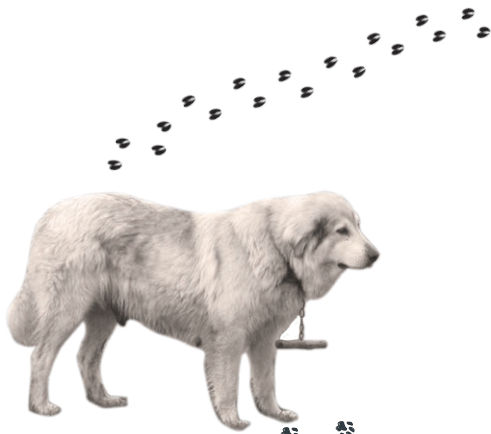


IV. Pastoralism on Display



The Wandering Sheep' or how I Set Off to Conduct Fieldwork

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Iuliana Dumitru is a social anthropologist who works in the cultural field. She holds a PhD in Philology with a dissertation completed at the Center of Excellence in Image Studies from an interdisciplinary and auto-ethnographic perspective, titled Narrative and Visual Cartographies of the 2 Mai and Vama Veche Space in 1965-2015. She is interested in human communities, the symbolic geographies of space, and their representation in art. Currently, alongside the tranzit.ro Association and a group of artists, curators, theorists, economists, and other cultural workers, she is part of the collective project "Experimental Station for Art and Life" in Siliștea Snagovului, a village 40 km from Bucharest. She is a founding member of the Fragile Society Association, alongside writer Rucsandra Pop and actress Ioana Flora. Currently, she is a curator in the Cultural Projects Department at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

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ABSTRACT

The article refers to the cultural project *Păstorit 2.1. Oaia Hai-Hui* [Shepherding 2.1. The Wandering Sheep], co-financed by the National Cultural Fund Administration and carried out by the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant. This text reviews and describes the activities conducted during the project (February–November 2022). It is written from the perspective of the project manager who focuses on fieldwork, describes how the exhibition was curated, and highlights the unseen work behind such a complex project. The article mentions the external partners involved in the project and their contributions to various activities, including roundtable discussions, conferences, fieldwork, exhibition, fair, podcast participation, and the production of editorial materials that describe the tradition of shepherding and the products obtained from milk processing.

KEYWORDS

Cultural project; project management; cultural activities; fieldwork; contemporary shepherding.

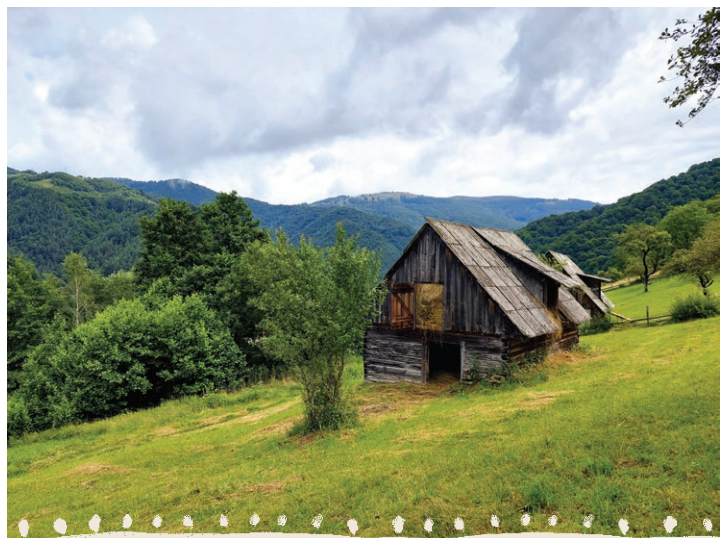


I read *Socio Hai-Hui*² written by Professor Vintilă Mihăilescu with great eagerness immediately after I was admitted to the Faculty of Sociology, as I was trying to understand what the profession I had chosen was about. I realized that sociology is about everything. It can easily be about traditions and transitions, about villages and cities. But above all, I learned from Professor Mihăilescu that sociology is fun and recommended for the curious. I had made a good choice. As much as I would have loved to conduct fieldwork with my university colleagues, according to a joke circulating on the internet, I had my own field at home. So, I wrote my bachelor's thesis about my home, a small fishing village on the Black Sea coast. Then, my master's thesis under the supervision of Professor Vintilă Mihăilescu himself was about the same village and about the neighboring Vama Veche village. I wrote my PhD thesis³—surprise—about these two villages too. So, my journey as a curious (and fun) sociologist to conduct fieldwork in other parts of my homeland had to wait a bit longer.

My colleagues proposed to write a project together titled *Păstorit 2.1. Oaia Hai-Hui* [Shepherding 2.1. The Wandering Sheep]. When the project was accepted for funding as the first on the list, I knew that the much-anticipated moment was coming: a journey to conduct fieldwork in other parts of the country. I wasn't going to go just anywhere, but to the mountains, where I would meet shepherds and learn more about sheep herding traditions, contemporary shepherding, and what has changed in this occupation in recent years. The project was ambitious, and I must admit that it was a good initiation for me, freshly employed at the Cultural Projects Department of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant. First, the project was possible not only due to the involvement of museum specialists, but especially due to the quality contributions of its partners, namely: ȘMAG—Gusturi locale din Țara Bârsei Cooperativă Agricolă, Mioritics Association, My Transylvania Association, ARCHÉ Association, and the "Pasterstwo Transhumancyjne" Foundation (Poland). The project's activities were diverse because they considered the various audiences that the museum can address based on their interests and curiosities.

During the eight active months of the project, several activities took place. First, we organized *Oaia la taclale* [Chatting with the sheep]—a roundtable with sheep herding specialists, both national and international, with the participation of the "Pasterstwo Transhumancyjne" Foundation from Poland. Participants discussed the situation of sheep farmers, they shared their aspirations, and mentioned the problems they face. The conclusions of the roundtable regarding the participants' hopes for the future of shepherding are presented in George Cățean's contribution to this volume. One of the most important activities of the project was the temporary exhibition, *Păstorit contemporan. Un patrimoniu, mai multe dileme* [Contemporary Shepherding. A Heritage, Multiple Dilemmas], curated by Dr. Anca Majaru, a founding member of the ARCHÉ association.⁴ During the exhibition, we organized two conferences as part of the *Conferințele de la Șosea*⁵ [Conferences of the Avenue] series to attract a wider audience. On these occasions, I learned stories about the old and new traditions of shepherding from Anamaria Iuga and Corina Iosif, as well as stories about the shepherds at the sheepfolds and their lesser-known rituals from Laura Jiga-Iliescu.

We continued in the summer with *Oaia (și) cu lâna de aur* [The sheep with the golden wool]—ten inclusive educational workshops organized by my colleagues Beatrice Iordan, Raluca Magda Oprea Minoiu, and



Coliba, a small house where the people from Râu Sadului keep the hay to dry.
Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru.



Haystacks in Râu Sadului. Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru.

Preparing the exhibition in the cultural house. Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru.



Dinner in the first night in Râu Sadului.
Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru.



Discussion in the sun with Max Drăgan and Cristina Iliescu.
Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru.



My colleague Georgiana putting the exhibition. Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru.



Ana Petrovici-Popescu. The workshops are described in Raluca Magda Oprea Minoiu's text in this volume. *Miorița. Varianta pentru mileniali* [The little ewe: the version for millennials] represented the phase of the project where we listened to the stories of Anamaria Iuga, Corina Iosif, and Raluca Magda Oprea Minoiu during the podcast *Cronicari Digitali*⁶ [Digital Chroniclers]. Those were amazing stories! Anamaria and Corina talked about their fieldworks, *măsurîșul laptelui* [the measurement of milk], and other traditions still practiced at the sheepfold to protect the sheep from wild animals and ensure they produce plenty of milk. They also discussed about the ways in which shepherding traditions are being recognized as part of cultural heritage through local festivals. Raluca recounted the amazing experience of guiding groups of visually impaired people through the exhibition.

My favorite part followed—fieldwork. I sent *Oaia la drum* [The sheep on the road] to observe the current situation in Râu Sadului, Râșnov, and Rotbav. After returning from the trip, I organized the *Târg de (B)ioierit*⁷ [Shepherding Fair] featuring traditional products to give the public familiar with the museum's fairs the chance to taste local cheeses produced by certified local producers and purchase beautiful items from those who process wool in different ways. The fair was organized in collaboration with the Association România cu Bun Gust [Romania with Good Taste], and we invited carefully selected local producers. In the autumn, when the sheep descend from the sheepfold, I invited shepherd Cristian Suciu to recount his journey on foot to Poland, retracing the ancient route of the great transhumance. I named this event "Sheep 5G" to appeal to a very young audience, specifically the first-grade students from class I D from the School Orizont in Bucharest. We then published a wall calendar with a shepherding theme, a beautiful work that combines archival photographs with small red thread interventions created by my colleague Cristiana Chivu, a brochure containing information about the project and traditional culinary recipes using milk, cheese, whey, and lamb and mutton meat created by Carmen Mihalache and Oana Rădoi.

The project was complex and required the active involvement of several colleagues from different departments of the museum and project partners. The exhibition *Păstorit contemporan. Un patrimoniu, mai multe dileme* [Contemporary shepherding: One heritage, multiple dilemmas] was open between May and August 2023 and featured numerous items from the sheepfold, including personal belongings of the shepherds. Visually impaired visitors could touch some of these exhibits during creativity workshops. The meetings with the exhibition curator, Anca Majaru, gave me a new perspective on how to curate an exhibition. First and foremost, Anca Majaru aimed to demystify the shepherd, for example the idea that shepherds always dress as depicted in old images. Shepherds today wear modern clothes like us, have access to knowledge, and connect with others just like we do. However, shepherds live a "secret" life that is accessible only to those who visit the sheepfold. This is something that cannot be adequately described, which is why direct experience is essential and recommended.

The exhibition is based on documentary materials resulting from field research conducted by a team of museum researchers between 2016 and 2022 in the regions of Dobrogea, Transylvania, Maramureș, and Bucovina. To effectively use the extremely rich information collected by my colleagues, Anca Majaru divided the exhibition space into four chapters: I. Time, II. Space, III. Memory, and IV. Knowledge. Each of these chapters corresponded to one sub-section of the exhibition. Each sub-section was deconstructed into smaller units, which were then represented by the objects brought into the exhibition space. The goal was for visitors to be immersed in the exhibition through sounds,⁸ smells, and textures. The center of the room was designed as a resting area, featuring bales of hay and grass,⁹ bunches of dried plants, a block of salt, a shepherd's bell, a wooden vat (*putină*), and a shepherd's cloak.

Here time refers to the shepherding calendar, which observes certain holidays but constantly plays with the past and the present. Shepherds have different temporal markers than we have. We basically have only two seasons, a fertile one and one dry one. These seasons are under the umbrella of two holidays from the Orthodox Christian calendar: Saint George and Saint Demetrios. This calendar is in a much more natural relationship with nature. The space in which sheep live is both physical and symbolic. It speaks of shepherding life but also of the space around the milk pail or the space around the bell at the sheep's neck. Memory refers to what we choose to preserve from the memory of transhumance or the way we speak about shepherding life in dialogue with everyday life. Knowledge is about the information we can obtain from shepherds, from their relationship with nature, from their stories, and from the way they prepare their products.



Silviu, the veterinary doctor telling kids about sheep. Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru



Hay meadow at Râu Sadului. Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru.

Watching a short movie about the village people, alongside Daniel, the mayor. Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru.



Part of the exhibition in the Amza Pellea cinema hallway. Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru.



Cristian, the shepherd, telling sheep stories to the kids from class I D, at Orizont School, Bucharest. Credit photo: Iuliana Dumitru.



In a press release, Anca Majaru summarizes the way she organized the exhibition as follows,

Modern society, defined by the flow of information, people, and resources, and by movement, has much to learn from contemporary shepherding. Sheep rearing has always been characterized by mobility, by pushing boundaries, by extended networks, by the adaptation of social practices, and by the continuous integration of technological development. Shepherds have a long-term vision regarding the well-being of animals, the prosperity of their households, and the responsible use of environmental resources, knowing how to move seasonally in search of optimal conditions for better performance. In this context, the heritage and experience of shepherding can be a good source of inspiration for the world of tomorrow. The exhibition we propose offers an overview of this shepherding universe and aims to remind us of a rich and accessible Romanian heritage.¹⁰

Besides management and financial organization activities, I was involved in contacting participants for the roundtable, I attended two of the three field trips, and I was extremely excited about organizing the fair. All these activities were driven by my curiosity about shepherding and my love for sheep cheese. Shepherding has experienced significant transformations in recent decades, but its tradition remains important for both the economy and the environment. Shepherding continues to be a non-invasive and non-destructive way of life. For example, at the roundtable, I learned from specialists and researchers in this field why preserving the tradition of shepherding, with raising grazing animals and moving herds, should be a national priority.

The two field trips took place at the beginning of July in Râu Sadului, Sibiu County, and at the end of August in Râșnov, Brașov County. I attended the Burduf Challenge weekend, a sub-mountain running competition organized by the My Transylvania Association¹¹ and the local town hall, in Râu Sadului. The goal of this competition was to “save the mountain cheese through movement and involvement!”¹² At the meeting with the local community, held at the cultural center, we watched two films¹³ and my colleagues Magdalena Andreescu and Oana Rahuma spoke about the 2013 Transhumance project. This project reiterated the movement of a flock of 300 sheep over a large area (1,400 km) from Romania to Poland. We also made time for discussions with former shepherds from the area, who shared their reasons for giving up shepherding, the hardships of shepherd life, the techniques to make good cheese, and the sacrifices the entire family must make.

I was impressed by the stories of the son of a former shepherd, now an adult, who recounted how until the age of 17, he did not spend his summers in the village but up in the mountains with the sheep. He had to watch over the sheep and milk them at the end of the day. Upon descending from the sheepfold, he had to shave his head because he usually had head lice. No girl from the village wanted to talk to him because “he smelled like sheep.” These memories, accompanied by a few amusing stories, reminded me of how challenging can be to uphold family traditions, particularly when you observe easier ways to live and work around you. Parents oscillate between feeling disappointed over losing an ancient and dear tradition and their desire for future generations to have a better and easier life than their own. On the morning of departure, I chatted with Cristian Cismaru from the My Transylvania Association about the first edition of the Burduf Challenge. He remembered when a young man from the village ran in wellies (because that’s all he had) and was disappointed with his final ranking. The next year, with Cristi’s help, he equipped himself properly and made it to the podium.

The trip to Râșnov revealed to me the community of the Mioritics Association,¹⁴ who has been organizing a series of impactful festivals and summer schools that focused on social and ecological issues for over twenty years. Mihai Dragomir, our partner from the association, invited us to present the films recorded by our colleagues Anamaria Iuga and Florin Iordan at the “Nature Stories” festival. After each film screening, high school students from across Europe had the opportunity to ask questions to the filmmakers present in the venue. A young woman from Albania confirmed the tradition depicted in the film to make a cross over the milk immediately after the rennet (*cheag*) is added to produce cheese is also practiced in Albania. I was pleased to discover the history and vision beyond the meeting place called Schubz¹⁵ that is part of the first Educational Center for Sustainable Development in Romania.

Upon returning to Bucharest, my colleagues Oana Constantin, Simona Hobincu, and I began organizing *Târg de (B)oierit*. The evening before the fair reminded me of my summers spent as a receptionist at a campsite in my hometown. Setting up tents and caravans, negotiating space, and establishing boundaries to ensure that each vendor (tourist) is satisfied and willing to return. The next day, I wandered from stall to stall, tasting the most delicious sheep's milk products and enjoying the energy and bustle of the fair, the sunshine, and the stories shared by the women from Mândra,¹⁶ who came to present the story of the onion produced in their village. During the fair, our wandering sheep chatted with visitors in the museum courtyard and on the church meadow under the gentle autumn sun. Here, I listened to Cristina Iliescu, who shared insights about the Transylvanian Hills,¹⁷ and Maximilian Drăgan, who spoke about the quality of sheep products during the activity *Oaia la flipchart* [Sheep at the flipchart].

After all these wonderful adventures, I finally settled at my desk and began crafting together the story using accounting documents – yet another way to tell a story. I struggled with the Excel document for the budget, which insisted to report an error of 0.32 lei. My colleagues from the Finance and Accounting Department organized each piece of paper into two red folders and helped organise the expense report remarkably. I then stamped each of the 400 pages of the expense report with a stamp reading *Conform cu Originalul* [In accordance with the original].¹⁸ After all this work, I realized how original the project I was a part of truly was. So, I can't help wondering: when are we going on our next adventure?



NOTES

1. *Păstorit 2.1. Oaia Hai- Hui* [Shepherding 2.1. The Wandering Sheep] was a project initiated at the National Museum of Romanian Peasant, which was conducted between February–November 2023. The project was funded by the National Cultural Fund Administration.

2. Mihăilescu, Vintilă. 2000. *Socio Hai-Hui, O altă sociologie a tranziției* [Socio-wanderings. Another sociology of transition]. Bucharest: Paideia.

3. *Narrative and Visual Cartographies of the 2 Mai and Vama Veche Area*, coordinated by Prof. Dr. Mihai Moraru and carried out within the Doctoral School Space, Image, Text, Territory at the Center of Excellence in Image Studies, University of Bucharest.

4. <https://www.facebook.com/AsociatiaArche>, accessed 20 July 2024.

5. Since 2008, The National Museum of the Romanian Peasant—formerly known as the “Museum from the Avenue”—has been hosting a series of thematic and occasional conferences initiated by Vintilă Mihăilescu.a

6. <https://cronicaridigitali.ro/captivate-podcast/cronicaridigitali-s8-anamaria-iuga-corina-iosif-poveti-despre-transhumana-romaneasc-arh-eliza-yokina-restaurarea-casei-ienachi-un-proiect-educational-pentru-publicul-larg/> and <https://cronicaridigitali.ro/captivate-podcast/cronicaridigitali-s7-raluca-minoiu-proiectul-inedit-oaia-hai-hui-arhitectii-nicole-caba-i-filip-ciobnau-cldiri-simbol-reintroduce-in-viaa-cultural-a-iaului/>, accessed 12 August 2024.

7. In Romanian, the name of the fair is a wordplay, where by adding the letter “b” in front of the word *oierit*, we obtain the term *boierit*. This term refers to townspeople who used to be called *boieri* [noblemen] in the past. Through this fair, townspeople had the opportunity to buy

natural products according to their noble status.

8. At the exhibition's opening, musicians Călin Torsan and Juan Carlos Negretti delighted visitors with their creative reinterpretation of specific elements of the Romanian shepherding folklore.

9. *Otavă* is grass that grows in the same year after the field has been mowed. It is considered the best quality feed for sheep.

10. <https://muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/show-item/pastorit-contemporan-un-patrimoniu-mai-multe-dileme/>, accessed 7 August 2024.

11. <https://www.mytransylvania.ro/>, accessed 29 July 2024.

12. <https://experiences.mytransylvania.ro/burduf-challenge/>, accessed 26 July 2024.

13. Anamaria Iuga, *Ruptul sterpelor. Obicei pastoral în Maramureș* [Separation of the barren sheep. Shepherding custom in Maramureș] (22 min.), and Florin Iordan, *Le-am cântat toată noaptea!* [We sang them all night!] (15 min.).

14. <https://mioritics.ro/blog/o-vacanta-pentru-suflet-calatorind-prin-istorie/>, accessed 29 July 2024.

15. <https://schubz.ro/centru-de-educatie/>, accessed 29 July 2024.

16. https://tvrinfo.ro/ceapa-ro-ie-din-mindra-bra-ov-are-propriul-festival_912857/, accessed 29 July 2024.

17. <https://www.colinele-transilvaniei.ro/>, accessed 29 July 2024.

18. One of the reimbursement rules in publicly funded projects stipulates that each copy made from original documents must be marked/stamped with the phrase “In accordance with the original” and signed by the financial officer.

