

Examples of Good Practices in the Field of Museology. Case Study – ASTRA Museum

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ABSTRACT: From the nomadic to the sedentary people, human communities have always wanted to make unique elements, specific to their identity, although they often received major influences from other neighbouring or most powerful communities. For example, archaeology reveals the identical geometrical elements found on ceramic vessels in peoples that were at some distance in time to each other or even geographically. Thus, we can see that not all elements of a civilization are authentic and that many times a motive formed by a group can become a leitmotif for many peoples. However, since ancient times, every community has tried to preserve at least one original element to help it differentiate among other peoples. In contemporary times, these elements are gradually extinguished, but there are still some places where the custom is preserved, and perhaps the most edifying example in this regard is the open air museum. Basically, this study will focus on this type of exhibition, approaching an edifying example, in this case, the ASTRA Museum in Romania, the largest open air museum in south-east Europe.

KEYWORDS: art, museum, sustainability, vernacular architecture, tradition

Introduction

The idea of an open-air museum is the subject of much discussions, but we can see that there is no real research in this regard, as the world often catalogues temporary and permanent exhibitions in two broad categories: museums and galleries. Of course, the open air museum is included in the category of museums, but this implies, from many points of view, another approach. Thus, beyond exposing an example of good practice, the ASTRA Museum, we also want to note some elements to consider when working with this concept of an open air museum. However, we have thought about starting in a new way, considering that we intend to promote and cultivate the interdisciplinary, in the sense that we will list at first a few key terms that we will use and which we want to emphasize, as it follows:

- **Heritage** – the notion of heritage is common in various fields, but we will focus on the definition of museum heritage, which represents “the totality of assets, rights and obligations with patrimonial value belonging to a museum or, as the case may be, subject to the right of private property ” (Law on museums and public collections no. 311/2003, art. 8);
- **Museum** – “public institution of culture, in the service of society, which collects, preserves, researches, restores, communicates and exhibits, in order to know, educate and recreate material and spiritual testimonies of the existence and evolution of human communities, as well as of environment ” (Law on museums and public collections no. 311/2003, art. 2);
- **Open air museum** – “a non-profit institution, permanently in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, preserves, researches, communicates and presents, for the purpose of study, education and pleasure, the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment” (ICOMOS 1999);
- **Non-formal education** – The Law on National Education no. 1/2011 approaches this concept in different forms, but in the sense that we can understand that "lifelong learning takes place in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts" (Law on National Education no. 1/2011, Art. 130, paragraph 1);
- **Vernacular architecture** – the traditional and natural way in which communities ensure their living. It is a continuous process including necessary changes and continuous adaptation in response to social and environmental constraints. The survival of this tradition is threatened throughout the world by the forces of economic, cultural and architectural homogenization" (ICOMOS 1999, *Vernacular Heritage Charta*).

Incursion into the world of open air museums

The world of museums has a rich history, perhaps whose beginning is not fully clear, but whose mystery we are all faithful friends. Ever since ancient times, man has been tempted to put aside certain things and the most valuable objects were by far the ones acquired through travel or even the war booty. Moreover, this last example, before being deposited, was exposed in a kind of itinerary to the winning people, although perhaps we were talking about slaves who were considered, in the end, household objects. Is this the first temporary exhibition? I think we could say that in this regard there would be a positive answer, but about this point we intend to discuss in another article.

If in time, the museum went from its rudimentary stage, in which we met with an universal museum that housed from manuscripts to statues, to a more advanced stage in which the diversity of museum types extends by the day. Thus, if initially we had several types of exhibitions that highlighted certain key areas, such as history, archaeology, literature and so on, today the floor has expanded, so we can even talk about banana museums.

What lies behind museum concepts? The need for specialists to discover, with the public, new elements of exposure or the desire to attract an audience that is losing more and more of the educational component? Could we add the desire for conservation, especially in the case of museums dedicated to science? Where does one reasoning stop and another can be outlined? Is the open air museum an extension of the past and a brush for the future?

The history of open air museums can be said to have started with the world, as this special exhibition comes to keep a living community, a community that is gradually lost in the past. As I said in the beginning, the open air museum is “a non-profit institution, permanently in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, preserves, researches, communicates and presents, for the purpose of study, education and pleasure, the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment.”

If the first open air museum in Romania is the Village Museum "Romulus Vuia" in Cluj, established in 1929 (Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania. 2019), the first open-air museum in the world, the Skansen Museum, was born in 1881 at the Royal Court of King Oscar II (The Romanian Peasant Museum 2019). Thus, it is not surprising that the most frequently cited model in the European space, when it comes to open air museums, is the Skansen Museum in Sweden. The living tradition of this space attracts through the uniqueness of the exhibition discourse and, at the same time, through the many events that attract numerous tourist year after year.

ASTRA Museum

The largest museum in south-eastern Europe, however, is the ASTRA Museum on the territory of Romania, a museum that began to write its history more than a century ago, being located in Dumbrava Sibiului, with over ten kilometers of alleys and also a lake (Astra museum 2019).

At a brief visit of the website dedicated to the museum, we find out why we should cross the threshold of this museum:

- “The Lipovan household in Mahmudia, Tulcea County, faithfully reconstructs the fisherman's life in the Danube Delta, both by its location near the lake in Dumbrava Sibiului and by the exposed fish objects.
- The pastoral household in Poiana Sibiului is a dwelling typical of the old rich shepherds of the Sibiu Border and can be easily recognized, being painted in an intense blue, locally called “Proud Mary”.
- In the functional household of a Saxon viticulturist from Șeica Mică, Sibiu County, visitors are invited to know the exposed objects closely, to warm themselves at the mouth of the stove and to take part in various workshops.
- The windmill from Curcani, Constanta County, is not only the only canvas mill on display in the museum, but also the last such specimen that has survived in Romania to this day.
- The church in Dretea, Cluj County, is the oldest monument of the museum, dating from 1672, with an extremely well preserved painting and a significant artistic and utilitarian value.

- The priestly household in Stănești, Alba County, has, according to the oral tradition of the area, a special memorial value - it is said that here he taught two primary classes Avram Iancu.
- The vineyard house in Vlădești, Vâlcea County, draws attention through its sidewalk and high stone pedestal, being very similar, as the visitors noted, with the house illustrated on the 10 lei bill.
- The two households in the village of Găleșoaia, Gorj County, now depopulated, are representative for the typological evolution of the houses in the area after the peasants' ownership after the First World War.
- Etno Tehno Parc is an area for children, with functional models of some technical installations in the museum, a playground and a school from Ticera, Hunedoara County, where they can take part in interactive workshops.
- At the Country Fair, visitors are invited to meet local producers and to participate in workshops that include, in addition to traditional foods, other segments of popular culture and civilization.”

And yet, why is the ASTRA Museum an exhibition model? Although there are many open air museums in the European area, not many of them maintain a lively atmosphere, and this example is an uplifting one, as we encounter unique exhibition elements (see fig. 1), various events are often organized to bring custom to the heart of the museum, and the exhibits are surrounded by various animals. Thus, if you walk through the ASTRA Museum, numerous specimens of birds and mammals will introduce you to their world, whether you are older children of the villages or you are children of the cities. Moreover, And yet, why is the ASTRA Museum an exhibition model? Although there are many open air museums in the European area, not many of them maintain a lively atmosphere, and this example is an uplifting one, as we encounter unique exhibition elements (see fig. 1), various events are often organized to bring custom to the heart of the museum, and the exhibits are breath-taking. Thus, if you walk through the ASTRA Museum, numerous specimens of birds and mammals will introduce you to their world, whether you are older children of the villages or you are children of the cities.

Moreover, for specialists in the ethnographic, historical and architectural fields, this place represents an oasis of study in a continuous metamorphosis. In addition, the arrangement of the houses is not a classic, linear type, but the passage from one building to another is done only by passing certain streams, bridges, wooden beams, sheep flocks... you can only say that it is more alive than a Romanian village, that you can wander at will as in childhood. Also, another thing to note is the lack of custodian and easy access in exposed houses. Thus, you can accidentally discover both the exterior and interior of the exhibits.

The story of open-air museums is ultimately the living story of the community, the righteous custom that has survived in time.



Figure 1. ASTRA Museum (photography from personal gallery).
(The image shows the last specimen of mill with sails from the Romanian space)

Conclusions

The research carried out at the moment comes to complete many aspects of comparative order between the practices of some states from different regions. Thus, we can say that there are certain tendencies that are repeated, lacking the exhibition act of the essential element-authenticity. In other words, although our state offers an example of extraordinary best practices - the ASTRA Museum - we believe that great things can still be done in this segment with the help of experts both from home and abroad, and the initiatory steps are, in our opinion, based on three elements (see fig. 2), as follows: carrying out a solid bibliographic research to discover the process and the stage in which the open air museum is located in your state, the empirical research that you can do as authentic as possible through visits of good practices in museums, as well as through a fair analysis of what we have studied both through libraries, and especially on the field.

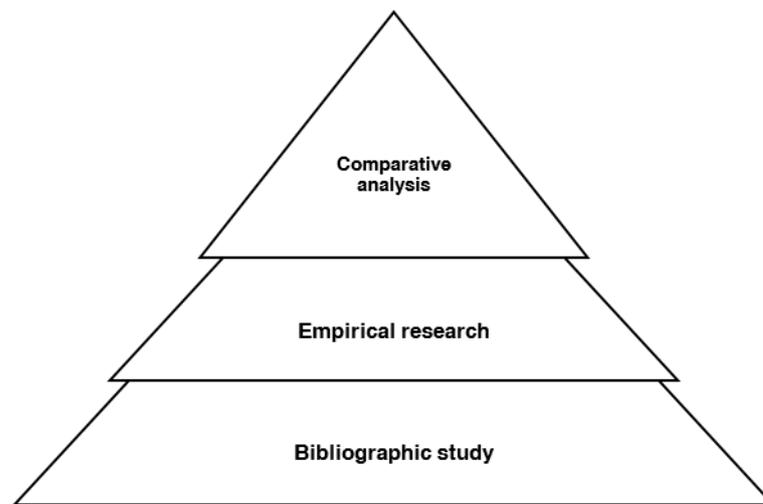


Figure 2. Methodology of study in the field of museology

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