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Creative Traditions Forum: the Project and the Team

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ABSTRACT

The present text is an interview with the members of the “Creative Traditions Forum” project, hosted in 2017 by the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, with the financial support of the National Cultural Fund Administration (AFCN Romania). The aim of this project is to encourage the development of the whole area of creation related to traditions, to bring traditions into the modern age and to draw benefits from knowledge that has been accumulated and passed down, in a way that will be useful and applicable to the period and the times in which we live. In other words, the project is promoting the idea of the modern age of traditions, in which tradition takes on contemporary usefulness.

KEYWORDS

Creative Tradition Forum, interview, project team, traditions, cultural patrimony, peasant cultures, manufacture, hand-made, peasant crafts, traditional skills.

Today it is not hard for anyone to observe the process of breaking-up and also of reconfiguration of a peasant world that we have become accustomed to calling traditional. Emigration for work and the processes and phenomena that characterise globalisation bring with them a particular kind of emancipation of both individuals and communities, one in which cultural cross-fertilisation and fusion have an extremely important part to play. These factors taken together make any return to what we have understood to be our “traditions” a problematic one.

In the rural world the transmission of local peasant cultures is taking place in a truncated and incomplete way, while the image of “traditions” as an area of national policy already has a history of its own, which is sometimes supported and at other times contradicted and thrown off course by the media image of the same “traditions.” At the same time, the distance between traditions as ethnographically reified and their contemporary form of existence is widening visibly, and the need to recover and even resuscitate some local peasant cultures that have already passed into history has become a pressing priority, including for those who still form part of the rural life of the present day: village people are opening their own ethnographic museums and running their own “folklore festivals”, while “tradition institutions” (museums, research institutes, centres for encouraging the creation of popular art) have assumed responsibility for the preservation and transmission of “authentic” traditions in their exhibition, archival and even display forms. However, each of these approaches needs to recognise that it has failed to



reinvent social applications for traditions, and more specifically to reinvent a functional role they could play in contemporary society. It is precisely here that the Creative Traditions Forum, a research and cultural action project under the aegis of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant (NMRP), has something to say, as may be seen from this report of a conversation I had in August with the members of the project team.

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Corina Iosif: How did the idea of the Creative Traditions Forum originate? How did this project come into existence?

Vintilă Mihăilescu: In the beginning was...practice! But this sprang from the shared dreams and efforts of two people, Teodor Frolu and Ivan Patzaichin. Together with the organisations they set up and the collaborators who joined them, they began by carrying out local development projects in the Danube Delta. All that was missing was the “creative traditions” label. Next, Teodor and I became associated in a grandiose project, a “country-wide project.” Taking our inspiration from the visionary ideas of Grigore Antipa (about whom we know very little apart from the “Antipa” National Museum of Natural History) and Nicolae Georgescu-Roegen (about whom we really know nothing), we launched what he called “Romania powered by nature.” “We launched” is a *façon de parler*, because this went no further than a kind of joint blue sky thinking. After that, when the “country-wide project” had been put aside for the present, we turned our attention to something more tangible and realistic, and it was thus that the idea of “creative traditions” appeared. The Forum was the organisational framework we thought would be the best vehicle for promoting this idea. The rest has been hard work – and, at that precise moment, Oana Perju came on the scene and got us all organised!

Corina Iosif: Oana, tell us the story of your connection with this project.

Oana Perju: My involvement in this project began at a very specific moment. I recall a meeting we had at the Peasant Club [*Clubul Țăranului*] in September 2016 at which I had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of a number of people from different domains: journalists, researchers, students, etc. Prof. Mihăilescu had told us that we would be setting off on a quest in the footsteps of Don Quixote, a venture into the world of “creative traditions”; at that point I imagined that I would be wind or a windmill, it was not very clear exactly what, but never for a moment did I imagine that I might find myself in the role of the miller himself! Things developed from then on and I found myself contributing to the writing of an application for National Cultural Fund Administration (AFCN) financing for our project. This financial support we needed for the Creative Traditions Forum to become reality came through in November 2016. The project was initiated on 16th January 2017, in association with the NMRP team, and now, in August, it is in full flow. And so it was that I set off on this journey in the company of Professor Vintilă Mihăilescu, Anamaria Iuga, Anca-Maria Pănoiu, Iris Șerban, Cristina Hurdubaia, Gabriel Brumariu, Carmen Zadară and Constanța Petre, with the close support of Teodor Frolu, truly one of the project’s strategic partners.

Corina Iosif: How does the Creative Traditions Forum fit into the wider framework of the NMRP’s cultural policies?

Anamaria Iuga: The Creative Traditions Forum initiative falls fully within the sphere of

activity the NMRP seeks to pursue. It should be said at the outset that ever since its foundation our museum has been committed to achieving as profound and comprehensive as possible an understanding of the old peasant/country world and also of the contemporary peasant world in all the variety of its current cultural expression, a world affected by emigration, post-industrialisation, etc.. In fact, the very way Horia Bernea, the museum's Director from 1990 to 2000, laid out the exhibits was unique in nature. The museum was conceived as one of context, in which, besides the objects that provide the material basis for the displays, the relationships these objects have with each other or with the space would play a vital role. It was to be a museum in which the order in which they were displayed would be as important as the actual fact of their being displayed. It was, at the same time, a museum which gave the visitor great freedom to "read" what was displayed in it and to interpret it in accordance with their own views, feelings and discoveries. The NMRP has been from the beginning a museum based on old peasant objects but one conceived in such a way as to be experienced in the present. It continues to speak to everyone, for the reason that, as Bernea stated, it is addressed primarily to the heart.

In a similar way, its fieldwork too has focused systematically on ethnological and ethnographic studies of the contemporary village, investigating local customs and methods as practised today. To this end, the museum has encouraged field studies that are firmly anchored



in the socio-cultural context of the present day. One of the museum's offices even bears the name of "Recent Patrimony", and the field recording we carry out concentrates especially on how traditions are expressed in contemporary local contexts. This way of dealing with traditions may be seen in such projects as Village Collections, Agricultural Practices, Ethnophony, etc.

A second important aspect of the programme of our Museum involves communicating traditions to the public – not only traditions as they exist today, but also as they can be seen through activities that actively encourage creativity. Initiatives of this kind are represented by what takes place at the Creativity Workshops and in activities carried out with the help of museum volunteers. Thus the idea of the Creative Traditions Forum, involving as it does the simultaneous presentation of so many varied initiatives, all of which use traditions in a creative way, is thoroughly in accord with the logic of our Museum. The Forum will also at the same time provide an ideal context for the establishing of partnerships that will facilitate constructive discussion of traditions and of how they can best be creatively exploited. Thus the setting-up of this Forum is a natural development of previous museum initiatives in the same direction.

Corina Iosif: Can you give us a brief description of the project? Who are its partners?

Oana Perju: The Creative Traditions Forum is intending to bring together a number of players from as wide as possible a range of areas and to combine two worlds – those of creative industries and of cultural patrimony, where there already exist praiseworthy initiatives. Therefore, as we made progress in our discussions of how to promote and communicate the event, we came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to have the umbrella concept of Romania of Creative Traditions, which would represent the platform on which the Forum would develop and would thus guarantee continuity between the present project and future

projects related to it. The event this autumn (6th-10th September, at the NMRP) will be a space in which to discuss and explain what exactly is meant in Romania by creative traditions, but it also represents our contribution to the European cultural patrimony, all the more so since 2018 has been declared European Year of Cultural Patrimony and 2019 is the year in which Romania will hold the presidency of the European Union Council. This being the case, we wish to find a form of cultural action that will encourage the strengthening of a network of people interested in and passionate about creative traditions, as part of a long-term strategic approach designed to contribute to economic and social sustainability at the local and regional level. This is an ambitious endeavour, but we have strategic partners including DC Communication, the Romanian Architects' Association, the *Calea Victoriei* Foundation and the Master of Visual Studies and Society of the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, along with financial backing from the Directorate of the National Cultural Fund and the Romanian office of the representative of the European Commission, and supporters that include the World Bank and the Romanian Cultural Institute. As the project progresses, the participant list too is taking on an increasingly coherent, detailed and complete form. I am conscious that the point from which we set out has now become a circle which includes more than 30 people involved in the Forum (a full list may be found on our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/TraditiiCreative>: https://issuu.com/romaniatraditiilorcreative/docs/brosura_forumul_traditiilor_online), partners such as The Institute (Re-Design Crafts and Romanian Design Week), the Peasant Club, and backers belonging to the corporate world, including Carrefour.



The jigsaw puzzle we started with is taking shape, but there is still room for additions, directions and – why not? – plans and dreams.

Corina Iosif: What are the aims of the Creative Traditions Forum?

Oana Perju: The principal aim is to encourage the development of the whole area of creative traditions. This is an emerging field and one which needs the collaboration and co-operation of the different players mentioned above. We therefore wish to put at the disposal both of the general public and of a specialist audience a space – bearing the NMRP specific – for the promotion and display of the products of this project and of related ones; we wish to open up the way for potential partnerships and collaborations, which can be established both during the Forum and via the online platform to be launched this September. We wish to start a series of debates connected with the context of creative traditions and to create the context necessary for the bringing to light of financing and marketing possibilities that exist in Romania for initiatives that can be regarded as falling within the field of creative traditions. In the end, what we wish to achieve through the Creative Traditions Forum is to bring traditions into the modern age and to draw benefit from knowledge that has been accumulated and passed down, in a way that will be useful and applicable to the period and the times in which we live. In other words, we are promoting the idea of *the modern age of traditions*, in which tradition takes on contemporary usefulness.

Corina Iosif: How can the concept of creativity be linked with that of traditions?

Vintilă Mihăilescu: This name is more a stylistic device, an oxymoron designed to draw

attention to a perspective on traditions that is slightly different. It means, upstream, a departure from the somewhat reifying view of traditions that we Romanians generally share. It has long been known – and accepted – that “traditions” do not reach us purely and simply like survivors that the past brings to us and that we venerate in the present; we too intervene in the process, interrogating the past, searching, sometimes selecting and reconstituting memorable parts of it. As Jean Pouillon said, traditions thus become established from the present towards the past and not in the opposite direction, as we are normally accustomed to think. What reaches us, sometimes, are “customs” – and in the case of Romania, which is probably the longest-surviving peasant society in Europe, these still exist in considerable numbers. One example of this shift and transfiguration from “custom” to “tradition” would be Călușul, an archaic custom (a ritual), which itself underwent changes over time (even customs are neither once-for-all-given nor eternal but have a dynamic of their own), but which at a particular moment was turned into a stage performance by Gusti’s teams and presented at the Universal Exhibitions. We may say that the transformation of “Căluș” dance and ritual from “custom” into “tradition” began at that moment: tradition selected only the dance from the ritual complex of the ancient custom, brought in a choreographer and offered it to a public. A custom has no public, but traditions always presuppose a public...

To move on, the association of creativity with traditions shows rather a way of making use of them: not simply conserving and faithfully preserving traditions, but also exploiting them “productively”, so to speak, in the perspective of the future, not merely from the perspective of the past. English has three expressions at its disposal in this context, heritage, patrimony and legacy; Romanian has only two, *moștenire* and *patrimoniu*. All of us have an inheritance [*moștenire*], but the question is what we do with it. Now, from this point of view, “creative traditions” suggests that we can do two different but complementary things: we can preserve them carefully, “patrimonialise” them like some kind of inheritance that has been left to us by our forebears and that we need to look after in a reverent way (legacy), and we can “exploit” them, put them to work, use them as a resource for organic future development (patrimony). Architects, for instance, can serve as an example in this regard in the way they creatively re-use “traditional” kinds of material such as wood (shingle) and earth (adobe, mud brick).

Corina Iosif: How does the Creative Traditions Forum fit into the wider context of European policies regarding traditions?

Vintilă Mihăilescu: You cannot reinvent the wheel! Initiatives of this kind have existed for a long time in other countries in Europe. It may seem paradoxical, but there are more of them precisely in those places where the loss of customs occurred long ago and is more complete, so making the need to recover them all the more pressing. In many ways, therefore, the “creative traditions” project resembles initiatives, programmes and institutions that are already operating in much the same way in other parts of Europe. In Romania, what we are concerned with is more a process of formalising and federating various individual and group initiatives of this kind which are as yet patchy in nature and are located in different corners of the country.

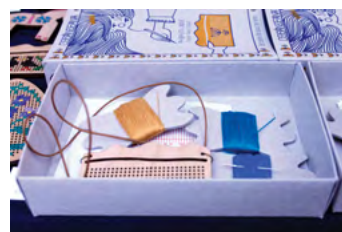
Corina Iosif: Why has this project been conceived as a Forum?



Vintilă Mihăilescu: In order to avoid any confusion with the “fair” format! More and more fairs are making their appearance, dealing with crafts, traditional products, etc., and the majority of them are more interested in the preservation and perpetuation of “traditions” and, in some cases, “marketising” them. The Forum is something partially different: what it has in mind are potential ways of exploiting traditional resources, or, in other words, it sees traditions as resources (and) as having a purpose that goes beyond traditions themselves and simply “making them available on the market.” And there is something else: the word “forum” involves dialogue, reflection, debate. The Creative Traditions Forum hopes not merely to bring together existing initiatives, but also to inspire future ones.

Corina Iosif: The Traditions Forum is now in full flow. What are some of its present aspects and what is their significance in the broader economy of the project?

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: I am currently working on a series of introductions written by participants, texts which follow a narrative thread that I have conceived in the form of an open interview in which I have sought to find a unifying formula for how the participants’ profiles



can be presented. No matter what project or product they are bringing to the Forum, I have tried to give them a place in this structure which will describe the origins of their projects and how each project actually began. When completed, this form of presentation should give a picture of what defines creative tradition: the traditional source of inspiration and how it is being creatively exploited in the present; about the people, players, personalities who have become involved in the story; about the places that have influenced them, - all of this, in a way, also being part of the tradition. And, because we are talking about creative traditions, and thus about a field oriented towards the future, the structure is designed to highlight the direction in which each project is heading and how it is attempting to keep capitalising upon the traditional resource. This is what I am trying to do now – to use the participants’ responses to a questionnaire (and the majority of them did reply to it) as the components of this narrative thread that will help us to design publicity materials, both in a concise form, for social media, and for the forum’s brochure. Again, I think there is a fundamental point that somehow, in a way, needs to be openly acknowledged – the fact that this first event involves finding our way, testing the waters, and uncertainties. I am referring to that distance that exists between project and realisation, a distance that can indeed be creative but can also generate moments of panic and upheaval between Vintilă Mihăilescu’s pump-priming theoretical formulations and what is happening in concrete terms. I am referring to the challenge involved in staging any event for the first time, conscious that even we are not succeeding in articulating it in all its complexity for the participants, so as to make theory become practice. More specifically, it is turning the concept into a fact, the distance between concept and its materialisation. It is precisely this process of “turning into fact” that is the greatest challenge involved in the project. What we are exerting ourselves to do all the time is to hold things together, to preserve the coherence and convergence of all the steps and segments. In fact this is also one of the aims of the project: to create a coherent network with the aid of which all these people can meet and be able to communicate with each other, make each other’s acquaintance... But we are at the stage of testing the waters, with some things going well while others are not, and some people thinking

better of their initial involvement while others are joining us along the way...

Corina Iosif: Are these texts the result of a dialogue carried on with the participants in a systematic way?

Iris Șerban: Emails were used to initiate a general dialogue in which all the people involved in the project take part. There are exchanges of messages, dialogues that can contain elements of tension or sometimes of misunderstanding of other messages, late replies that lead to things becoming confused... This has been the dynamic of relationships between those involved in the project and, more importantly, of how it has been managed. If I may add my contribution to what Anca has just said regarding the difficult task of keeping tabs on our project, the most difficult job has probably been that of Oana Perju. She is both the project manager and the interface at which we and the other participants meet. I say this because we, the NMRP team, do not (except on rare occasions) communicate directly with all the players involved in the implementation of the Forum. I am referring here, for example, to the DCComm team, to Professor Vintilă Mihăilescu, and to our financial backers: there is the NMRP team, there is the DC team, there's Oana and there's the Professor! Oana is the person who holds the reins. Now, for instance, we can chat "live" about how we are working on this brochure called Creative Traditions which is in fact the catalogue that introduces the participants. It is not an exhibition catalogue as such but rather a kind of expanded flyer, if one can say that. It contains an introduction to the theoretical principles of the project, plus a text that explains the aims of this first event of ours and introduces all the forum participants in turn; using the structure about which I spoke at the beginning – origins, inheritance, people, places and the future. The catalogue draws all the project's partners and participants together into a single logical structure that has as its point of convergence the reactualisation of traditions. However, it is also linked to the "stage set" of the fair, which makes it a functional tool too, a tool that facilitates the staging of the fair as part of the project; it is, therefore, a consultative document. It will not be a book-object or a brochure-object; its primary role will be one of conveying information, though it will of course be attractively designed. If you come to the fair, you, as a visitor, want to know something about a specific project. Let us suppose that our visitor is an architect and wants to discover details about the five relevant projects he can see in the catalogue and so heads for stands 7, 9 and 3, for example.

Corina Iosif: Are there any differences between the way the project was initially formulated and what it looks like at present?

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: From a theoretical point of view, the project has remained as originally conceived. The way in which (as we have realised) it is extending, sometimes beyond our control, has flowed from its being put into practice, which has meant the involvement of a very large number of people, a very large number of players – and this is good, because it demonstrates the project's growth potential. That being said, there are constant challenges in managing something of this kind, providing the necessary interconnections within the network of people who are orchestrating the project, and ensuring that these links are actually working.

Iris Șerban: Let me give a concrete example. Our budget provides for thirty stands, but we have over forty participants. A selection process took place – there were a large number of people who registered or who were invited to participate – and this final selection process brought this down to roughly forty participants. But we have thirty stands at which we need to group and classify people and projects according to their themes and types of approach. Those coming to the gastronomy section will thus be displaying together. But then how are we going to group together three people, all with different approaches to the subject of gastronomy, three different projects with larger and smaller products that need or do not need refrigerators?...



Let's suppose that some of these people are from the Sibiu gastronomic region, which has been declared a European gastronomic region for 2019. They will not be coming to sell but rather to present their project, which, no surprises here, is connected with food. By contrast, the people from "Kernel", who make artisan bread, may well be coming to sell. The people bringing the *brega* (millet beer) are also coming with sales in mind. So the problem arises of how these people can be grouped together in such a way that what the fair has on offer can be varied and relevant, in such a way that we do not have some people bringing just a story while others bring only products to sell, and in such a way that the allocation of space on the stands is equitable and the way they are designed is appropriate for the project proposers occupying them. We started off with the idea that a specific number of people and products and projects to be presented would be coming, and inevitably we have come up against the tactical and organisational issues involved in including a fair in the project. This is one of the major challenges of the project, and here redefinitions have to take place.

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: Are you giving participants the information they need and doing so in good time? Are you answering their phone calls? When you send out information that seems clear to you, is it actually reaching them sufficiently clearly for the resulting event to match the initial scheme? These are the kinds of challenges that come up every day.

Corina Iosif: If I have understood correctly, one challenge was the devising of a kind of market for traditions in which objects and products could find their place as goods for sale, while at the same time it preserved the structural link with the cultural source of traditions.

Iris Șerban: What is at stake is not finding them a place on the market – market being an economic concept – the problem is one of how here, in the museum courtyard, you can give them coherence, and how you can respect everyone's contribution in such a way that they are allocated enough space to be able to sell and communicate at the same time. Some participants tell us the bad news in advance: we have three projects running at the moment, we cannot undertake to be at your fair for all five days, we can only be there with our presentation for one day! In this case, for example, how can you build in a project that you regard as extremely worthwhile but that you cannot keep for more than one or two days? What are you going to do with the stand it will require when it comes?! That is another potential problem that needs to be solved.

Corina Iosif: My impression is that you are in fact talking about the difficulties involved in reconciling the idea of a forum with that of a fair. Am I correct?

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: The forum is more a space for debate in which people can meet and talk, more at a theoretical and technical level, about everything they have experienced in their projects, in their field of activity... which is not that hard to do...

Corina Iosif: In fact there are two concepts – partly similar and partly distinct from each other – that come together here, that of forum and that of market. In the specific case of the fair planned as part of the project, these need to be integrated in a fertile way. There are points of convergence between them but also lines of divergence that manifest themselves as difficulties encountered in the course of managing or rather controlling the project as a whole, if I have understood what has been said. Have there been steps or aspects, whether in connection with collaboration between teams, or in connection with collaboration between people, or actually connected with holding together composite ideas of exhibiting, such as, for example, that of forum-fair, which could be regarded as nodes or hubs of the project?

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: When the project began, my impression was that the scenography aspect was being somewhat minimalised or put off. Being highly aware of space and the need for curating, I felt that it was vital that we settle right at the beginning what this was going to look like in space. Also, given that this was the first such event and a pilot event and that the concept

itself was still being forged and distilled, a great deal of effort was devoted to theoretical and conceptual work: What do creative traditions mean? What is it that connects all these people? How are we going to articulate the concept? And any discussion of the practical part of the project, which is, in fact, the fair, was put off and put off. We have reached the point at which such a discussion has clearly become a priority, because those who are going to come and who need to understand what creative traditions are will not be making contact with concepts but with what they actually see. It is for this reason that I believe that a highly important step will be to work out the scenography which will be the vehicle for the conceptual significations of the project.

Corina Iosif: What do Creative Traditions mean now, six months after the project began, in the context of the NMRP?

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: They mean a contemporary project or product that makes use of a resource from the past, a traditional one, but through it creates something else. And this something else needs to be telling not as an act of recovery, or less as an act of recovery than as potential to project the inherited “dowry” concerned into the future, to make it something of value for contemporary needs and requirements, for today’s world. You can no longer talk about craft skills, for example, in a merely backward-looking and nostalgic way. You need to find a way to place them in a new syntax in which they can produce meaning and knowledge and even jobs, to come to practical aspects, because at the moment traditions most often mean cultural leisure activities. A craft skill can no longer ensure financial sustainability for an entire mini-region as it used to do in villages in the past. So, in town, it appears as an “object” for display, museified, that can be taken further, exploited and recovered only in the context of debates and workshops. It can no longer be resuscitated so as to be what it was initially – an activity by means of which a community can support itself economically.

Iris Șerban: I believe we have people coming to exhibit at the fair who are involved in wider economic circuits, almost mass ones. And this is one of the chief aims of the project: to demonstrate that creative traditions, unlike crafts and thus unlike traditions, have the potential to become products that are relevant at the macro level, at the level of the market, and not the niche market but the mainstream one.

Corina Iosif: There is one thing that surprises me: not once in this discussion have you used the word “identity.” Why?

Iris Șerban: For me this is not appropriate discourse. The idea of identity associated with that of crafts comes with a whole ideology behind it and implicitly with a particular view of tradition and of the peasant/countryman. Our project is not a project about identity or the reinvention of identity. We are not concerned with traditions viewed in terms of identity but with a source of inspiration that we find in traditions.

Corina Iosif: A source detached from the concept of identity?

Iris Șerban, Anca-Maria Pănoiu – Not that connected... Not that interdependent ... not that inextricably entwined with this concept...

Iris Șerban: Precisely. I will give an example, that of the “ȘEZI” (“Sit”) project, which works in wood, or the projects run by the DELTACRAFT people, who work with local craftsmen but also with designers. I want to make it clear that this is my view, not necessarily the perspective of the project: what a particular craftsman knows how to make has value as a craft item, as practice, but is not necessarily in its essence a feature linked to identity... Good, let’s say that the craftsman comes from Bucovina, or from Maramureș. He, through what he makes, is saying something about the region he comes from, but I – the “producer” of creative traditions – take what he produces, reinterpret it, adapt it, innovate and make his products relevant in Bucharest or in the urban environment in general, for a public that is completely different from the original one. Thus it is not only the public that changes, the market changes too, there’s a



radical change in the environment in which these products are displayed and integrated and so changes also occur in how they are interpreted as objects whose (conceptual) origin is linked to tradition. I'll give another example: the people who are bringing 3D woven carpets. These are woven carpets with figures printed on a 3D printer inserted into them. I can't see a woman from some corner of a village putting a carpet with 3D insertions down in her "kept for best" room! But I can see a tourist, or someone who is interested in those ethnographic areas, or some "hipster" who wants to have something traditional in their house, buying something like that. I feel the target public is changing.

Corina Iosif: What is the project's target public?

Iris Șerban: Every product has its target public, especially in virtue of the fact that we are gathering people who already produce those things and have already found themselves a place in a market. One of our aims is precisely that of broadening the public, of combining the various kinds of public. For example, we have the NMRP public, the people who come and "consume" NMRP fairs, which fuses, for instance, with the public of the architect Mihai Nuță who works in wood shingle, who already has orders and is known on the market, who has already built chalets and mountain refuges for public bodies and for various individuals who can afford to purchase such things. So, Nuță the architect's public will meet the publics of other exhibitors, leading to the idea that these categories of public will mingle and so produce a public with wider interests.

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: The principal target of the project is a young urban public, interested in taking up the creative part of tradition but in a form in which it is integrated into a logic that is industrial and contemporary. Creative traditions are a border region between what is old, what comes from the past, and the concept of creative industries, which somehow reproduces the source of inspiration in an industrial logic. This is where the target public could take shape, in a zone in which the specific or local or what was previously just manual work meets modernity and proliferates, following a market formula. But this is a young, urban public, who can afford to acquire, to consume, as Iris says, a style of design.

Corina Iosif: In this case, is the historical dimension of the source, that is, of traditions, still taken into account?

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: I think that in this case the historical aspect loses out. What is left in the centre of attention is the process, the practice, but the time element slips away. The past loses out to the projecting of a future for which such things have to become functional, have to present interest. And so as not to continue to speak in terms of over-specific concepts, I am going to invoke the example we were talking about at the beginning, in January or February, the lamp with the USB! It's a lamp, a bedside lamp, made of osier in the Delta, the technique was entirely the traditional one, involving weaving osier. It was a product created through a partnership between a designer and an engineer, and the engineer attached a USB stick to his lamp!

Corina Iosif: Can you give me a few examples of people involved in the forum?

Anca-Maria Pănoiu / Iris Șerban: For instance, there's the book *Stories from the Calendar*, an editorial project in which the author, Iulia Iordan, has taken her inspiration from old collections of ethnography and folklore but has tried to reformulate the stories about time and the traditional calendar so that the children of today can understand them. Why? Because she was involved in cultural-educational projects and realised that time, for children, is generally an abstract concept, and that the way peasants in olden times used to give time physical form in characters, in figures, and in images that were apotropaic and possessed great magical powers was something that brings concreteness to these abstract ideas and helps modern children to understand them. Or there is the architect Mihai Nuță with his *șița* (roof cladding and wood shingle) project. In fact there is a team of architects who have studied the way the

technique of *șiță* (roof cladding) developed in Vrancea and Buzău and who are now using this traditional knowledge and adapting it to meet present needs. This means, for example, adding a fire retardant layer or using a method of fitting that makes it easier for maintenance men to climb up high to do their work. All this either did not exist in the past or existed only in a vernacular form. When you bring a model of this kind into the present you have to adapt it to meet new market requirements and feasibility requirements and so make it fit for purpose in the present day. Or there is the “*ȘEZI/Sit*” project, involving an architect couple, Octavia and Lucian Loiș, amazing people, poets and architects and carpenters too, who are turning out their products on an almost industrial scale. It even says in their literature that they are feeling they need more workers because demand is constantly increasing and the project is tending to grow and extend. They took the styles of traditional furniture as their starting-point but added a component of personal design and now sell these pieces of furniture, that is, they create them and market them not just as functional furniture but as objects intended to awaken and reawaken sensitivity to traditional cultures, to the aesthetic and symbolic value of such objects. To a great extent, when people buy them they are consuming in a symbolic way, consuming archaic-rural otherness, consuming tradition, which for the urban public has come to mean something exotic.

Corina Iosif: Without exaggerating your own importance, what does your particular contribution to this project look like?

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: Well, even at the risk of lifting the curtain at the back of the stage and allowing people to see our behind-the-scenes work, I would venture to say that the problem and challenge of this project is that... it is absolutely massive! For this reason it has a tendency to escape in many ways from the boundaries set for it, because there are so few of us, because there are so many things we have to construct and make connect with each other that you have the feeling that they are slipping through your fingers. And if you have noticed any hesitation in what we have said in the last thirty minutes, it comes precisely from this difficulty in holding together all the dimensions of the project. Plus, as you have observed, a large part of it has been “farmed out” to other people.

Iris Șerban/Anca-Maria Pănoiu: And it has had to be, because the NMRP would not have had the resources to manage something of the size we have set ourselves. But in fact I think that when you write a plan you do not realise how big the proposed enterprise really is. Let's suppose that at the planning stage you decide to produce a brochure, a catalogue, anything... So, is a catalogue such a difficult prospect? You imagine you'll be selecting information from the descriptions you've received from the participants, putting it together and there you are! But wait a moment – this catalogue has to conform to the NMRP style, the techniques and modalities of expression that make the museum impossible to confuse with any other institution. So in fact it isn't just a catalogue!

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: And even this wouldn't be that difficult.. But wait a moment, this catalogue needs to talk about thirty people who in the first place have to exist, but at the point at which we wrote the project they didn't exist, because the selection process hadn't happened yet! Then, once you've identified them, they need to reply to you, they need to be available, they need to supply you with the information! And all these things, happening at the same time for a pilot event that still hasn't found its formula and personal style, really do pose a challenge!

Iris Șerban: Not to mention the stress imposed by the issue of financing, because I'm not sure if the financing we have from the AFCN will cover even half of what we need. I at least, because I am more involved in the administrative side (and Oana is the person who knows this best), have experienced financial rather than any other kind of panic. How are we going to make the display stands for the fair? We still don't know what they are going to look like. These fifteen stands, which will be made from wood and canvas, will join the ones



that already exist at the NMRP and that have been used before. These new ones must not look like market stalls, or be that different either, and they also need to be inexpensive, and ready in time, and capable of providing a home for the story of each exhibitor, so they need a logic. And for these stands we find that we have 5,000 lei left over, then that we don't have it any longer, hang on, we've got it, hang on, we haven't got it! (Anca will tell me off and say I'm talking out of school) and this situation is stressful for the person who has to cope with it directly and then obviously for Oana too! It is particularly stressful for the people you are collaborating with, because the team of architects designing the display stands need to know that they have 5 or 10 or 15 lei to play with, and then the rest of the team, who are doing the brochure, become stressed and asks "Come on, how am I going to do the brochure?" Wait a moment, it would be useful if the text in the brochure could include some of the key words that will appear on each stand, and the text also needs to be related to the text on the site and the posts on Facebook – the only problem being that three different people are working on the Facebook posts, the site and the brochure... I may be exaggerating a bit now... But that's roughly what things are like right now, certainly challenging, but such is the atmosphere when you're working on a pilot event!

Anca-Maria Pănoiu: I am working more on the creative side, so I'm encountering less of the stress inevitably generated by the financial and administrative obligations. An example of what is causing me problems is the need to receive data and information from people and put this content into the form in which it will be presented within the project – let's say, for example, the introduction pastile for Facebook posts. What does that mean? It means a little picture that you upload. What does this picture need to contain? A photo of the participant, plus a text that also needs to come from the participant but which you have to process. However, this text needs to come in a format and the photo needs to be of a specific size. You request all these things, you write to them about them, you repeat them, you tell them, you explain them to them, you send a form, you send an email, you ring them. When the replies do not come, you basically need to fill the gaps. Now when there are 30 or more participants each causing these problems for you every day, instead of the dynamics of the project moving in a convergent direction you are dealing in some respects with a divergent movement. And obviously this too could be regarded as a challenge.

Iris Șerban: For me what is at stake is how we can create a project that is relevant from a practical point of view and faithful to what was announced. When the general call to the public to register participating projects was launched, there were three criteria you had to meet in order to qualify: to have a traditional source of inspiration, to have a creative way of exploiting that source of inspiration – whether in terms of material, of technique or of something else – and, in the third place, for it to be a project or product that was sustainable from a socio-cultural and in particular an economic point of view. As for the relevance I mentioned, I feel this has to do mainly with the feasibility of the project. I think that both components can fail if you are not able to keep them under control and if you do not have a follow-up, something that comes after the finalisation of the steps in the project as distinct actions! be a failure. The forum part can fail if people come there merely to discuss, without being actively committed to taking some post-event action – whether they are financial players, or institutional players, or actually practitioners in the area of creative traditions. This could happen if the idea somehow gets around that the forum is an event like any of the other events that you come to and just talk... We have tried to encourage the people participating in the fair to take part in the "forum" section too, explaining to them that it will not just be discussions but a dialogue that will be summarised in a mini-final report that we will attempt to get on to the desks of institutions potentially interested in the subject it covers. The network thus created will be the concrete expression of what remains active after the project is completed: a network in which people

can draw inspiration from one another. As for those who come as visitors, they too may be potential entrepreneurs in this area, they too may have ideas, because what we are putting on display is not only ideas that have been given physical form but rather models of good practice. So my personal challenge and my fears are concerned with how we can manage to give this Romania of Creative Traditions project – which deserves something large-scale and involving a very major economic commitment – the publicity that it needs in order for it to be able to evolve. And I think that it is only on the first day of the fair that we will be able to judge the degree to which we have succeeded.

Corina Iosif: How far does this Forum go and what are its limits?

Vintilă Mihăilescu: I was about to say that it has no limits... In fact, the Forum of Creative Traditions has not been conceived as a free-standing one-off event, potentially repeatable every year. As we have already said, it is not a “fair”, an “exhibition”, but a continuous process. Of course, we are starting this year with a launch, an inaugural event, but the activity of the Forum will go on after that, in the virtual realm, via a platform that will continue the work of identifying initiatives belonging to our sphere of interest, making them known and promoting them, along with encouraging interaction between creators, craftsmen and designers in the rural and urban environment, commentary from the public, and so on. There will also be other “events”, some already projected and others that will be planned as the project continues. Obviously we also need a space where results can be exhibited from time to time, but what is essential is to stimulate the *process* of ensuring these results find their place in a melting-pot in which cultured and (still) popular ingredients, crafts and creative industries, “traditional” and current techniques can be combined. And this must be done without imposing or even suggesting any “necessary” convergence between them. The Forum is thus a “work in progress”, and even its initiators neither know – nor even wish to know! – what will come of it over the course of time.

Corina Iosif: How do “creative traditions” fit into “Creative Europe”?

Vintilă Mihăilescu: Creative Europe 2014-2020, and especially its Culture sub-programme, has the explicit aim of strengthening and widening specific areas of trans-European collaboration and of opening culture up as much as possible to new communication technologies and business models. Current European policy in the area of patrimony (and, by implication, in that of “traditions”, our particular field of interest) is in fact a continuation of that pioneered by UNESCO immediately after the Second World War, when Aldous Huxley was the President of the organisation. In line with this, the Creative Europe 2014-2020 platform states explicitly: “Culture is likewise a major resource for economic development, job creation and social cohesion, offering at the same time potential for urban and rural revitalisation and for the promotion of sustainable tourism.” I believe we can identify with all these desiderata. However, I also believe that we have our own particular contribution to make to this “European symphony”: the way in which we are attempting to combine traditions as a *source* (from the past) and as a *resource* (for the future), the result of this reciprocal transfiguration being material objects, products and practices that are not now either well conserved traditions, or well oriented development, but a kind of... “third way.” That may sound a little much to claim, but for the moment it is the only formulation that comes to my mind.

From this point of view, this year’s Creative Traditions Forum is a kind of experiment and avant-premiere for 2018, which will be the European Year of Cultural Patrimony, the centenary of the Great Union, and the year when this initiative of ours will, we hope, reach its mature expression.

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