing visitors to create their own experiences and lets them discover the communities cultures, identities, and history on their own. Kalyna also uses volunteers from the community to run the site and their many different attractions. This museum is different from the others we’ve examined so far in that it does not feel like a museum at all. It is instead an experience where you learn the culture through being in the place where it all exists.



Figure: One exhibit found in the Kalyna Country Ecomuseum

There are many more examples worldwide but they all maintain the same ideals and goals. They are interested in involving the community, building the community back up, bringing economic and environmental stability back, preserving culture and heritage, and maintaining their identity. While each museum finds different ways to achieve these goals and ideals, they are essentially the same. Ecomuseums can help communities in many different ways and may become the new typical museum as time goes on.

The museum at Ramet will be one focused on community, cultural and heritage preservation as well as teaching the history of the site. Our community museum will follow and hopefully achieve the goals outlined in the first couple of paragraphs in this paper. The museum should also follow an action item list. I have outlined those action items in the first sections of this paper but I will relist them here as well. The action items are:

- Sense of place
- Identification of specific heritage resources
- Celebrating ‘cultural touchstones’
- Empowering the local community
- Plans and the ability to accommodate the expansion of knowledge

These five points will help the Ramet project become the best community museum it can be and bring acknowledgement to Transylvania like the other museums discussed earlier.

Sense of Place

The sense of place action item is quite a simple one to complete. Most community museums are placed in the center of the cultural epicenter. The museum is in a location that best showcases what the community wants. This allows visitors to fully immerse themselves into the culture. The relationship between a museum and its location should be natural. They should be connected so that the results are that of the needs of the community who is concerned with safeguarding its heritage, preserving its collective memory and consolidating its identity.⁹ The plan for Ramet is to build the museum next to the site of the burial mounds. The site is on a large mountain and has stunning views of the town and surrounding landscapes. Visitors will experience the beauty of Romania and the hidden gems it offers. By building the museum at the site rather than in town, it offers a different experience. The trip up to the museum is an hour from town. This will let people think and reflect on how far the people would travel to visit these mounds. When they arrive at the museum, visitors will know that they are standing where those who built this site were standing thousands of years ago. It is a special and awe-inspiring feeling that many traditional museums lack. Building the museum there will bring a special feeling and knowledge to visitors that cannot be found elsewhere.

Identifying Specific Heritage Resources

The identification of specific heritage resources will be achieved through the use of local artists, builders, workers, and community input. There are plans to have parts of the museum built using the wood carvings and designs native to Romania. There are also plans to construct part of the museum to look like a traditional Romanian home so that visitors are surrounded by

the heritage. A community survey or town hall meeting will be held where members are invited to come and share their ideas on what should be showcased. This will be an ongoing process even after the museum is built. The needs and desires of the community will change and therefore the identification of these heritage resources will also change. We cannot identify the resources without the community and we must be prepared to work with the community to narrow down their choices or expand our plans in order to accommodate their resources.

Celebrating ‘Cultural Touchstones’

The celebration of “cultural touchstones” will be seen in having the community bring forth their ideas. Cultural touchstones are things or even a place where the community feels is extremely important. It is something that showcases their culture. This means that there will be a variety of touchstones presented by the community. There will be exhibits laying out the “cultural touchstones” and showing their importance in Romania’s history. This museum will not solely be focused on the site of Ramet but will instead use the site to emphasize the cultural depth of Romania. This could involve members of the community bringing heirlooms to the museum to be placed on display. Since a touchstone can be a place, there should be plans made for a possible extension of the museum to another location. Buses or flyers can be arranged to take or direct visitors to that location. In doing so, we could showcase more of the community and possibly find more ways to preserve their cultural heritage. In order to showcase more of Romania's culture, we may think about expanding our meetings to other surrounding communities.

Empowering Local Communities

The empowerment of the local community will be seen in having locals volunteering and helping to manage the site. The locals will help to decide what exhibits go where and why. They will also help to build the museum. Local contractors, artists, workers, etc. will be called in to help build and design the museum. There will be a place for suggestions that is open for all on how the museum can be improved. The community will also have a space that is theirs where they can place cultural items significant to them and their own history with a notecard explaining what the item is and its importance. This may be where we invite the community to bring the heirlooms they have. Another way to empower the community is to use local companies in the museum. For example, local bakeries or coffeeshops can have a small place in the museum. A form of transportation can be set up such as a bus or van system. These can be driven by local members. That not only offers a source of revenue but will allow community members to again directly interact with visitors and give them a chance to answer questions and explain what their culture means to them. The museum could also hold fundraisers for the community and different issues. There are many different ways for the community to be empowered and to show their voice in this museum and it is our hope we can find a way to include them all.

Plans and Room for Expansion

The last action item is important because as time goes on communities change. As communities change so does their heritage and culture. The museum at Ramet needs to be equipped and prepared to expand and change exhibits as the wants and needs of the community shifts. There are many ways to accomplish this. One way would be to have a rotating exhibit plan. Depending on the time of year, different artifacts and exhibits would be displayed. This rotation could then be changed and altered as the community does as well. Things can be added

or taken away. There could also be an exhibit of the month of year. This would be where every year or month the community votes on an artifact to be displayed. For example, the exhibit on woodworking could be expanded for a year and shown more in depth. The next year it could be an exhibit on medicinal plants and the culture of healing in Romania. The possibilities are endless.

Conclusions

My research on ecomuseums has led me to the list of action items described above. It is my belief that these action items can lead the Ramet Museum Project to success. The ultimate goal of this project is to showcase the beauty and complexity of Romanian culture with the help of the community. Involving the community at every step guarantees that the museum will present the important parts of Romania and allow visitors worldwide to experience said culture. This is just the beginning of the research needed for this museum. We will need more research, more conversations, more planning before this museum is ready for its big reveal. With that said, I think that the work that I and my fellow team members have done is a good start and stepping point for future researchers.

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