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In Brief

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The local communities of Eastern Europe, regarded up to the beginning of the 1990s as a rich reserve of peasant culture, have over the past twenty years been falling apart before our very eyes. Under the pressure of migration to work abroad and of the effects of globalisation – multiple, obvious and, in particular, subversive of the ways they functioned until not long ago – cultural alterations of all kinds have generated phenomena of hybridisation and cultural fusion.

At the same time, that which from a range of motives is felt as a need, complex and existing on different levels, to preserve traditions in their role of cultural history of local specifics, appears to be growing in importance, not only for those charged with this duty as a political project (“places of memory” institutions that society has “delegated” as keepers of cultural memory) and for cultural brokers and stakeholders but also for the local performers of those cultures that we have been accustomed to call traditional.

For countries whose modernisation in recent history was closely connected to *peasant cultures and societies*, at one and the same time as a source of higher culture and as a fount of what marked

them out as a nation, these recent cultural changes raise supplementary problems; the dramatic reshaping of traditional peasant communities brings with it a crisis in a particular way of reading and interpreting traditions. The key to this reading had been delivered *de facto*, up to as recently as the end of the 1990s, into the keeping of such disciplines as folklore studies, philology and history, these being regarded as the legitimate ways to analyse, interpret and simultaneously preserve traditions. Today, however, disciplines such as economics and political and environmental studies are staking their claims to a role in the epistemological investigation of these areas. More specifically, the territory now has to be shared with border-crossing (inter) disciplinary approaches.

Thus, light can be shed on the particularising intensity with which cultural and also socio-political phenomena, in the context of which the changes we are discussing can be seen, have made their presence felt in the socio-cultural reconfiguration of the societies and by implication of the rural communities in this part of Europe. It is not the direction of the movement – predictable, as it is – from the traditional, rural and local towards the

global that appears as dominant here but the strength and speed of the phenomenon and, consequently, the cultural and societal

Peasant (NMRP) under the co-ordination of the anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu – the Creative Traditions Forum. The way



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convulsions it brings with it. The various aspects of these changes are all the more fascinating to observe in that they provide an opportunity for an empirical verification, today, of the analogous phenomenon that took place, in a different political context, in Western Europe in the last century.

The theme of this 22nd issue of the *Martor* journal, “Back to the Future. Creative Traditions in the 21st Century”, has proved to be the opportunity for a discussion of the complex and frequently hard-to-formulate implications of the existence of local traditional cultures in contemporary societies. The two poles that have generated texts that have thus entered into dialogue have been, in general terms, on the one hand articles contributed in response to the call for papers for the current number of the journal, and on the other hand texts born out of the experience of a current project hosted by the National Museum of the Romanian

the texts are arranged in the journal allows this twofold avenue of approach to be seen. With the exception of the two introductory texts, the thematic articles in this issue are grouped in five sections.

The theoretical issue raised by the problematical position of old local rural cultures in the context of contemporary societies makes its appearance in the introductory text by Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Creative Traditions and Ecology of Heritage*, an article which at the same time adumbrates the subject of the general discussion that the articles in this number, taken together, comprise. Starting from the distinction made by Eric Hobsbawm between “customs” (collective representations of the past experienced as present) and “traditions” (as “imagined past”, a product of modernity), a distinction the content of which is given simultaneously with the introduction into the theoretical terminology of the

social sciences of the concept of “invented traditions”, Vintilă Mihăilescu opens up a discussion of the epistemological operationalisation of concepts that facilitate analysis of the relation between “the past and the present that reuses it” (Mihăilescu, *Creative Traditions and Ecology of Heritage*).

The articles that follow develop in a radial manner the issues involved in the dialogue concerning traditions.

Section I, *Social Usages of Traditions*, focuses on the connection between old and contemporary rural societies in terms of their functional and also ideological (by quotation, but also by reinvention) recourse to tradition. Thus, in her article *Tradition and Architectural Representation*, Marta Jecu analyses the political agendas and ideologies which, by invoking traditions, but also by instrumentalising their reinvention, produce architectural images that are making their presence felt in architecture and building techniques. In the same register, Augustin Ioan, in *Retrofuturism*.

of the architectural image of the identity of occupation: traditions in the ethnological sense, architecture in its historicity, and the religious element. David Diaconu’s article, *(Re)establishing Institutions as Tradition. A Fieldwork-based Analysis of Obște’s Commons’ Management Institutions* presents the process of reactualisation of an old community institution, “Obște”, and the applications this form of economic and community organisation can have in rural life today. The article by Chris Baker, *Reinventing Mountain Food Traditions and Small Farm Survival in Southern Appalachia*, is a case study that handles the issue of local identity through the lens of three areas that today occupy an important place in regional development projects: food, local culinary specialities, and tourism.

In the articles in Section II, *Political Usages of Traditions*, the emphasis falls explicitly on the political dimension of the construction of traditions as an area of contemporary societies. The studies



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A Revisited Concept for Religious Architecture, calls into discussion three fundamental sources for the construction

by Andrea Membretti and Pier Paolo Viazzo, *Negotiating the Mountains. Foreign Immigration and Cultural Change in the*

Italian Alps, and by William Westerman, *Kayaktivism: The Anthropology of Protest, Craft and Imagination*, treat situations directly connected with the wider phenomena of globalisation and migration. Aspects of the transformation into goods (commodification) of a number of areas of old rural culture, others connected with tourism that exploits traditional local cultures and, more than that, examples of features of local traditions that have been integrated into forms of political protest, make up the subjects discussed in these two articles. They thus open up the problematic issue of the most currently pressing and active kinds of appeal to tradition: those that involve socio-economic applications and socio-political ends.

Section III, *Traditions on Display*, explores the aesthetic resources of old rural cultures and poses the problems both of curatorial strategies that have traditions as their raw material – in *Forging Folklore, Disrupting Archives: Curatorial Explorations between Tradition and Innovation* by Magdalena Buchczyk, Gabriela Nicolescu and Alexandra Udrea – and of the constructing of an image of traditions as an ingenuous cultural act – in Anca-Maria Pănoiu's *A Sense of Past. Usages of Objects in Naïve Museology*.

Section IV, *Traditions in Dialogue*, is allocated to texts of a more heterogeneous nature, such as field notes, current research, and interviews. These are concerned

especially with specific experiences of cultural action that have traditions as their source and/or subject. Pride of place here goes to the Creative Traditions Forum project, under the aegis of the NMRP, as can be seen from Corina Iosif's record of interviewing the Creative Traditions Forum team and from Bogdan Iancu's *Inside the Creative Traditions Workshops*, a discussion with two of those participating in that project. The article entitled *Atelierul de creativitate. Sentimental Dossier* lifts the curtain on the exercise of initiating and carrying out cultural actions that link the idea of tradition with that of creativity in cultural projects of an educational kind. The illustrations in the current issue of the journal are of this Creativity Workshop.

The final section is, as usual, devoted to book reviews. Here we are dealing with two works: Cristoph Brumann and David Berliner (eds.), *World Heritage on the Ground. Ethnographic Perspectives*, 2016, reviewed by Vintilă Mihăilescu, and Margaret Beissinger, Speranța Rădulescu, Anca Giurchescu (eds.), *Manele in Romania: Cultural Expression and Social Meaning in Balkan Popular Music*, 2016, reviewed by Claudiu Oancea. As both these works deal with the theme of traditions in the contemporary context, they too contribute to the deepening and refining of our reading and theoretical interpretation of this disputed issue.

